

Book Reviews

tems biology, performing measurements on whole systems instead of their isolated parts to replace it.

Section Four: Biological Information and Self-Organizational Complexity Theory

Noted self-organization theorist Stuart Kauffman boldly proposes that no law entails the detailed evolution of the biosphere and the end of a physics worldview. He uses self-organization as a kind of “natural magic.” The spontaneous assembly of molecules interacting with selection creates the biosphere. It seems to echo James Shapiro’s natural genetic engineering, a form of vitalism.

Finally, acknowledging the challenges posed by developmental biology and the evolution of complex systems, Weber advocates an emergentist position, in which both the upper and lower levels are with causality. He and Kauffman seek a possible fourth law of thermodynamics and see progress being made under the Darwinian Research Tradition. He seems to represent the paradigm of current thinking in meta-evolution that emphasizes the evolution of mechanisms that assist evolution.¹

This volume is a milestone in the scientific discussion of the origin and development of biological information not encumbered by a commitment to methodological naturalism (MN). Even though many Christians believe that a commitment to MN is not the same as a commitment toward philosophical naturalism, some argue that in the realm of origins science, philosophical commitment directly influences the direction of research.² Since MN is a *provisional* and not a *necessary* requirement for scientific research,³ this volume should serve as a stimulus for others who question the efficacy of neo-Darwinism to persist in their effort to find new solutions in the controversial origins of biological information.

Notes

¹L. Caporale, *Darwin in the Genome: Molecular Strategies in Biological Evolution* (Columbus, OH: McGraw-Hill, 2003).

²P. Pun, “Response to Professor Alvin Plantinga’s article on ‘When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible,’” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 21, no. 1 (1991): 46–54; N. Geisler and J. K. Anderson, *Origin Science: A Proposal for the Creation-Evolution Controversy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987).

³A. Plantinga, “Methodological Naturalism?, Part 1 and Part 2,” *Origins and Design* 18, no. 1 and no. 2 (1997), <http://www.arn.org/docs/odesign/od181/methnat181.htm>; <http://www.arn.org/docs/odesign/od182/methnat182.htm>.

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RELIGION & SCIENCE

IN PRAISE OF DARWIN: George Romanes and the Evolution of a Darwinian Believer by J. David Pleins. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. xviii + 294 pages, chart, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. Paperback; \$34.95. ISBN: 9781623565947.

Some books do not fit neatly into genre categories. J. David Pleins offers us an excellent example of a multidisciplinary work with *In Praise of Darwin*. It is part history, part literary critique, part philosophy, and part theology.

The book begins with a chapter exploring the personal history of George John Romanes. Romanes, a lesser-known figure amongst the giants of Victorian science, was the youngest of Darwin’s close friends, and the heir apparent to Darwin’s work at the time of his death. The opening chapter sketches Romanes’s personal struggle with faith and his relationship with Darwin. Stricken by grief and existential angst after the death of his mentor in 1882, Romanes crafted over the following years a 50-page *Memorial Poem*, wherein he struggles through the questions of life, death, love, and faith.

Pleins found the full version of this poem, long thought to be lost, and has published it here for the first time. The heart of *In Praise of Darwin* is a five-chapter, poem-by-poem exposition of the composite *Memorial Poem*. Pleins calls the whole piece “one of the most daring treatments of the relationship between faith and science to come to us from the nineteenth century” (p. 14). The savvy reader, after the opening chapter, will not proceed directly to chapter 2, but will flip to the book’s appendix and read the full *Memorial Poem* to experience the raw passion and power of the piece at once.

Chapters 2–5 each explore a different theme that groups the short poems of the larger work into sections. Chapter 2 explores the poems relating to Darwin’s funeral in Westminster Abbey, which serve to shed further glory on the already-immortal figure of Darwin. Chapter 3 contains poems of the passionate struggle with the finality of death, including what Pleins calls an “anti-sermon on greatness and grief” in which Romanes chastises those who extolled from pulpits Darwin’s great accomplishments without having known or loved the man behind the work. These reflections lead naturally into chapter 4 on the nature of fame. To pursue it is folly, yet—paradoxically—fame still stands as a sure marker of greatness.

Chapter 5 expounds upon the poems that emerge from Romanes's return to Down House a year after Darwin's death. Once again he struggles through his profound sense of loss and the emptiness of the world without his beloved mentor. Yet, he realizes that now he sees nature through Darwin's eyes, with evolutionary lenses. Thus Darwin lives on and nature is enlivened anew.

The reader, at this point, will emerge with a rich picture of the private sides of both Romanes and Darwin. Particularly evident is Romanes's passionate hero-worship of Darwin, and the momentous effect of his death. These are not philosophic treatises on the relationship of science and religion; they are a poignant reflection on the nature of grief, love, life, and death. Each short poem is divided from the others by Pleins's commentary. His exposition is interspersed with contextual details, short anecdotes, and letter excerpts that help illustrate what Romanes might have been alluding to in his poetic musings. Yet much of the commentary is simply breaking down the poem:

With "Reason" as the anchor, the unsettling "chaos" of line 2 is tamped down by the steadiness of "calmness" of line 3. The poet scatters throughout the quatrain a smattering of "s," "sh," "c," and "ck" sounds, like so many bricks strewn around a collapsed building. (pp. 171-72)

Chapters 6 and 7, however, contain perhaps the most interesting parts of the book for the scientifically minded reader. Chapter 6 contains the last part of the poem, in which Romanes reflects openly on the question of natural selection and the ubiquitous suffering in the evolutionary process. He anticipates, by more than a century, Holmes Rolston III's concept that nature's suffering is "cruciform" — that the great goods of evolution emerge directly out of the great harms, and that this emergence is analogous to the redemption found in the death and resurrection of Jesus. He ends with a vision of science and religion as bride and groom and recognizes that great mystery is involved in every part of the human search for truth.

Chapter 7 moves on from the *Memorial Poem* and traces Romanes's ongoing struggle between rationality and faith, both in the public sphere and in the private. Drawing from letters, poems, articles, and lectures, Pleins presents the most sensitive and nuanced account of Romanes's inner journey now in print.

If one small criticism is to be made, it is that where other historians have been too quick to dismiss Romanes's journey toward theism (such as Frank Turner and Joel Schwartz), Pleins presents sometimes too unproblematic a view of that journey. Pleins does

not make enough of Romanes's statements of disbelief, at least not in the main text. The nuance of the poet's doubt is left largely to those who delve into the detail of the endnotes and have access to compilations of Romanes's letters. And, occasionally, Pleins downplays the importance of the shocking nature of some of the doubts Romanes expresses in his *Memorial Poem*. For example, when Romanes claims "Love, thou art God, and God is love," and two poems later writes, "Almighty Death! ... love made not thee; thou madest Love," the implication that Romanes is saying that God is simply the creation of the human response to death is not perceived.

Some will want to read this book because of the poignant reflections on grief and loss. Some will be enriched by Romanes's vision of the compatibility of science and religion. Others will appreciate the light it sheds on Romanes's much-contested faith journey. Whatever else this book achieves, historians will now have to include the *Memorial Poem* as Romanes's fourth great theological work, alongside the other already-recognized three: *Christian Prayer and General Laws*, *A Candid Examination of Theism*, and *Thoughts on Religion*.

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THE BODY OF FAITH: A Biological History of Religion in America by Robert C. Fuller. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013. 231 + xiv pages. Hardcover; \$35.00. ISBN: 9780226025087.

The first blurb on the dust jacket asks: "What would a history of American religion look like if it were grounded ... in the genetics, hormones, sexual organs, bilateral structures, and sensorium of the human body? That is precisely what Robert C. Fuller gives us ..." (Jeffrey J. Kripal). The expectation was not fully met, and could not have been at this time, because we do not yet know enough. But Fuller has made a worthy attempt.

This volume is part of the Chicago History of American Religion series. I am not a historian, but even this biologist has heard of the work of the University of Chicago on the history of religion in the US.

Body of Faith is about Christianity, and religions related to Christianity, in the US. It barely mentions Canada and other parts of the New World, or Native American religions, in spite of the subtitle. With these limits, it does describe much of the important history of religion in America.