

Book Reviews

anecdotes that the results could be manipulated to prevent the biases, but she has no proof, yet this is the *raison d'être* for the book.

Algorithms of Oppression is a difficult read. The book is full of long, convoluted sentences, and often reads like a PhD dissertation (and a cursory inspection online of the author's PhD dissertation seems to indicate that most of the thoughts, if not the actual text, are borrowed from her dissertation). For example, one part of a paragraph reads as follows:

In this effort to try and make sense of how to think through the complexities of race and gender in the US, I resist the notion of essentializing the racial and gender binaries; however, I do acknowledge that the discursive existence of these categories, "Black" and "women/girls," is shaped in part by power relations in the United States that tend to essentialize and reify such categories. (p. 70)

Finally, the book, being essentially a polemic against Google, offers little in the way of solutions to the problem. We could protest against Google, and this might have an impact. Or we could take our business elsewhere. But, there are few alternative search engines to use that have the scope and depth of Google search. The author does highlight a few search engines designed to collect and curate references to more balanced and positive websites regarding African-American culture and racial issues. Yet, these search engines have little impact on the greater general public.

This book does offer important lessons: be cognizant of the issues, skeptical of search results, and thoughtful about the impact of search results. These are important lessons for users, including Christians, to remember. Google search is value-laden and Google is essentially a monopoly. Google generates revenue by promoting some companies' websites over others. Google's algorithm naturally promotes websites cross-referenced by other websites, and not all races, cultures, and subcultures are equally represented online.

As Christians, we should be informed about the factors that influence search results. Question what you find. Practice going deep into the results. Do not simply accept what you find in the first or second page. Scan lower-ordered results for alternative opinions and voices. Thoughtfully consider the impact the results may have on your decision making. Simply following the top results may lead you to have an incomplete understanding of important issues.

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THEOLOGY

EVOLUTION AND THE FALL by William T. Cavanaugh and James K. A. Smith, eds. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017. xxix + 231 pages. Paperback; \$26.00. ISBN: 9780802873798.

Books on the historical Adam and the Fall (into original sin) are multiplying in the current decade, particularly when considered against the backdrop of the ongoing dialogue of theology with the natural sciences. This book was sponsored by the Colossian Forum, an organization devoted to developing resources for churches to navigate cultural conflicts, funded by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and mediated through the BioLogos Foundation's Evolution and Christian Faith project. As such, the ten chapters gathered together in this volume developed from a three-year initiative that took up the following question:

If humanity emerged from nonhuman primates (as genetic, biological, and archaeological evidence seems to suggest), then what are the implications for Christian theology's traditional account of origins, including both the origin of humanity and the origin of sin? (p. viii)

The cumulative results are distinctive along the following lines when compared to the extant literature at this interdisciplinary intersection.

First, the conversation is ecumenically broad. The lead editors are a Roman Catholic systematician (Cavanaugh) and a Reformed charismatic and continental philosopher cum public intellectual (Smith), and contributors derive from confessions across the spectrum of Catholic-Anglican on the episcopal side to Wesleyan-Methodist on the more free church side, with others staked out all along the way in between. Although the various confessional identities are not conspicuous in every chapter, they are surely not absent, and, in a few cases, these are overtly factored into the analysis. The point is that the ecclesial dimensions of the discussion are neither muted nor marginalized, and when they are foregrounded, they provide windows into how to navigate the challenging questions at this interface in ways that involve, invite, and engage the richness and thickness of the church and its affirmations and even practices (see below) with the conversation.

Second, given the commitments of the BioLogos Foundation to foster Christian discussion about and openness to evolutionary understandings of the world and humanity's place in it, readers ought not to be surprised if the general scientific consensus struc-

tures the discussion (the first two chapters in Part I on human origins and the biological sciences both presume and also establish the basic contours of the debate within an evolutionary environment). Hence, a first consideration of the book gives the impression that the authors have by and large accepted the evolutionary model and therefore sought to fit their work as biblical scholars, theologians, and cultural critics into that theoretical frame. Yet the essayists are also (mostly) established scholars in their respective fields and, when read carefully, can also be seen as working to clarify what the real issues are from their respective disciplinary perspectives, and to show how scriptural and theological commitments may foreclose certain understandings of evolutionary science but not all. In other words, there are nuances introduced, certainly, about how to understand the fall into sin, but there are also explications of the scientific data as well as implications for ongoing and further scientific exploration informed by theological (broadly considered) perspectives.

Last but not least, consistent with the Colossian Forum's mission to engage the ecclesial world, the project was infused from the beginning with a kind of liturgical flavor creatively adapted for the group meetings, and attentive readers might be invited to think about how some of the chapters of the book have been shaped by these Christian practices, providing the matrix from which theological theory emerges. In fact, this is the key feature of this text and its contribution to the theology-and-science (or religions-and-science) literature: that it is possible to engage the philosophical, scientific, and theological issues, not by avoiding, but by precisely situating in the context of practicing the faith.

So, for instance, one of the chapters ponders how ascetic practices are conducive for the formation of a more distinctively Christian way of looking at the world, so that we are attentive to cosmic fallenness on the one hand, but also imbued with eschatological hope for creaturely flourishing on the other hand. Or think about Eucharistic participation as initiation into the deepest mysteries of the Christian faith, and how such might prompt a poetically and aesthetically shaped vision of reality that then orients us toward the dark chaos of the so-called "first" Adam as well as to the luminosity of the "second" one. What is made explicit in these two essays may be less prominent in the rest of the book, but there are many other instances in which confessional practices and resources can be recognized as in play once the reader is primed to their presuppositional role in this project. As the editors put it in their introductory chapter, a substantively Christian imagination is honed through and fueled by liturgical and other

forms of practices, so how might such practices be cultivated for perspective on these thorny questions of the present era? Put alternatively, specifically Christian thinking about science and faith, even about evolution vis-à-vis a fallen world, cannot but pass through the liturgical moments of faithful devotion.

Those for whom adjudication of the "evolution question" ought to be navigated empirically and scientifically may not appreciate the Colossian Forum's theological commitments and how such impinge on engaging even the scientific sides of such questions. On the theological side, the ecumenical breadth of the contributors ensures that however "the Fall" (in the book's title) is understood, such is irreducible to any dogmatic or confessional position, thus assuring that there is plenty of leeway for the various perspectives to comprehend such a fallenness within an evolutionary frame. It is perhaps also precisely in this vein that advocates of a more Augustinian or especially Calvinist notion of the Fall might object that theological sensibilities are hereby subordinated under currently popular scientific ideas that may turn out to be no more than fads in the long run. Or, of course, the scientific consensus could hold, in which case, the efforts to re-situate theological rethinking in relationship to such developments will continue to pay dividends to the faithful in that longer run.

Those looking for resources to inform faithful Christian engagement with the pressing questions posed by the evolutionary sciences in the contemporary context will come away with a broader sense for how matters are not merely theoretical but involve communities of faith. These can promote authentic Christian worship with and amidst, rather than silencing or purporting to definitively domesticate, such issues. *Evolution and the Fall* can be considered a success, although its use in ecclesial communities will need facilitators who can lay out the broader landscape and invite the group to consider that a variety of strategies are always needed to more adequately engage these complex matters.

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Letters

The Fine Tuning of Life

In his article titled "The Fine Tuning of the Universe: Evidence for the Existence of God?" in the September 2018 issue of *PSCF*, Walter Bradley describes the extraordinary precision of the foundations of our universe that makes life possible. The amazing facts