Reviews

Philip Hefner

Human Becoming in an Age of Science, Technology, and Faith

Lexington Books/ Fortress Academic 2022. 237pp, hb £77, ISBN 9781978708372.

This book is authored by Philip Hefner with contributions from other thinkers and edited by Jason P. Roberts and Mladen Turk. I found the collection very controversial.

Hefner's portrayal of the traditional Christian understanding of creation as passive – not creative – is something I cannot accept. He places traditional Christianity in the categories of 'Two Worldviews of Denial' (31), while the roots of his own philosophy he sees in the categories of 'Worldviews of Constructive Interpretation' (32), represented mostly by the very controversial panentheistic philosophy of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. As many other neoliberal philosophers, he also misinterprets Paul's teaching about the Spirit and the flesh in Romans 8 as demonising the material order (31). In fact, what Paul says is that believers are called to act in the world according to God's purpose (Rom 12:2) and in the context of Jn 17:11,15-16, they are called to be *in the world* but *not of it*, rather transforming it. Indeed, one cannot take Paul's teaching out of the context of the rest of Bible, especially about Jesus giving authority to humanity to act in the world according to His purpose (Jn 14:12-14).

In Part 1 Hefner speaks about 'An Emerging Concept of God' and 'New Worldviews, New Interpretations' (34). I welcome his assessment in Chapter 4 that the 'crisis of technological civilisation' cannot be dealt with by a 'worldview of progressivism'. His call for humility against cynicism and against the hostility towards 'the Other', against segregation and marginalisation of African Americans and American Indians, as well as his proposed solution for 'relating the World to God' (55-62), are all constructive views. However, instead of offering hope in the crucified and resurrected Christ, a direct resource from the Bible, he rests his theological resources in 'religious traditions' and 'the great 20th century… Teilhard…' (64).

In his manifest Hefner largely ignores the fact that at the moment, governments and politicians are seeking wide consultations on the issues involved in genetic engineering. The technology of germline editing with CRISPR is not yet accepted in therapeutic practice in most countries, including the US and the UK, yet he is quick to join those who unconditionally affirm its unrestrained use by declaring that '…our behavior for all practical purposes, affirms the transhumanist program' (70). By overemphasising human 'functioning' and intelligence, without going into the details of psychological categories like personhood, consciousness, human dignity, purpose, and ethical tendencies of the human nature, he puts forward his 'General Principle' (70), in effect declaring humans identical to machines, which tomorrow unconditionally will be creating other humans without restraint and without certainty of the outcomes. This is strongly controversial and of great concern. Although germline editing of humans is expected to be eventually approved for healing purposes in humans, after clearing all technological risks, its use for human enhancements will continue to be the subject of great concern in the times ahead. Many theologians and ethicists, including those of secular transhumanism, consider such intentions far ahead of its time, posing an existential risk to humanity, and requiring extreme caution.

Part 2 contains contributions from other authors, supporting Hefner's fundamentals with no critique. There is nothing in the new discoveries of science and the technological advancements per se that requires correctives to the eternal Biblical message of salvation through love for the other, yet Jason Roberts is trying to 'review the concept of the Creator'. In his opinion 'Major shifts in ontological frameworks – from permanence to process, from substances to systems – must be allowed if the concept of *God* [his italic] is to remain scientifically tenable' (115). Further on, this school of thought is trying 'to use the idea of dynamic systems to reconfigure a basic Christian idea about *God* – a Western idea about God – namely that God is Spirit.' (117). The attempt to modify our Biblical narrative in order to have, in his words, a 'scientifically credible idea of God' (118), actually is profaning the divine and the supernatural in our understanding of a transcendent God, who is distinct from His creation and is not 'a process', taking its course in time. Proposing 'God…[to be] understood as an evolving system' (120) is deferring from God whom we know from the Bible, the One who created time and space and Who should not be described purely as a process in that material world. In fact, his description can never be made full from within the material world He created without falling into the trap of circumferential causation in philosophy. Hefner's school of thought implies a god as a concept in our minds and shies away from God, who is the source of all our faculties, who's wisdom we seek.

The *leitmotif* of this book, termed 'becoming' is inappropriate, challenging a fundamental Biblical statement, that God had already created humans (mankind) (Gen 1.26-27). Although humans are still evolving and maturing, they are not 'becoming' as such. Some established terms are inappropriately used too. We must not use the term 'eugenics' in the context of genetic engineering due to the reminiscence of the horrific events in recent history that took place in the Nazi camps. Even with good intentions we should never 'practice eugenics unabashedly' (178) but be humble, prayerful and sorrowful when we sacrifice an animal, zygote, embryo or foetus, any living thing, for whatever reason, even when the end goal is to alleviate human suffering, save lives or heal. We are prayerful also when we kill animals for food. That is why we give thanks to God before we eat. However, the spirit of this book does not offer praying and worshiping the true living God because it seeks to 'propose' a god that fits the humans of the day.

I must acknowledge the insightful analysis of the crisis of the technological civilization of some of the other contributors, who's 'diagnosis is not quite isomorphic' with Hefner's (201). Still the proposed resolution to 'place a spirit of communal well-being into the driver's seat of technological innovation' (207) suffers from the same malaise of circular logic as that of Baron Munchausen. We shall not put a spirit in the driver's seat, but *invite* the Spirit of our transcendent uncreated God to renew, transform and inspire us to drive the technological innovation along His way.

Todd Kantchev is the Reviews Editor of S&CB.

Victoria Lorrimar

Human Technological Enhancement and Theological Anthropology

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 356 pp. hb £75.69. ISBN 9781316515020

Citing recent advances in gene editing, nanotechnology, and the field of artificial intelligence, transhumanism, posthumanism, and the effective altruists believe, we stand on the brink of a new humanity, one that will be technologically

altered to enjoy a longer lifespan, defeat disease, and possess expanded mental, physical, and even moral abilities. For philosophers and theologians, this raises numerous questions, including: Perhaps we can enhance human nature in these ways, but should we? How might we evaluate a given enhancement to determine if it is desirable or not? Should we eschew human enhancement as "playing God?"

Victoria Lorrimar answers the last with a definitive "No!" Her work is a paeon to human creativity, approached first through a thorough examination of humans as "created co-creators" with God, a concept introduced by Lutheran theologian Philip Hefner in 1984 and explored in *The Human Factor* (Hefner, 1993). For Hefner, being a created co-creator situates humans as God's creation, through evolution, yet a creature that possesses, via our technologies, the unique ability to create ourselves, as we modify and manipulate our environment, our fellow creatures, and, increasingly, our very selves. Lorrimar traces the development of the concept of the "created co-creator" through Hefner's work and into the broader field of science and religion. She critiques Hefner as limited by a scientific, more specifically, Lakatosian lens, whereby technological creativity is viewed as a product of our progressing scientific knowledge and little else.

Lorrimar posits imagination as a necessary companion with knowledge in driving technological creation and transhumanist visions of human enhancement. She notes how these visions are most thoroughly explored in the imaginative worlds of science fiction and film. Thus, she turns to the literary world for an understanding of the role of the imagination in creation, honing in on J. R. R. Tolkien's concept of "sub-creator" as both a parallel to and expansion of Hefner's created co-creator. Tolkien distinguishes human creativity from divine creativity in that we, as sub-creators, do not create *ex nihilo*. Rather, the works of our imagination reveal truths already extant in God's creation, "breaking through the limitations of preconceived response, and revealing an essentially sacred reality" (181). In this sense, she breaks from Hefner, noting Tolkien's assertation that we create within divine norms and limits.

In the final section, Lorrimar suggests that linking knowledge with imagination, the rational with the narrative, might give us a new perspective from which to evaluate and direct a transhuman future. In her final chapter, she sets out to apply this dual perspective to a selection of biological technologies, such as radical life extension, mind uploading, and moral enhancement. However here, she once again falls back from covering the extant literature and thus, falls short ofdemonstrating how linking knowledge with imagination might help theologians, scientists, or political bodies determine a path forward regarding particular paths toward human enhancement. Rather than advancing a defined position on any technology, she presents a list of commendable, yet general rules of thumb but fails to demonstrate how to apply these rules in a concrete way.

As a literature review of what it means to be a creator, both scientifically and artistically, this work is a remarkably thorough compilation, perhaps reflecting the requirements of the doctoral dissertation from which it is derived. That is both the book's strength and its weakness. At the high price of £75.69 for both hardback and ebook, *Human Technological Enhancement and Theological Anthropology* is likely to be purchased mainly by libraries and used as a reference. However, as I read, I could not help thinking of the words of the founder of Quakerism, as recorded by Margaret Fell: "You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say

this; but what canst thou say?" Lorrimar 's exhaustive treatment of the extant literature buried her own position. I would have liked to have heard less from the numerous scholars Lorrimar quotes and more from Lorrimar herself.

Noreen Herzfeld is the Nicholas and Bernice Reuter Professor of Science and Religion at St. John's University and the College of St. Benedict.

Michael S Northcott

God and Gaia: Science, Religion and Ethics on a Living Planet

Oxford: Routledge Env. Humanities, 2023. 271 pp. pb £34.99. ISBN 9780367627744

Michael Northcott is well known as an environmental campaigner, who has long drawn attention to the ways that humans are degrading the biosphere and the planet on which we live. This book is a continuation of those themes. The chapters draw heavily on conference papers he has previously published on a variety of topics, and reads as a series of somewhat disconnected topics, including an extensive chapter on COVID-19, rather than as a single through-going argument. In his own words, Northcott writes that 'This book is an attempt at a dialogue between the Hindu, Hellenic, and medieval Christian religio-cultural sensibility of the agency of the Great Chain of Beings, which includes the Divine origin of all things emanating divine forces or spirits; angels; humans; and all other creatures, including Gaia/Earth, and the scientific theory of Gaia/Earth as a living system or network of agencies' (43 – 44).

If there is an over-riding theme that came through to me, it is Northcott's intense dislike of global governmental bodies and industrial organisations, and top-down governance which he perceives as using issues such as the Covid-19 'pandemic' [his quotation marks] and climate change, and indeed science itself as excuses for ever-increasing social control and profiteering. This polemic seriously detracts from his main arguments. Northcott also continually complains throughout the book about scientism. Now I agree with him that scientism (the view that everything can be explained ultimately without the need for any supernatural agency), is indeed a kind of new atheistic religion. But science itself doesn't need to, and indeed should not carry that baggage. When the Royal Society, the world's first scientific institution was started, the founders explicitly stated in their 1663 charter that their 'studies are to be applied to further promoting by the authority of experiments the sciences of natural things and of useful arts, to the glory of God the Creator, and the advantage of the human race'. For many of the early Fellows of the Royal Society, and indeed for many scientists today, this dual aim of giving glory to God by using scientific insights for the good of humankind fitted exactly with their religious and ethical perspective of the world. I sought in vain for any mention in Northcott's book of the benefits that science has brought to humankind – such as the fact that smallpox has been eradicated from the world after having killed an estimated 300 million people in the twentieth century alone, or the medical benefits that give us healthier and longer lives, to name but two.

Many readers will be surprised by Northcott's certainty that SARS-Cov-2 is 'a chimeric virus unleashed on the world from a bio-weapons laboratory in Wuhan, the development of which was funded by a globalist partnership between US development and scientific research agencies and Chinese Communist research funding agencies' (89). He goes on to claim that 'The globally interlinked and highly invasive restrictions on normal human life and social interactions which followed in almost every nation revealed a novel level of global political

and technological coordination' (90). Though it remains a possibility amongst several others that the virus escaped from a laboratory in Wuhan, a more commonly accepted explanation for the presence of this virus in humans, as for others previously, is that it jumped via an intermediary animal from a bat population due to the encroachment of humans on the living space of wild animals, and the forced proximity of wild animals in the unsanitary conditions of a meat market in Wuhan or elsewhere. Surely these latter explanations would fit equally well with Northcott's concern about the deleterious role of humans on the natural environment without descending into conspiracy theories. Northcott goes on to claim that the mRNA vaccines developed to counter Covid-19 were driven largely by the profit motive of large pharmaceutical companies, providing 'a financial bonanza of trillions of dollars' , and that the vaccines 'have an exceptional record of injury, including death' (140). This despite carefully peer-reviewed research in the Lancet and elsewhere that these vaccines saved an estimated 20 million lives in just the first year of vaccination.

Likewise, readers might be astonished that Northcott agrees with a 2014 statement by Lovelock that since 2000 'global average surface and atmospheric temperature has hardly warmed at all' (231). This is hardly a tenable view in light of data that show global temperature records being broken on an almost annual basis, with 2023 likely to be the hottest on record since humans have trod this Earth. He ignores the painstaking work of many tens of thousands of scientists worldwide when he asserts that there is not sufficient evidence to claim that climate change 'is principally caused by greenhouse gas emissions from humans and their animals' (247). He decries 'climate change alarmism' (231), and the 'global false alarm of climate change' (231). That would be small comfort to the relatives of the estimated hundreds of thousands of people already dying annually from the effects of overbearing hot weather, or climate driven extreme weather events such as floods and droughts – all of which affect the poor and disadvantaged most.

If we can get past the distractions of Northcott's minority (and dare I say it, unscientific) views discussed above, what about his main suggestions concerning, as he puts it, that 'The main "takeaway" of this book for environmental concern is that humans are not alone in their efforts to restore the Earth from the ecological damage industrial activities have inflicted'. His view is that 'contemporary humans need to recover a sensibility for, and revive the capacities of, all Beings – the Earth, mammals, fishes, plants and soils, and the divine Life force working through them – to restore the Earth to the state of species abundance which filled most of the Earth's surface until the colonial and industrial eras' (3). In his final chapter he puts forward three 'sacred postulates that moderns should adopt and for which they might construct rituals of care in every human community and habitat' (247). These are, first, water-catchment governance, including 'revivals of traditional water-blessing ceremonies by the leaders of local religious traditions' (257). Second, soil conservation and the suggestion that 'churches and temples have a responsibility to revive the now mostly forgotten ceremonies of blessing of the soils, food, and farming' (259). And the third and final 'ultimate sacred postulate' is species diversity. Contrary to the views of most people concerned to reduce the impacts on greenhouse gas production of huge numbers of domesticated animals, Northcott advocates 'a huge increase in the numbers of carefully managed domesticated animals, and reintroduced wild animals, on lands that are at risk of desertification' (260). He wants religious traditions to revive 'the co-agency of all species, and all Beings, including Mother

Earth or Gaia, in recomposing Earthly habitats' because 'Gaia urgently needs to replenish and revive her innate living powers of planetary healing' (261, final sentence of book).

I agree with Northcott that we have lost much indigenous knowledge stemming from a time when people lived in rural communities that were much closer to the earth than do most people today. But I have my doubts as to whether these three postulates are sufficient to provide a good quality of life to Earth's population of over 8 billion and rising, especially when more than half of them live in cities rather than rural settings. But maybe it's a start.

Robert White, FRS is Emeritus Director of The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion and Emeritus Professor of Geophysics at Cambridge University.

Joseph Vukov

Navigating Faith and Science

Grand Rapids, Michigan: B. Erdmans Publishing, 2022. 179 pp. pb £16. ISBN 9780802879615

Joseph Vukov is Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Graduate Program Director in the Philosophy Department of the University of Chicago. This book presents a fresh, novel and well-argued view of the relative merits of the Conflict Model, the Independence Model and the Dialogue Model as descriptors of the relationship between science and faith. Although the author agrees with the majority of the SCB readership that the Dialogue Model is to be preferred as the best descriptor of the ideal relationship, the originality of this book is the proposal that in the context of the limited knowledge of humans, each of the three models can be thought of as imperfect tools which could in turn be "right for the job", according to their relevance to the given situation.

The author starts out by confirming the view that as science and religion are both endeavours aimed at discovering an accurate and holistic nature of reality, that ultimately there can be no conflict between the scientific and religious findings. He asks the reader to imagine an angelic being who can see the whole of physical and spiritual reality and sees how the two relate to each other. Vukov uses the two phrases "truth is one" and "truth unites; it does not divide" to reference this idea as his argument proceeds.

The author argues then that by contrast, there is a disjoint between our human lived experience of the relationship between the spiritual and the scientific ("is"), and what the ideal relationship should be ("ought"). He then argues that it is helpful to acknowledge the lived experience of conflict (or of independence) between our science and our faith, as this then means that the experience of conflict or independence can be "navigated" – discussed and analysed -- rather than denied from the outset. He also suggests that in many cases, in a limited context, the common experience of conflict or independence might in fact be the most appropriate approach, unless the goal is to then reflect and attain a deeper understanding.

The author argues next that this discrepancy between *is* and *ought*, arises because of our limited human understanding, and therefore to navigate this successfully, we absolutely need intellectual humility, as this then paves the way to considering the merits of other models and how one might approach an integration between science and faith. He defines intellectual humility as a clear-sighted awareness of both the extent of and the limitations of a person's knowledge and understanding.

Each of the three models (Conflict, Independence and Dialogue) is then examined in turn, and scenarios given where

the common experience is either conflict or independence. Vukov suggests that even the Dialogue Model sometimes has the weakness of elevating dialogue for its own sake above the endeavour of discovering truth. He calls this the "kumbaya" effect, and suggests this can suppress robust argument in cases where there is a misunderstanding which needs to be identified.

The style is fresh and fluent, although requiring focus due to the progression of the argument. The author uses scenarios taken from famous paintings as well as science, notably using the simile of a painting that has one impression when viewed up close up, and a different and more inspiring message when viewed from afar. The most memorable image is that of Icarus fallen, where the "fall from pride" is not even noticed in the wider picture. Vukov's engaging discourse, by focusing only on the task at hand of navigating the real world and using imperfect tools to acknowledge our limited experiences, neatly sidesteps the whole issue of pride and hubris. Instead, the reader is invited to pick up the tools and have a go themselves in the final section of suggested discussion questions.

The book is suitable for the general reader, and is also sufficiently academically robust and theologically orthodox to be of help both to students of the philosophy of science and potential authors for SCB.

Dr Christina Biggs is a Daphne Jackson Research Fellow at the Energy Safety Research Institute, Swansea University, working on green hydrogen, and a former local group leader for CiS Bristol.

Peter N. Jordan

Naturalism in the Christian Imagination: Providence and Causality in Early Modern England

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 218 pp. hb £69.78. ISBN 9781009211987

The breadth of theological opinions in seventeenth-century England is notorious. The Civil War allowed previously marginalised voices a chance to be heard while the relative toleration of the Restoration meant that the borders of orthodoxy were porous. In the book under review, Peter Jordan has examined one important concern of writers on divinity during this period: the question of providence or, how God provides that the world does what He wants it to do.

Part 1 of the book, Setting the Scene, is an excellent summary of the ways that God was thought to interact with nature. Peter Jordan presents a clear taxonomy of avenues through which the subject could be approached by Christians. Methodological naturalists leave their religious beliefs at the laboratory door, regardless of their commitments outside it. This is the usual position of religious scientists today. By contrast, providential naturalists recognise God's government of the world when they consider the workings of nature. Jordan defines 'providential full naturalists' as those who claim that He acts only through natural causation. 'Providential partial naturalists' accept that, while natural causes are the dominant mechanism in the world, God does sometimes intervene, either by causing miracles or directing the outcome of natural events. Jordan also touches briefly on 'occasionalism', the doctrine that God steers the world moment by moment, although this idea receives little attention here.

There was clearly a spectrum of early-modern providential partial naturalists, and much of Jordan's book is made up of following the debates between them through books they wrote. The first topic covered is the extent God controls the outcome of lotteries and games. Many

people have issued a little prayer before rolling a dice, and providentialists would certainly maintain that God could affect which number comes up, if He desired it. One moral objection to games of chance in the early-modern period was that God Himself was being pulled into the lists, either because players believed He was influencing the result or because He actually was.

Thomas Gataker, a Rotherhithe vicar, disagreed. He saw dice as subject to natural causes and essentially random. James Balmford, a rector from Southwark, took the more traditional view that God could be directly involved in apparently random events. That said, their disagreement was not as great as might be imagined. Both men accepted that God might intervene directly if he wished, and both agreed that natural causes, even when they operated without direct divine intervention, required God's concurrence.

Other writers extended the debate. John Spencer of Corpus Christi, Cambridge challenged the idea that God communicated through apparent prodigies (from earthquakes to fountains running with blood) and other unusual events. Spencer also asked what He was supposed to mean by them if He was causing them to appear. Atomism and cosmology were other topics that brought to light similar issues. Thomas Burnet, for instance, went so far as to explain the deluge in Genesis according to natural causes. The question in all these cases was to what extent God's purposes were brought about by natural causes rather than through supernatural agency.

None of these writers were asserting that God was not the ultimate cause of what happened on earth or that events could run contrary to his purposes. However, the overall effect of the enquiries that Peter Jordan considers in this book must surely be to reduce God's immediate interactions with the world. Deism seems the next logical step, as indeed it was.

The main drawback of this book is that it wears the imprint of the PhD thesis upon which it is based rather too clearly. It's arranged as an introduction, followed by four independent chapters of research and then a conclusion. Each chapter is the fruit of a close reading of relevant early modern texts, but these chapters run on too long for a reader interested in seventeenth century science and religion in general rather than the debate on providentialism in particular. The conclusion of the book is especially disappointing because it reads more like a summary than the punchline of an argument. The book ends by noting that providential naturalists attributed events to natural causes even when they couldn't say what those causes actually were. This sounds like an important part of the history of methodological naturalism, but the idea remains undeveloped.

Overall, the clarity of Part 1 is well worth the time of anyone concerned about early-modern English science or religion. There is certainly material in the rest of the book to furnish informative articles that could further advance our understanding of these subjects. Unfortunately, a monograph was not the best format to present this.

James Hannam is the author of The Globe: How the Earth Became Round (Reaktion, 2023)

Neil Laing

Is God Really Legit? Making sense of faith and science

Watford: Instant Apostle, 2018, 160 pp. pb £8.99. ISBN 9781909728837

Is God Really Legit? is an informed, easy-to-read, address of science and faith topics aimed at teenagers. However, the book will benefit anyone who prefers

non-academic writing and appreciates colloquialisms. The author, Neil Laing, a secondary school science and IT teacher in the UK, tells 'The Author's Story' in a meaningful preliminary element, which includes his Christian testimony. Although not at the same time, Laing and Richard Dawkins, attended the same Zimbabwean primary school. I appreciate the author's humble approach: 'As far as I am concerned, as long as anyone has genuine biblical and scientific evidence to support what they believe, I respect their view, whether or not I agree with them. I really will be amazed if I find I am completely right' (63).

Most of the fifteen short chapters address a 'big question'. These chapters include: 'What is atheism?'; 'Can we trust the Bible?'; 'Doesn't evolution disprove creation?'; 'Surely seeing is believing – and I can't see Him?'; 'Is there any proof of God?'; and 'Why would a good God allow suffering?'. Additional questions throughout keep readers thinking and guide them towards making an informed decision on the relationship between science and religious faith. One such question is 'Would Adam and Eve have been created as adults or as new-born babies? Either way, what would this imply?' The topic of Christian faith is of inevitable relevance to the topic of the book and is specifically treated in chapters such as: 'What is faith really about?' and 'Faith in action'. The back matter in the book includes sections on 'Famous scientists who are Christians' and the 'Top ten questions asked by teenagers' from a research conducted by 'God and the Big Bang' (https://gatbb.co.uk/). Laing responds to each question in a brief paragraph, most of which have been dealt with more fully within the book chapters.

Laing makes the important point that the main message of the Bible is not to explain scientific mechanisms, but rather the Bible is God's communication with us (41). Furthermore, both the Bible and science look at people, the world and life, from different angles. Thus, non-scientific, including biblical, explanations of a concept or phenomenon, can still be true; they are just from another perspective. For example, a rainbow can be described scientifically in terms of light being refracted by raindrops; aesthetically a rainbow can be described as beautiful; and from the Bible it can be said that it reveals the glory of God (Ezek. 1:28). Each of these descriptions can be regarded as true and complement each other. Laing made some valuable connections between the evolution of the universe and the Bible. One example is God created and 'stretched out' the heavens (e.g., Jer. 10:12), which connects to evolution's expanding universe. Another example is 'The earth was without form and void, …' (Gen. 1:2), which connects to the theory that the earth was formless during the process of being formed from gases orbiting the sun which then cooled to form liquid then solid. I appreciated the conjecture on God creating humans (58-60): 'God took creatures which were highly intelligent animals and breathed into them the breath of life so that they become living souls' (Gen. 2:7). In other words, God made humans spiritual, having the 'ability to know God'. I thought the last chapter on suffering is a commendable address of a very difficult topic within a short chapter. Laing tells moving stories from personal experience. He rightly includes a central idea to this topic that 'God gave us free will' and we are not programmed robots. Also, Laing admits that the topic of suffering would be increasingly difficult for the person who does not leave room for God in their understanding and only views it from a human perspective.

Despite this selection of positive points, I have a couple of minor criticisms. In reading the first eleven chapters it could easily be misunderstood that Christian faith is purely human effort. Even though we are told later that faith

is initiated by God (111) it may have been an idea to make the different aspects of Christian faith clear earlier in the book. The other is with the chapter on 'Faith in Action', which is predominantly about miraculous healings and miraculous provision, usually as a result of prayer. It would have been beneficial to give an appropriate amount of space to the more ordinary ways of demonstrating faith in action. Living as a radical Christian disciple in the mundane and with Christian relevance in the community may be the primary example.

I commend this book to young and old alike, and not just the Christian.

Malcolm S. Buchanan is a Secondary school science teacher in Brisbane, has a doctorate in chemistry, and his interests include the relationship between science and religious faith.

Marjorie Lindner Gunnoe

The Person in Psychology and Christianity: A Faith Based Critique of Five Theories of Social Development

Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2022. 247 pp. pb £20.69. ISBN 9780830828722

Marjorie Gunnoe seeks 'compatibility' between her biblically guided, Christian depiction of an embodied, purposeful, moral, accountable person made in the image of God, and the C20th developmental psychology theories of Eric Erikson, John Bowlby, B.F. Skinner, Albert Bandura, and Evolutionary Psychology (EP). Systematically and carefully reading their work through the grid of this anthropology, she firmly and unequivocally rejects those parts that her scripturally based approach rules out. Positive features include the well-structured chapters and subsequent consistent and thoughtful application of her schema. I liked the informative biographies of each thinker as well. They not only add colour, but also illuminate the theological and psychological influences on and motivations of her theorists. Gunnoe diplomatically steers a sensible course through the US culture wars too when discussing sexuality and gender, avoiding the excesses of some contemporary misunderstandings.

But whose Christianity, which psychology are in play throughout the book? It transpires that a modern protestant faith variant is being used to adjudicate the overall *theological* acceptability of what tends to be presented simply, and maybe a little uncritically at times, as a modernist discipline. Biblical 'facts' deployed to sift scientific facts from scientistic factoids we might say. How convincing this rather positivist encounter proves depends partly on one's place in the Christian family; denominational positioning does matter in these debates I'm afraid. One's stance on faith and reason's relationship is particularly crucial, as is confidence in whether Gunnoe's filtering strategy is practicable in the long term, (an obvious alternative being a more nuanced *dialogue* between two rational traditions, theology and psychological science, mediated by and through philosophy).

I wondered how others might respond to the outright rejection of uncomfortable aspects of psychology on biblical authority alone, such as developmental psychology's ignoring the *imago Dei* or any notion of ultimate purpose. A reading such as Gunnoe's rules out their acceptance definitively and unequivocally. But on what shared, reasonable grounds will this approach be accepted, or even treated as remotely credible by those sceptical of biblical inerrancy claims, especially if made by some flavours of evangelicalism? How might one use Gunnoe's method to educate an afflicted tradition, psychology in this case, of the identity of and cure for its epistemic fallacies in a language it might come to understand and accept? If the answer is 'one can't'

there remains only rhetorical posturing for the many outside what is arguably a narrow, confessional fold, with preaching to the choir for those within. This inevitably restricts the reach and readership of this book, foreclosing its usefulness as part of any wider apologetic or intellectual endeavour.

To be fair to Gunnoe, the target audience is not meant to be so wide. As intended, her book may well prove to be a necessary, useful, and crucial text for many a US Christian College fresher or sophomore or similar at a particular stage in *their* maturation and development. For those formed by fundamentalist, religious outlooks, or who need urgent assistance with their arrested or compartmentalised religious and intellectual formation, this monograph probably will refresh the parts that a free church, Biblicist background cannot reach. It will engender a healthy respect for certain scientific as well as religious routes to truth, and it can only encourage a compassionate understanding of the socio-political implications of the interpersonal and relational, whether theological or psychological. It will act as a partial prophylactic against contemporary travesties of faithful truth-seeking that eschew all commerce with secular understanding of the person. For all this it deserves a cautious welcome and recommendation. But it will most likely prove a curious read, with a somewhat dated feel, for anyone in the longer and broader Christian (especially catholic or orthodox) tradition, particularly those educated in both psychology and theology, and who are comfortable with both Athens and Jerusalem and their complex philosophical and theological connections.

Derek Mahon, the late Irish poet, wryly described himself as a 'recovering protestant'; the author of *The Person in Psychology and Christianity*, describes herself as both 'Reformed and reforming'. In Mahon's case the radically fallen, objectified, dead world characteristic of some strands of Northern Irish Christianity and post Newtonian science, became meaning-infused as his poetry teetered on the brink of the transcendent and a participatory ontology. Gunnoe, still largely in sympathy with the radical reformers, is keen to counteract unduly negative views of the person associated with certain strands of the Calvinist tradition. So far so welcome. Behind both, however, often lurk the spectres of other common, modern, but potentially unhelpful dualisms including the nature-culture, faith-reason, and subject-object splits. In his mature years, these receded in the rear-view mirror for Mahon, while some might wish for similar distancing here. This, I suspect, will be needed for similar engagements with psychology to be more widely accessible in future.

Peter Hampson is Emeritus Professor of Psychology, UWE, Bristol and SCR Member of Blackfriars Hall, Oxford with interests in moral psychology, theology and psychology, and theology and culture.

Timothy M. Mosteller (ed.)

Four Views on Christian Metaphysics

Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books 2022; 142pp. pb £20.25. ISBN 9781725273306

Human wisdom gets a rather bad press in the New Testament (e.g., Matthew 11: 25-26). However, the New Testament is not totally against wisdom but states it is found in a place few intellectuals think to look, namely the person of Christ crucified (Colossians 2: 3, 1 Corinthians 1: 22).

Judged against this gospel, how does the book under review measure up? Before answering this question, we need to describe the book. It consists of four chapters written by four different men each seeking to persuade the reader that

their chosen metaphysic should be *the* Christian philosophy. These four are (in the order considered) Platonism, Aristotelianism, Idealism, and Postmodernism. All the authors were required to finish their chapter by considering how their metaphysic handles the resurrection. After each author has made their case, the other three critique the arguments advanced. The author of each chapter then responds to their criticisms.

The four metaphysics may be summarised as follows: (i) Platonists hold that there are two parts to reality, physical and non-physical, the non-physical realm being where universals (such as redness) reside; (ii) Aristotelians hold that universals do not exist if there are no examples of them in the physical world (e.g. 'redness' would not exist if there are no red things); (iii) Idealists hold that there is only one kind of substance, not two, and that in order for something to exist someone (usually God) has to perceive it; (iv) Postmodernists reject the concept that metaphysics is an analysis of a reality 'out there' but rather is an interpretive task in which universals are simply names we agree upon in our use of language.

The question may be asked why Mosteller chose this four metaphysics? The reason he gives in his introduction is that they are the most prominent among Christians today.

Up until the chapter on Postmodernism, the debate was conducted in a gentlemanly manner. The debate then got heated with the Aristotelian attacking Postmodernism thus: 'For all its effort to study the meanings of words, it does more to obscure them' and 'Subjectivist language obscures the truth'. 'If [Postmodernism] is not concerned with metaphysical questions, then I will stick with systems that provide answers.' The Idealist finishes his critique of Postmodernism by stating: 'So is a truly Christian postmodern perspective actually just an excuse to avoid doing serious metaphysics? From where I stand, that would appear to be the case'. In his response to the other three authors, the Postmodernist points out that none of the four metaphysics being considered should be considered to be Christian. 'All four systems include, or may include, beliefs that do not line up with the teachings of Scripture, or that flat out contradict it'.

What is most helpful about this book? In my opinion it is that you will find here an accessible summary of the main differences between universals in Plato and Aristotle.

Reading this book will not make you great in the kingdom of heaven. For according to Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, that privilege belongs to '*…whoever does [the commandments] and teaches them…*' (Matthew 5: 19) and, more amazingly and unexpectedly, children (Matthew 18: 1-4 and Mark 10: 13-16). Nevertheless, if you have a God-given gift of intellect, reading this book may make you more useful to both Christians and non-Christians, so long as after you have read it you remain able to make a simple and straightforward gospel presentation (Acts 16: 30-31) '*Then [the Philippian jailer] brought [Paul and Silas] out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*". And they said, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household*"'.

Stephen Walley is a retired research physicist associated with the Cavendish Laboratory, University of Cambridge

John C. Lennox

Cosmic Chemistry: Do God and Science Mix?

Lion Books, 2021. 400 pp. pb £25. ISBN 9780745981406

John Lennox will be well-known to many

readers of S&CB. He is a brilliant Christian apologist and has successfully debated new atheists such as Richard Dawkins and Peter Atkins. His books *Gunning for God and Can Science Explain Everything?* are widely read and greatly appreciated. He is rightly held in high regard as a Christian speaker and debater, with immense knowledge, charm and clarity. As this book is written by someone who is so highly regarded, it is natural to assume this new publication will be another masterpiece. However, we need to think carefully and critically about the contents of this book, for in my opinion it contains some flaws and incorrect or inappropriate arguments concerning evolution. Lennox is a mathematician and philosopher; this book is about biology and chemistry.

The first chapters engagingly cover familiar territory and criticise the 'nothing-buttery' of scientism. Claims that science might be able to explain everything are convincingly refuted, as in Lennox's previous books. Arguments for the existence of God based on fine tuning and the origin of the universe (why there is something rather than nothing) are clearly presented. However, most of the book is an extended argument for 'design' in biology. By this he means much more than seeing the Creator's hand in everything. Instead, this is a defence of Intelligent Design (ID) and is a critique of the adequacy of the standard model of evolution. He is not denying that things evolve, and he is very clear that he is not invoking young earth creationism, but he is highly critical of the modern evolutionary synthesis, known as Neo-Darwinism.

Lennox is careful to explain the difference between evolution and the origin of life (abiogenesis), which are very different areas of study. There are indeed very few convincing arguments for how living organisms might have arisen from non-living material (though there are plenty of speculations), yet many of Lennox's arguments concern the latter, especially questions about the origin of information in DNA and where that might come from. There is no mention of the RNA world, and nothing on endosymbiosis, let alone the difference between prokaryotes, archaea and eukaryotes. Lateral gene transfer and convergent evolution are other aspects that are not mentioned. Lennox invokes the role of a 'designer' to explain the complexity, which he claims cannot be explained by evolution.

The author claims that he is not proposing a God-of-the-gaps, but yet seems to invoke a 'designer of the gaps' to account for the complexity of the biological world. At whatever level biology is studied it is complex, whether at the level of DNA sequences, protein structure, cell biology or developmental biology. Biologists take this for granted and stand in awe of the amazing complexity of all life. There is nothing in the cell that isn't amazingly complicated! However, we no more need to invoke anything miraculous to explain evolution than we do to explain the development of baby from a single fertilised cell. He cites the bacterial flagellum as an example of irreducible complexity; though the main proponents of ID have moved on from this example, for which plausible evolutionary models have been proposed. He even claims that 'science is uncovering the design, but not simultaneously revealing any convincing natural processes to account for it' (162). In other contexts, he ignores the facts that we have learned about retroviral insertions, which convincingly demonstrate the evolutionary relationship between different species. His argument that genetic relationship is only a 'relatedness of the gaps' (256) makes no sense, as too is the claim that reverse transcription weakens the role of the genome in inherited characteristics (269). All this ignores the designer's role in the rest of biology, which has not been 'designed' in the same way. This is rather different to the usual Christian understanding of the

creator God who is intimately involved in every aspect of creation.

Lennox proposes his own definition of 'science' so that it can include unrepeatable divine activity, and so stands against the legal ruling of the Dover court case, which concluded that ID is not science and that ID 'violates the ground rules of science by invoking supernatural causation'. He sets up a false dichotomy between 'atheistic' evolution and philosophical naturalism making the implicit assumption that evolution is necessarily atheistic. Of course, Christians will be wary of strict naturalism, as nothing exists without God's involvement, but that does not mean that evolutionary mechanisms are necessarily atheistic.

In several places (too many to list here) Lennox's arguments are in error, or are exaggerations. His statements about the evolution of the peppered moth are simply wrong; the molecular basis for this small change in phenotype, leading to a change in population, have even been mapped to the level of a single DNA transposition. Natural selection is not only about competition for limited resources between the strong and weak, but about reproductive fitness.

There are many quotes from Dennis Noble and Thomas Nagel (neither of whom are theists, though both have criticised the standard evolutionary model) and he makes great play of the Royal Society discussion meeting on 'New trends in evolutionary biology: biological, philosophical and social science perspectives' which was held in 2016. That one called for 'revision of the standard theory of evolution, although the issues involved remain hotly contested'. His book doesn't explicitly mention the Extended Evolutionary Synthesis (EES) which addresses some of the 'top-down' questions that were posed, but which 'does not replace traditional thinking, but rather can be deployed alongside it to stimulate research in evolutionary biology'.

Lennox invokes arguments from information theory and makes the classic error of arguing as if proteins or long stretches of DNA assembled in a single step, purely by chance (like assembling a Boeing 747 from a scrapyard). But that is not what evolution is claiming; rather that the various stages occurred incrementally, and that successful ones were preserved, allowing for further improvement. Nothing started in the optimised state in which we find biology today.

He mentions systems biology and invokes 'jumping genes' (transposons) and epigenetics as if these give evidence for interference by the designer. These do indeed give added complexity to the mechanisms of evolution, and call for some new approaches, but they are very far from claiming that evolution is a theory in crisis, as Lennox seems to suggest. Epigenetics gives added levels of complexity for development and control, which are inherited in a non-Darwinian fashion, but these do not go any way to producing any new information or refuting the main mechanisms of evolution. He invokes 'systems biology' as if this helps his case, without explaining how. This is merely an aspect of biomedical research which tries to understand things at the level of cells/tissues/organisms by putting the pieces together, in contrast to reductionist approaches, which take things apart.

Many readers of S&CB will see this as a well-meaning departure from Christian understanding of God's role in Creation. In the biblical view God is much more than a divine tinkerer who occasionally steps in to overrule natural processes. He gives no hint of how the 'designer' went about his business – by miracles that defying the known laws of science, or maybe by individual new acts of creation or by loading the dice to enable the less likely? Arguments from quantum uncertainty (occurring at the subatomic level),

generally don't work at the molecular, or higher, levels of biology

This is not such an easy read as Lennox's previous work, and it necessarily contains far more technical terms. Read it for yourself and reach your own conclusions, but beware – this does not represent mainstream biological science. The subtitle of the book is 'Do God and Science Mix?' Lennox's conclusion is yes (and I wholeheartedly agree), but he claims this while denying much of contemporary evolutionary science. This can only cause confusion.

Keith Fox is Editor of Science & Christian Belief, Emeritus Professor of Biochemistry in the University of Southampton and former Director of the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge.

Graeme Finlay

God's Gift of Science: Theological presuppositions underlying exploration of the natural world

Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2022. 143 + xii pp. pb £19. ISBN 9781666748062

Graeme Finlay works in the field of cancer research and scientific pathology. *God's Gift of Science* is perhaps best read as a series of reflections on the ways in which science and the Christian faith, which are so often presented as inimical to one another, do not need to be seen in this way but might rather offer jointly visions which address the malaises of contemporary Western society.

Finlay sets out his ideas in six chapters. The first covers the nature of science: Finlay here maintains both that 'science cannot justify its own existence' (14), and that, historically speaking, 'The human enterprise of science rests on the bedrock of biblical faith' (19). The second is a reflection on the idea of creation and the understanding of God as creator that emerges in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The third, similarly, is a reflection on the nature of humanity: here Finlay ponders *inter alia* issues around biblical hermeneutics and critical realism. These opening chapters have a rather piecemeal feel: they quote extensively from other authors, and it is hard to discern what is being added to these sources.

Things pick up with the fourth chapter, which discusses 'threats to science' in the contemporary world. Finlay sees these as coming from the use of technology to support vested power interests, postmodern thinking with its critiques of science as a tool of Western imperialism (Finlay suggests that '[w]hen people speak (disapprovingly) of European *science*, they probably mean European *ideologies* that are often dressed up as science' (60, italics in original), and the attacks made on scientific findings by powerful lobbying groups such as those associated with the tobacco and fossil fuel industries. In a 'post-truth' society, Finlay urges, 'the remedy is not to place our hope in science, but to return to the God upon whose truth science is most securely founded' (68).

A fifth chapter looks at the way in which both scientific and theological findings can generate surprise in those investigating these areas, whilst the sixth chapter explores issues of sustainability and justice from scientific and theological standpoints. Here Finlay draws on the work of economist Bill Rees and theologian Michael Northcott to offer a penetrating analysis of the current ecological crisis, an explanation of it in terms of the models of humans and the environment provided by Enlightenment thinking, and an alternative rooted in the Christian Gospel. Finlay concludes that '[Jesus's] call for justice in place of acquisitive living supplants consumerism. To adopt Jesus's paradigm is to gain inner motivation to live sustainably and justly' (115).

Finlay frequently refers to 'biblical faith', which he understands as 'a commitment to a way of living that is based on the biblical narrative – especially the story of Jesus' (49), but he is no naïve biblical literalist, commenting of the creation narrative that 'evolution … has compelling evidential support, ... and that the biblical concept of creation must encompass every conceivable natural process' (67).

There can sometimes be a clashing of the gears on moving between theological topics (discussions of which are often heavily indebted to a handful of scholars such as Tom Wright, and regarding which Finlay's position tends to the conservative) and some of the scientific material, of which Finlay's handling is rather more assured. Many of the topics discussed here have been extensively covered elsewhere, but Finlay's final chapter – comprising a third of the entire book – is both challenging and timely, and the arguments presented here deserve to be widely heard.

Michael Fuller is a Lecturer at New College, University of Edinburgh: he is also a Fellow of ISSR, and Vice-President for Publications of ESSSAT.

Cees Dekker, Corien Oranje, and Gijsbert van den Brink

Dawn. A Proton's Tale of All That Came to Be

Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2021. 295 pp. pb £14.63. ISBN 9781514005668

This book is the English translation of a book published in the Netherlands in 2020. It is jointly authored by a professor of nanobiology and biophysics, a novelist and theologian, and a professor in theology and science. The book provides a narrative that combines the scientific story of creation with the story of God's redemptive involvement in human history and in His creation. The story is told from the perspective of Proton, a proton who witnesses the origin and evolution of the universe, the origin and evolution of life on Earth, the origin of human beings, and the birth and life of Jesus and the beginnings of the Christian church.

The story is told in 24 short chapters. Chapters 1 to 7 cover the history of the universe and the history of life on Earth in accordance with our current scientific understandings. Proton is formed in the Big Bang, becomes part of a helium nucleus, ends up inside a star, and through nuclear fusion becomes part of a carbon atom. The star becomes a supernova, the carbon atom is ejected into space, becomes part of a dust particle, and ends up in the water on Earth. Proton, as part of the carbon atom, then becomes part of a variety of living organisms and witnesses key events in the evolution of life on Earth.

The story then moves towards the history of mankind and God's involvement in this, covered in chapters 8 to 22. This part of the book covers the essentials of the biblical narrative. As part of the carbon atom Proton ends up in a bamboo cane, and meets the first humans. As time progresses Proton meets a number of biblical characters including Abraham, Josua and David, and witnesses key events in the birth, life and death of Jesus. Chapter 22 ends with the beginnings of the Christian church and the discussion of God's plans by the apostle John with his friend Gaius.

In chapter 23 Proton is in a space station and follows the discussions about God amongst the five astronauts on board. These discussions reflect the current discussions in religion and science. Proton and his friends (the other protons and neutrons in the carbon atom) end up on the gloves of one of the astronauts, and during a spacewalk find themselves back in interstellar space after billions

of years. In chapter 24, as Proton and his friends drift further and further away from Earth, they recap the six eras that they have experienced: The Big Bang and the first moments after that, the formation of stars and galaxies, the origin and evolution of life, the emergence of human beings, the coming of Jesus, and the coming of Breath (the Holy Spirit). And they discuss God's promise of a future seventh era: the return of Jesus. The book ends with an epilogue in which the authors summarise a number of the discussions they have had in the writing of the book, and a set of discussion questions.

This is a delightful and inspiring book that is easy to read, and a scientific background is not needed to appreciate it. In simple and engaging language, the narrative covers the essentials of the Gospel. The synopsis of the history of the universe and evolution of life on Earth is true to current scientific understandings. In this way the authors effectively endorse the relevance and harmony of the two books of God's works: the book of the Bible, and the book of Nature.

The choice by the authors of a proton as the narrator of the story is a very clever one. In the ongoing recycling of atoms and molecules in nature, Proton as part of the carbon atom becomes part of a variety of objects and creatures. These include different plants and animals, the sheep skin of Abraham's tent, one of the strings of David's harp, and Jesus' walking stick. This enables the authors to make Proton and his friends witnesses of all the key historical events.

In many parts of the book, Proton and his friends discuss the events they witness, in particular in relation to God's plans for the redemption of mankind. They voice excitement, concerns, misunderstandings and doubts, and in this way, they draw the reader into the story and induce the reader to think for him- or herself about the relevance of these events. This book is highly recommended, a must-read for both Christians and non-Christians alike.

Peter J. M. van der Burgt is emeritus associate professor in the Department of Experimental Physics at the National University of Ireland Maynooth.

Terryl & Nathaniel Givens

Into the Headwinds: Why Belief Has Always Been Hard—and Still Is

Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2022. 132 pp. hb £15.99. ISBN 9780802882431

The Givens ask two questions in this book: What are the challenges to faith? Are they particular to this modern moment? Here, 'faith' is defined as loyalty—maintaining religious commitment (e.g., beliefs) beyond being easy or costless (vii). Briefly, their answers are: The challenges to faith do not come from specific 'truths' of secularism but are rooted in the limited, biased, and fallible operations of our mind; these challenges are not particularly modern—hence 'why belief has always been hard'.

The title of the introduction, *Secularism Is Not the Problem*, is quite telling. Here, the Givens debunk the secularization hypothesis (myth of scientific enlightenment), which says life was hard in the dark times before the Age of Reason; religion fed on the people's ignorance and fear, offering tales that made life tolerable; science, however, exposed the folly of religion and led to great intellectual, moral, and technological progress (2-4). According to the authors, this theory is implausible for many reasons, such as that Christianity did not make life easy; it instead required countercultural aspirations and demanded costly material, social, and ideological sacrifices (9).

But if the secularization hypothesis is wrong, why has religion declined? The Givens argue for the counter-intuitive:

because the choice to believe has become too easy (9). The secular age is not one of disbelief per se, but one of casual belief or domesticated religion—religious affiliation mistaken for genuine conversion. While authentic faith has always been costly, we expect from our affiliation the comforting tales: 'a map of meaning… minimum tension with prevailing social norms… escape from cognitive dissonance, uncertainty, risk, and vulnerability' (12). Consequently, substitutes of faith readily emerge on the market which offer exactly what we want but with fewer personal costs. They are rationalism and scientism; they pose challenges to faith not because secularism is right, but because our religion has gone wrong (11).

Next, the Givens argue that rationalism and scientism are false. Their refutation of rationalism is based on the recent findings of psychology and neurology which support intuitionism (19). People rarely make highly rational decisions, and our mind offers only after-the-fact rationalization (28); we often do not actually believe what we think we believe, and we are ignorant of our self-inconsistency (41). Their refutation of scientism is based on the real character of science—depending considerably on intuition (58), not directly correlated with technology (64), and quite fallible in finding truth (68).

The authors are telling us that rationalism and scientism cannot deliver what they promise; the kind of certainty, objectivity, self-knowledge, and self-mastery which we want are simply unattainable anywhere. Reality is multi-layered, and our mental faculties are fallible (79). So rather than running away from risk and exposure, we should embrace our limitations as part of ourselves—what real faith has espoused all along. Facing cultural, biological, and psychological headwinds, the way forward is to rethink our faith: it is not a proposition, but a disposition of epistemological openness (80). It is a gesture of trust in our diverse faculties of knowing (intuition, conscience, imagination, etc.), which enrich our apprehension of reality (96, 107). It is a personal response to this reality outside us—God in particular—thus it is relational and volitional, making us vulnerable and holding us responsible (100, 110). Then, knowing that the struggle to believe is largely self-inflicted, we can proceed into the headwinds confidently and prayerfully (117), trusting in our moral and intellectual intuitions and avoiding the stumbling blocks, including over-reliance on reason and science.

The Givens present a valuable insight. However, their finer points are difficult to grasp, as the book is overwhelmingly occupied with introducing and refuting the secularization hypothesis, rationalism, scientism, and other headwinds. The reader's initial impression may be that this is another book lamenting how the champions of secularism misunderstand and abuse reason, science, and faith. If the Givens' message stopped there, we may as well say that secularism is still the problem, thanks to the (debunked) conflict myth, when reason conquered ignorance and science disproved religion. The Givens show that their position is far more nuanced: the problem before us is not what to believe, but whether to trust; there are perennial idols tempting us to withhold trust, avoid exposure, and escape from responsibility. Though the idols change their appearances, running away from faith is nothing new. Alas, the Givens' response to the keystone question—'why is religion apparently difficult in a secular culture'—is very brief, a mere five pages in the introduction.

The Givens can strengthen their case by a greater sensitivity to the diverse meanings of 'secularity'. They quote Charles Taylor but do not engage with Taylor's

work significantly (1). Also, if scientific enlightenment is false and is 'not the problem', how our faith has changed (for the worse) requires further elaboration. Is the Givens' picture of an imperial corruption and institutional domestication of Christianity true? Did the early Christians measure faith with authenticity? Did they even think of religion in terms of conversion? I do not find the answers self-evident. Since the Givens' argument depends on an explication of the nature of faith and an analogy between the modern moment and late antiquity, more evidence from church history is necessary.

Pu Ji (Preston), a science tutor at Mount Mary University, studies theology at Nashotah House Theological Seminary, both in Wisconsin, USA. Drawing on his previous training in diverse disciplines including chemistry, engineering, philosophy, and theology, he aims to transform the discourse of science and religion into a ministry of the church and establish it as an integral part of Christian education.

Carl Mitcham, Jim Grote, and Levi Checketts

Theology and Technology, Volume 1: Essays in Christian Analysis

Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022. 174 pp. pb £23.00. ISBN 9781666734621

Theology and Technology, Volume 2: Essays in Christian Exegesis and Historical Theology

Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022. 272 pp. pb £32.00. ISBN 9781666734638

Through the efforts of Levi Checketts and collaborators, these volumes are a republication of Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote's 1984 edited, largely unattended, collection on the relationship between theology and technology. Checketts states that the goal of revisiting this work is to '[expand] the field of philosophy of technology to theology' (I, xiii), emphasizing his use of these essays as a teaching tool for theology students. While the new preface acknowledges potential challenges to this task, such as rightfully noting that the volumes have a serious 'blind spot' for people who are 'not white, cis-gendered, heterosexual Christian males' (I, xviii), there are other issues which may create difficulty for instructors to use these volumes as a teaching tool. Because the rhetorical strategies used by many of the authors do not meet the standards of academic rigor, in 2023 or in 1984, *Theology and Technology* is more of an interesting artifact from a historical research program which went undeveloped, rather than a springboard for new scholarship. However, a handful of exceptions shine through which show the potential for the tradition Checketts hopes to regenerate.

Volume 1 contains a series of philosophical perspectives on the relationship between Christianity and technology, as well as two new pieces written for this volume. Volume 2 has sections on biblical studies, classical theology, and technological culture. Issues of method run throughout, where dubious claims and strawmen spoil the arguments made in more essays than I can list: Jacques Ellul (II, 42-59) polemicizes against the *new theologians* and atheists while only citing himself, Wilhelm Fudpucker (I, 25-41) tells us with no supporting evidence that all non-Christian religions are non-historical, non-eschatological, or both, and Egbert Schuurman (I, 77-90) claims that many engineers struggle with aspirations to 'unlimited, megalomaniacal achievements,' (I, 89) which is more a description of a Saturday morning cartoon villain than a woman who make plans for bridges. Instructors deciding to use these volumes to teach theology trainees should ensure their students have enough critical training to identify claims which are not substantiated. Be prepared to discuss issues of questionable biblical interpretation and overly prescriptive

conceptions of technology. For potential examples see: (I, 78-83; II, 30; II, 60-61, II, 138; II, 145-146).

The essays that hold up best are ones which implemented historical methods alongside theological arguments. Both Terry J. Tekippe (I, 42-60) and Ernest L. Fortin (II, 99-114) engaged the corpuses of other theologians to expound on their relevance to technological questions, Bernard Lonergan and Augustine, respectively. By surveying the works of the mighty dead and contextualizing them with questions about technology, both Tekippe and Fortin created secondary literature which can be used by instructors to introduce these figures to students. Checketts's new contribution in Volume 1 (I, 91-115) pulls from his background in Science & Technology Studies to show how engagement with non-theological literature can anchor novel theological arguments. As Checketts examines the 'sacred technologies' (I, 110) of navigation tools, the printing press, and the cross, he also places these tools within economic and Christian history. Grounding his research in these histories builds trust with readers, giving people who hold different religious views something interesting to ponder on while building credibility for his theological analysis to those who do not already agree with him.

Were I asked to teach a theology and technology course next semester, I would first question why a heretic like me would be asked to do such a thing, but then accept because these volumes drove me to ask about my own positions on this subject. Checketts suggests supplementing the volumes with Science & Technology Studies literature, and I would also ensure students got a background in the history and philosophy of technology. Kate Stockly and Wesley Wildman's ponderings on "spirit tech" (Stockly, Kate J., and Wesley J. Wildman. "Interpreting the rapidly changing landscape of spirit tech." *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 13, no. 1 (2023): 109-118) deserve attention and I would dedicate a week to Karel Čapek's *The Factory for the Absolute*. Theology and Technology would be discussed as a stage in the history of the field's development, one which continued a tradition worth theologians' time, with Checketts's own essay being a shoo-in for the syllabus.

Scott Ryan Maybell is a court mediator in the USA with a research background in neurohermeneutics and recognitive analysis, and an MSc degree in Science and Religion from the University of Edinburgh, UK.

Alister McGrath

Natural Philosophy: On Retrieving a Lost Disciplinary Imaginary

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. 248 pp. pb £32.99 ISBN 9780192865731

'No one should expect great progress in the sciences (especially in their practical part) unless natural philosophy is extended to the particular sciences, and the particular sciences in turn brought back to natural philosophy.' So wrote Sir Francis Bacon in 1620. In 2015, as Professor of Divinity at Gresham College, Alister McGrath set out to retrieve the import of this historic actors' category'. The result is vintage McGrath. *Natural Philosophy*, with its 60-page bibliography, is a timely *ressourcement* for a goal beyond science or religion. 'A natural philosophy is the grander vision of nature, that arises from transcending disciplinary divisions, affirming the value of all its disciplinary components, while actively seeking to discern the larger picture of nature they disclose' (177).

In Part I, McGrath initiates a conversation with a tradition of natural philosophy, which as practiced, 'was a way of life, not merely an intellectual endeavour' (3). Combining learning *about* nature with

learning *from* nature, the subject was oriented to the *knowledge* and the *reformation* of its practitioners as worldly agents. Before it 'bifurcated into "science" and "philosophy" '(91), the discipline sought more than a unified theory of natural "science". If 'the singular term "science" has functioned satisfactorily for many as a disciplinary imaginary for two centuries' (176), neglect of natural philosophy may explain the plausibility and produce the sensibility of Stephen Weinberg's saying, 'the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.'

Drawing on Charles Taylor's notion of social imaginaries, McGrath's proposal in Part II is not to recover a discarded *theory* but to renew engagement in practices of *theoria* by which the objectivity, open to different forms of subjective engagement (including but not limited to scientific, aesthetic, and ethical perspectives), may be incorporated into the image of reality in all its fullness. Central to McGrath's vision of a natural philosophy is the potential of contemplation (*theoreia*) to disclose what nobody's eyes can yet have seen, except in part. Whence Mary Midgley's insistence on many ways 'mapping reality', Thomas Nagel's integration of multiple 'points of view', Karl Popper's talk of many 'worlds', and Hans Georg Gadamer's of many 'horizons of interpretation'.

There is a tension in McGrath's historical narrative. In chapter 1 we read that 'natural philosophy emerged as a significant intellectual domain in Western Europe in the late modern period' (3), but post-Kantian traditions of *Naturphilosophie* are not the focus of this study. In chapter 2 we learn that natural philosophy was 'conceived by Aristotle as 'an autonomous and self-contained discipline' (19), which was consolidated in 'the middle ages', when 'Aristotelian natural philosophy dominated Western attempts to make sense of the world of nature' (30) centuries before Descartes or Newton. Historiographical difficulties are inevitable in the work of retrieval. The conversation with the tradition in Part I is suitably selective, but has a distinctly English flavour. Positions of historical actors are routinely presented via their reception by twentieth century figures, which the publisher's decision to not put the dates of the works cited in footnotes obscures.

The prevalence of 'natural philosophy' as an actor's category is sometimes overstated, and the influence of political economy understated. Galileo, the visionary Pythagorean, waxed lyrical in 1623 of the grand standing of *philosophy* - not [natural philosophy] (60) - being written in the then highly figurative language of mathematics. Keats, the romantic poet, felt in 1819 the clip of cold *philosophy.* I found McGrath's reading in each case quite unnatural. The 1810 *Encyclopaedia Brittanica* does not provide the synonymy he intends (95-96), but serves to show rather how natural historians and philosophers were distinguished by their chief objects in the nineteenth century. It may even help to iron out a few historical details. For example, why McGrath's suggestion that the term 'scientist' was coined to replace 'natural philosopher' (89) would have been verboten by Coleridge and Whewell alike; 'why the term «natural philosophy" is absent from *The Origin of Species*' (101n.); and why Whewell described Darwin's work as 'utterly unphilosophical'. It had nought to do with Darwin's preference for 'a "naturalistic" approach to biological science' (99).

These are minor historical details. McGrath's concern 'lies elsewhere' (12). He anticipates a more basic objection: 'why bother resurrecting an obsolete form of thought in the light of inexorable scientific progress?' (5). Whiggish readers are directed to Maria Rosa Antognazza's demonstration of 'The Benefit to

Philosophy of the Study of its History'. It remains to be seen how McGrath's visions for a natural philosophy interact with his visions for a Christian natural theology. '*Theoreia*' finds fertile expression in the gospel according to John, and readers of this journal may notice Hooke's desire to 'furnish the Learned with an *experimentum crucis*' (49n.). More must be said on the subject of *Natural Philosophy*. We may thank McGrath for initiating the conversation.

Christopher Oldfield is a philosopher at King's College London, a member of Trinity College in the University of Cambridge and a research associate at the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion.

Felicia Wu Song

Restless Devices: Recovering Personhood, Presence and Place in the Digital Age,

IVP Academic, 2021. 232 pp. pb £17.05.
ISBN 9780830851133

This book is not what I had expected it to be. Although I did know the book was about social media and its various effects on society at large, I had broadly anticipated discussions of what social media was today, how it was broadly affecting us, its consumers, and describing the various commercial and technological forces at play actively shaping our experiences. Yes, the book is certainly all of these things - but it is also so much more than that, and in a rather surprising way. What I was not prepared for was the richness and depth of discussion contained within, especially for a Christian audience.

The author is Dr Felicia Wu Song, a cultural sociologist based at Westmont College in California who specialises in studying 'the place of digital technologies in contemporary life'. Despite the academic context, I found the writing to be accessible and well-crafted, although somewhat wordy at times. Song carefully communicates her points clearly in an approachable, conversational manner, mostly without using technical jargon, but also with surprising conviction. Even when sociological terms were used, such as 'social imaginary' and 'plausibility structures', they were skilfully explained within context. An index is also helpfully provided.

I found the rather personal introductory chapter to be essential reading, providing overall context and a flavour of what comes later. As said already, I had expected a somewhat different book, perhaps focusing on the downsides of technology and how social media corrupts our souls and leads us into endless distractions. Fortunately, Song continues further by giving a surprisingly uplifting and positive message, not only acknowledging benefits but equally suggesting ways to examine, diagnose, and even counteract how social media may be leading us astray.

A significant part of practically doing this counteracting is what Song terms 'The Freedom Project'. This consists of four separate coda sections dotted throughout the book that provide helpful suggestions and exercises designed to help attain a greater awareness of how we can use digital media more safely and establish a 'new normal' in its use.

In the first part of the book, Song focuses mostly on sociological aspects, describing what she terms the 'digital ecology', to characterise what digital social media does along with its effects on users, both positive and negative. This discusses the origins of the digital ecology, the landscape of social media and the known inclinations and motives of the usual litany of organisations that operate it. I found myself agreeing vigorously with what was said here. Although quite well-known, Song nevertheless

expresses it all extremely well. Despite the known benefits of this digital ecology, those benefits can all too easily come at a true cost to everyone in terms of misdirected attention, spiritual isolation and ever-present distraction.

Reading the first part of the book didn't prepare me for the second part, which goes to form its bulk. Broadly, this opens with two chapters transitioning from the more sociological perspective taken in the first part to the thoroughly Christian theological perspective taken in the second. Song's general observation here is that although technologies like social media broadly provide us with a basic sense of 'connection' with others, often what we are truly seeking is instead a genuine communion with them - that is, being faithfully present in fellowship. In short, the ease and convenience of using social media have persuaded us to accept mere connection as a substitute for what we would prefer, which is communion with those whom we know. Song emphasises that, in a Christian context, communion means being in an abiding relationship with the Lord as well as with others in our various communities.

The remaining four chapters explore both the consequences of accepting mere connectedness over communion within our communities (such as reluctance towards physical engagement) as well as considerations of how to ameliorate those consequences through applying more traditional spiritual disciplines (such as prayer, lectio divina, intentional habits, etc.). I am particularly grateful here for Song's discussion of what author James Davison Hunter calls 'faithful presence' in Chapter 8. For me, this beautifully summed up what it means to be an intentional Christian.

Overall, this is a remarkable work, one that is immensely timely given its topic and will stay relevant for some time to come. If there is any criticism, the book could have been shorter and yet delivered its message just as powerfully. This book is relevant to church leaders, Christians studying/working in social sciences, theology and philosophy, together with those interested in the use and development of digital media.

Brian Monahan is a (retired) mathematician, computer scientist and software developer living near Bristol.