

## Book Reviews

view is “much criticized,” Benz provides only one reference, that of Albert Einstein. Statements such as “God cannot be experienced objectively” raise questions about the incarnation. One of the unique aspects of Christianity that apologists often cite is that Christianity and the Bible make historical claims. Jesus, the God-man, coequal with the Father, told his disciples to make physical observations to confirm his resurrection (Luke 24:39; John 20:27).

In sum, there is one major assumption that Benz makes as outlined in the preface to the English edition. This is that “God cannot be evidenced by scientific methods.” In defense of this claim, Benz uncritically cites Hume, including Hume’s thesis that miracles are impossible, without ever acknowledging the many Christian responses. Since Benz cites the resurrection as an example of his idea of creation, I wonder if he considers it to be a literal, physical, and observable miracle. Those who disagree with Benz’s assumption will remain unconvinced. But oddly enough, Benz says there is at least one condition in which he would recognize scientific evidence for God: if the laws of physics were one way on Earth, or in our region of the universe, while different elsewhere. I found this strange but keeping in line with his rejection of traditional Christian thought. Christianity has offered a framework in which science can flourish by understanding God as immutable and constant. The laws of nature are universal because they reflect God’s attributes. This offers a response to the problem of induction. But Benz rightly acknowledges induction as a piece of the scientific process. The conclusion we are left with seems to be that only a God whose laws are not universal would be detectable by science, which depends on the universality of natural laws!

Perhaps Benz avoided the dialogue and debate that might make his philosophy more robust because the book is intended for a popular audience. The science content is engaging and accessible. But I wonder if the average person looking for an accessible review of astrophysics wants a popular work on existentialism. The Christian wanting a perspective on faith and science will find the faith dimension sorely lacking.

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**ON FAITH AND SCIENCE** by Edward J. Larson and Michael Ruse. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017. 298 pages. Hardcover; \$30.00. ISBN: 9780300216172.

Two of the most distinguished, well-known historians and philosophers of science collaborate in another recounting of the historical encounter

between science and faith. Much has been written on this topic and one might wonder what new insights there could possibly be. Yet, these skilled authors shed more light on the interface between these two paradigms.

Ed Larson is professor of history and Hugh and Hazel Darling Chair in Law at Pepperdine University. His most acclaimed work is the book *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion*, for which he received the Pulitzer Prize for History in 1998. He has written nine other books, several of which deal with evolution and creation, and has made frequent appearances in public forums to discuss faith and science.

Michael Ruse is Lucyle T. Werkmeister Professor and director of the History and Philosophy of Science program at Florida State University. He taught at the University of Guelph in Ontario for 35 years and has been at Florida State since 2000. Though a self-described atheist not subscribing to Christian faith, Ruse argues that Christianity and evolution are compatible and he disagrees sharply with the harsh arguments of the so-called “new atheists.” He has published numerous books and articles and participated in countless public events to make his case.

Larson and Ruse alternate as lead authors of the nine chapters, blending the views from their expertise in history and philosophy, respectively. They do not claim to be breaking new ground or proposing major new insights. Rather, they want to show how the science-faith interface cannot be described in a straightforward set of models, such as the conflict model or the compatibility model. They

favor what might be called a “coexistence” approach, which views religion and science as two big messy and sometimes internally inconsistent categories of human perception and understanding that coexist in the same place and time, sometimes in a complementary or conflicting relationship but most often in a complex one, with both categories currently growing in influence and authority in many regions. (p. 12)

The conflict model exists and thrives as well as the complementary approach, with a wide range of complex interactions in between.

The first two chapters provide a high-level overview of the trajectory of science, particularly astronomy and physics, from ancient days until now. Ancient metaphors depicted the universe as an organism largely controlled by gods or vital forces. Then Galileo, Kepler, Newton, and others helped to transform the metaphor from that of an organism to that of a machine. The mechanistic universe took hold, incorporating even biology, thanks to Charles

Darwin, until the twentieth century revolutions of quantum mechanics and relativity shook the foundations. The story as told by these authors is clear and concise. They point out that the dominant players in the Scientific Revolution were Christians and their scientific work was done in the context of what they regarded to be a divinely created universe. The rise of mechanistic and reductionist views also gave room for agnostic and atheistic ideas to flourish, leading to a complex blend of theistic and nontheistic philosophies in science.

Chapter 3 considers the brain, the mind, and the soul. Ruse pens this chapter with a deft articulation of the challenge of understanding consciousness. He shows how advances in computer technology and in modern physics influenced our ideas of the mind and the brain. But in the end, he admits that we have made relatively little progress since Plato when it comes to understanding consciousness. It is no wonder that the “new mysterianism,” which claims that consciousness is beyond our comprehension, is an attractive position.

Larson continues with a historical account of geology and how it was primarily Christian geologists who blazed the path in discoveries of the age of the earth. Again, the controversies seldom pitted science against faith in a simple conflict or compatibility model.

Ruse goes on to provide an insightful account of the grand philosophical motivations that set the stage for Darwin’s theory of evolution. He points out that humans, particularly in the Christian and Judaic traditions, seek to answer three big questions:

1. Where did everything come from?
2. What kind of world do people live in?
3. Where do humans fit into the scheme of things?

Darwin’s ideas provided provocative, though tentative, answers to these questions. While there were similarities to the Judeo-Christian views held at that time, the differences were significant enough to generate a complex set of reactions. The problem of evil, cast in a prominent role in Darwin’s ideas, and the clash between Providence and progress seemed to dominate, as they do today.

When Larson traces the scientific ideas that Darwin presented, as well as their reception, he dismisses the broad scope of the biosphere to concentrate solely on the evolution of humanity. He points out that

the big issue has never been the theory of evolution in general, but applying it to humans. After all, many people care more about humans than they do about other animals. And who cares if plants evolved? But

many people find the idea of descending from monkeys or being related to apes as really quite degrading to their self-image. (p. 159)

Ultimately, the Christian understanding of human behavior in the context of a spiritual condition before God comes into conflict with the socio-philosophical extension of Darwinian ideas.

Today, Darwin’s sketchy social theories have matured by way of E. O. Wilson’s sociobiology and modern evolutionary psychology to become foundational for understanding in the social sciences. Through these, human behavior is reduced to the physical, and people become merely matter in motion with evolved self-consciousness. (pp. 183–84)

The last three chapters of the book are devoted to highly pertinent issues in today’s society. They explore sex and gender, from the mystery of why sexual reproduction exists in the first place to the role that our religious beliefs play in setting our cultural practices. They move on to examine the unsettling history of eugenics with the prospect for modified versions in our hopes for genetic engineering. Finally, they conclude with a chapter on living on the earth, devoted mainly to climate change and the close relationship between Christian stewardship and scientific ecological responsibility.

Few books manage to cover such a breadth of issues with the clarity that these authors do. They provide no easy answers but encourage readers to actively engage in discussion. They provide a very helpful bibliographic essay to guide further research.

The book concludes with the following sentences:

The inhabitants of this earth face serious physical and social issues. Standing still and doing nothing is not an option. Hard thinking about the science and technology combined with deep moral seriousness and the religious conviction of believers are absolute requirements. Together with the realization that others, no less learned and no less serious, will come from other directions. No one should feel threatened by differences, nor should anyone quake and yield because there are differences. But if humans are in this together, sympathy and understanding are essential. Then perhaps we can move forward together. (p. 276)

Larson and Ruse have provided us with a valuable resource that deserves a place in the library of anyone seeking to understand the history and philosophy of the relationship between science and faith.

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