June 1997 Book Reviews


In the last decade there has been a marked increase in the number of science-religion studies. These works have been addressed to audiences as diverse as the laity in particular denominations, religiously oriented academics, and the scientific community. Their goals include encouraging and instructing the faithful in proper interpretation, religious apologetics, and a less easily defined desire to examine relations, hold dialogue, examine implications, and construct world views. Most of these works have been individual contributions necessarily limited by the authors' understanding and idiosyncrasies of interpretation. As the science-religion field has broadened to include everything from eugenics to economics, it is increasingly difficult to put it all together. Studies such as Religion and Science which include specialists from various disciplines are much more effective in exploring options and raising interdisciplinary questions and the complications that lie beneath the surface of any issue if there is editorial effort toward overall coherence and unity.

Richardson and Wildman have drawn together a diverse set of contributors whose theological commitments and disciplinary specialties are wide ranging. They offer the well-worn building bridges metaphor to describe their task. The introductory examination of the motive for science-religion studies and the characterization of this new academic specialization is especially well done. The first section presents several papers on historical themes plus Holmes Rolson's prophetic note. Part two considers the comparative methodology of science and theology in a valuable four-participant, round-robin discussion. Part III offers six case studies illustrating various constructive links between theology and science. The rich relationship between cosmology and creation, chaos theory and divine action, quantum complementarity and Christology, molecular biology and human freedom, and social genetics and religious ethics are explored in a fashion that does not minimize differences nor discount the tentative nature of the discussion.

Space limitations allow only a limited sampling of the rich diversity of offerings. John Brooke's Enlightenment study notes the dangers of accepting traditional interpretations. I was impressed by his treatment of the role of science as an agent of secularism. Claude Welch casts a skeptical eye on contemporary attempts to derive scientific notions on origins or time and eternity from theology. Wesley J. Widman stresses the question of divine action as being in need of a critical breakthrough and emphasizes the educational implications of science-religion studies.

The value of unifying editorial hands is clear in this work. In spite of the diversity (and attendant disagreement) among the writers there is a clear line through the discussions, a recognition of limitations in understanding, and a welcome absence of the polemic often found in the field. I would have welcomed dialogue on the historical papers; things are no more settled in this field than with the themes debated later.

Readers of PSCF will be pleased that such familiar names as Nick Wolterstoff, Nancey Murphy, Chris Kaiser, the late Jim Neidhardt, John Polkinghorne, and Robert John Russell are among the many contributors.

Religion and Science is designed for interdisciplinary courses at the advanced undergraduate and graduate levels and is a valuable statement of the current discussion. One leaves this work with the impression that this is an exciting time for science-religion studies and that evangelicals need to hone their skills if they wish to participate.

Reviewed by J. W. Haas, Jr., Gordon College, Wenham, MA 01984.

From PSCF 50 (June 1997: 123.


This book aims to set aright society's current disenchantment with science. The first section, Science in History, is a collection of five seemingly unrelated chapters that respond to society's rebellion on the life of the scientist, on the education of the young, on pubic understanding of science generally, and on the legislation of science support (p. 3). The second section is a survey of Einstein's thought and, as the title suggests, contains an implicit call to be Learning from Einstein.

From Holton's perspective, the good old days of science have been in decline since the late 1940s. The first chapter, What Place for Science at the 'End of the Modern Era,' surveys this decline with a sampling of various attacks that have been waged on science over the last century. Just so that the reader knows who the heroes are in this story, the author opens the second chapter, on science's poor public image, by extolling the virtues of science:
Shreeve argues for a separate species designation for these hominids—a position not shared by all anthropologists. His passion (or distinct from all others. The thesis developed by the end of the book is that this is why we are here and Neanderthals are not.

By the conclusion of the first chapter, Shreeve has established his contention that the Neanderthal Enigma is as much a personal quest for meaning on the whys of Homo sapiens success as the only surviving hominid species today, for it is apparent that a number of potential outcomes are suggested by the evolutionary record. In answering these questions, Shreeve's strategy is to identify and explain the very essence of human-ness—those qualities that distinguish modern humans from ancestral forms and from our other cousins in the primate order.

The Neanderthal Enigma is an unusual title for an unusual book. Several chapters contain material that is seemingly unrelated to the author's stated purpose of examining the rightful place of science in our culture (p. ix). The impression is given, to this reviewer at least, that the author wanted to publish a book and then collated all his resources to secure enough material for a 200-page manuscript. Holmon admits as much in the acknowledgments section where he acknowledges Joan Laws and then himself for several lecture series and articles on which the book was based!

A lofty tone pervades this book that tends to obscure and detract from the author's main points. For example, "It was my luck to have known, and to have learned my trade under, one of the last physicist philosophers, P. W. Bridgman a Nobel Prize winner (1946)" (p. 75). Another minor frustration is the lack of references, particularly when referring to other authors (e.g., Toynbee, p. 44). However, the main criticism of this book is that there is no clear theme developed over the course of 200 or so pages. The perseverant reader can expect to glean a few pearls in an ocean of random thoughts.

 Reviewed by Fraser F. Fleming, Assistant Professor of Chemistry, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA 15282.

From PSCF 40 (June 1997): 123.


Shreeve, a contributing editor to Discover magazine, wrote fiction before pursuing a career in science writing. In The Neanderthal Enigma, he addresses some of the more profound and hotly debated questions concerning human origins. Shreeve tackles not only those questions pertaining to the whens and hows of human evolution. He also addresses the much more elusive mysteries surrounding the whys of Homo sapiens success as the only surviving hominid species today, for it is apparent that a number of potential outcomes are suggested by the evolutionary record. In answering these questions, Shreeve's strategy is to identify and explain the very essence of human-ness—those qualities that distinguish modern humans from ancestral forms and from our other cousins in the primate order.

The Neanderthal Enigma is impressive in the scope of its subject, in the sheer amount and variety of data the author incorporates into the narrative, and with respect to the originality and plausibility of the explanatory models he suggests. In reading this book, it becomes apparent that Shreeve's purpose is two-fold. The Neanderthal Enigma is as much a personal quest for meaning on the author's part as it is an opportunity to propose a new interpretation of the varied and often conflicting and confusing evidence pertaining to modern human origins. Most impressive of all is that Shreeve manages to synthesize such an array of archaeological, fossil, and genetic data into a coherent and highly absorbing account. It is rare enough for a science writer to effectively communicate the minutiae of an often arcane and esoteric field to a more general audience (comparisons to Carl Sagan or Stephen Jay Gould come to mind); but to do so in a manner that is illuminating and entertaining is rarer still.

By the conclusion of the first chapter, Shreeve has established his contention that Homo sapiens as a species is qualitatively distinct from all others. The thesis developed by the end of the book is that this is why we are here and Neanderthals are not. Shreeve argues for a separate species designation for these hominids a position not shared by all anthropologists. His passion (or...
obstruction as he puts it) regarding the subject of Neanderthals is obvious, however, and so he does not blithely dismiss these players from the evolutionary stage. Instead, he wades through the considerable array of science fact and fiction concerning Neanderthals and constructs an admirably thorough and balanced perspective on this group which, in the end, amounts to a sympathetic and somewhat poignant assessment as well.

Shreve's considerable talents as a story-teller are evident throughout. The text unfolds like a mystery or detective novel of the highest order. There are twists and turns woven into the skillfully crafted plot and the narrative propels the reader forward in anticipation of the next revelation. Shreve raises numerous hypothetical possibilities and then proceeds to dissect and refute them, often taking the reader quite by surprise in the process. The author's penchant for humor is also apparent. Some of the more amusing segments reveal the passions and loyalties of those men and women for whom these issues have deeply personal as well as professional significance. The issues and arguments surrounding modern human origins comprise one of the major arenas of debate in anthropology an arena not only of clashing ideologies, but of clashing reputations and egos as well.

In reviewing The Neanderthal Enigma, one must not disclose too much of its content; to do so would thwart the author's considerable accomplishment in crafting a mystery about a mystery, and ultimately undermine a large part of the pleasure in reading this book. The Neanderthal Enigma should prove absorbing and provocative reading for any person intrigued by the issues of modern human origins and the fate of the those who were almost, but not quite, us.

Reviewed by Janice D rodge, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University College of Cape Breton, Sydney, NS B1P 6L2, Canada.

From PSCF 49 (June 1997): 125.


Meilaender recently joined the faculty of Valparaiso University. He has published extensively in the field of theology and ethics. His recent publications include Bioethics: A Primer for Christians, Limits of Love: Some Theological Explorations, and Faith and Faithfulness: Basic Themes in Christian Ethics.

In this book, Meilaender addresses only a small range of topics within bioethics. He raises the question whether bioethics as a new discipline has developed in a way beneficial to the individual and society. He laments the increasing focus on public policy in bioethics which obscures the importance of beliefs about human nature and destiny. By drawing our attention to those beliefs, he shows us what is at stake in many of the debates about bioethics.

In chapter one, How Bioethics Lost the Soul: Questions of Method, he considers from where the direction for bioethics should come. Since medicine is a profession, it is important that its norms be generated from within the practice itself, not from applying more universal norms to it. But the development of bioethics in recent years has been moving away from this principle which was perceived as paternalistic, arrogant, and elitist. Meilaender criticizes the communitarian approach of Emanuel and the principlism approach of Beauchamp and Childress, which treat morality as rooted in general communities. These approaches fail to explore in detail the world view underpinning their principles of respect for autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, and justice. They also fail to provide wisdom and guidance about questions of human life and personhood. They only provide a minimal morality and consensus in a pluralistic society. Meilaender also criticizes the casuistic approach of Jonsen and Toulmin in abandoning principles and in settling for probabilistic opinions to gain public support.

In the second chapter, he explains How Bioethics Lost the Body: Personhood. Augustine first described the human being as animated earth. This idea can be extended to mean that the human body has a trajectory, and every person shall live out a history. Meilaender criticizes the recent development in bioethics which separates a person from the body and which considers only a body with cognitive ability as a true person. He concurs with Paul Ramsey that the human is an embodied soul or an ensouled body and that the soul is inseparable from the body until death. It is impossible to point to some moment in a person's history when he is no longer a person. He concludes that only God can see us as person and we should not truncate according to our own criteria of personhood or our own desire of autonomy.

Meilaender then discusses the beginning of a person in How Bioethics Lost the Body: Producing Children. He analyzes the arguments in John Robertson's Children of Choice about decisions to produce and finds them wanting. The arguments of Robertson have a very thin understanding of human life. The body is separated from the person, and it can do whatever it wants for fulfillment. However, a true understanding of procreation within a marriage bond, as a mystery, is good for the loving relationship between husband and wife and good for the dignity of a child.

In chapter four, Bioethics as Public Policy: A Case Study, Meilaender uses the Report of the Human Embryo Research Panel as an example of bioethics in search of a public policy. He decries the marginalization of religious and philosophical perspectives in the deliberation of this issue, and points out the impossibility of purely scientific or philosophically neutral consideration of this issue.

In the concluding chapter, The Issue That Will Not Die, Meilaender revisits the abortion issue and discusses the two arguments, personhood and bodily support, for the rights to choice. He points out that neither argument is sufficient, and they need mutual support. The basic issue is the concept of humanity.
This is a book which discusses bioethics from a traditional Judeo-Christian world view. It analyzes issues in depth and contrasts different approaches sharply. It is useful for reminding Christians that biblical thinking is different from the prevailing ideas. In a pluralistic society, Christians should seek out books like this which explain the outworking of biblical truth and try to reflect and integrate the faith into their daily lives.

Reviewed by T. Timothy Chen, National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, MD 20892.

From PSCF 49 (June 1997): 126.


Kellert has conducted over twenty years of research into the relationship between human values and the diversity of life on this planet. Following a brief introduction that outlines the parameters which he established for examining the differing values that people associate with nature, the extensive second section shows how various social and cultural factors can shape the content and expression of these values. The final section examines how the understanding of these values can be applied through government policies and management practices, to ensure a long term harmony between humankind and all other species.

While much of this book is descriptive in nature, there is also a prescriptive element. The great majority of Americans fail to appropriate the extent to which the intellectual quality, emotional value, and material well-being of their lives depend on an abundant, healthy, and diverse living world (p. 63). Many of the chapters consist of evidence taken from surveys that demonstrate how one or another factor lead to this conclusion. So, for example, we learn that most Americans possess a highly utilitarian perspective toward animals, while the young and better educated have a much broader appreciation of nature and wildlife. Similarly, people show a greater appreciation for animals that are large, intelligent, and express emotion while, by and large, they fail to see the importance of insects.

The diversity of perspectives towards nature is highlighted by comparing the attitudes of, for example, hunters with those of bird watchers. Similarly, a presentation of the attitude of Americans, Japanese, and Germans demonstrates the importance of national differences while material from Botswana is less convincing. Despite the variety and complexity of views and interests that different groups of people hold toward nature, Kellert advocates a more active role for government in guaranteeing a better future for humankind. He sees this taking place through a process of incremental change accompanied by increased education and the adoption of a more ethical attitude toward all forms of life.

Perhaps the greatest feature of this book is the author's prologue, where we gain an insight into the intense passion that Kellert has for his subject. It is in these few pages, and briefly in the final chapter of the book, that we are presented with a holistic view of nature as possessing an order and purpose that is as spiritual as it is intellectual or material. Unfortunately, I do not think that the rest of the book lives up to the author's expectations. Though this book is not intended for specialists, the scientific tone of the text is tedious and uninspired, and the figures and tables are more distracting than convincing. For those readers interested in learning about biodiversity and society's attitudes towards living things, I would recommend Kellert's more technical articles or works for a more general audience by others.

Reviewed by Robert A. Campbell, University College of Cape Breton, Sydney, NS B1P 6L2, Canada.

From PSCF 49 (June 1997): 127.


Older scientists are sometimes nostalgic for a time when science was generally considered good. Of course there were religious opposition to evolution, fringe adherents to astrology, and the Soviet eccentricities of Lysenkoism. Nuclear energy showed the dangers of science-based technology. But in American academia, even humanists, who did not much like science, thought that scientists learned something about reality. Those of the academic left were often the strongest supporters of free scientific investigation.

The subtitle of Higher Superstition, The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science, shows the change which has taken place. Ill-defined post-modernism movements such as deconstructionism, and radical aspects of women's and minority studies, multiculturalism, and environmentalism have developed an antipathy to science and try to discredit the belief that science can discover truths about the world which are not merely cultural constructs. Indictments of science sometimes assume extreme form.

The authors are scientists, Gross a biologist and director of the Center for Advanced Studies at the University of Virginia and Levitt a mathematician at Rutgers. Their response to the criticisms of science is civil but blunt and sometimes devastating. As they argue in their final chapter, Does it Matter? the stakes are high: the integrity of academic communities and the possibility of liberal education. It is necessary to call a spade a spade, not a geotome.

Higher Superstition can be read on two levels. Its introductory chapter attempts an analysis of causes for the academic left's negative attitudes toward science. Despite the progress toward a more just society which science, the Enlightenment, and political
liberalization once seemed to have produced, academic leftists found themselves, shortly after their heady days in the sixties, irrelevant to the real political process. It is not surprising, then, that they are in a sullen mood, a mood in which it seems that the most immediate solace comes from devising reasons for discounting and minimizing the proudest accomplishments of the smug society that surrounds them (p. 26). Science is one of the proudest accomplishments of our society. It can be discounted by claiming that it is a tool of oppression, a cultural construction which enables white males to retain power. Such assertions are made by many authors who, though isolated from the rest of the world, hold prestigious academic positions.

Gross and Levitt make it clear that they are not claiming to be professional historians. Their foray into this field is justified by the need for analysis by people who know something about science. Their study of the historical roots of leftist attitudes seems at least as competent as those of most of the literati, discussed later in the book, who feel competent to discuss science.

The detailed discussion of these criticisms suggests another way in which one can read this book simply as a source of horrible examples. The authors are fair in their citations and try to avoid quoting out of context those they criticize. But many scientists who read what is said about their field of competence will simply conclude that the critics are not competent to open their mouths about the subject. For example, the statement by literary scholar N. Katherine Hayles (discussed on p. 101) that by midcentury, special relativity, quantum mechanics, and quantum field theory had all been played out or had undergone substantial modification seems simply ludicrous to a theoretical physicist like me.

Of course, it is true that science has been dominated by white males, so that women and minorities have largely been excluded from positions of power. The way to remedy this situation is to open up the sciences to broader participation. As Gross and Levitt argue, just the opposite result will be achieved by the notion that each group has its own distinctive science. A young woman persuaded to study feminist science instead of the supposedly oppressive masculine variety is likely to be cut off from the possibility of making any genuine scientific contribution. The only people empowered by pseudoscience are pseudoscientists.

This is a valuable study by scientists who are sympathetic to traditional liberal concerns, but who are not willing to put up with intellectual sloppiness or dishonesty in dealing with them. I would recommend it to anyone who cares about the state of science in American society.

Reviewed by George L. Murphy, Pastor, St. Mark Lutheran Church, Tallmadge, OH 44278.

From PSCF 49 (June 1997): 130.
Freud argued that humans invented God because we need to believe in a big daddy in the sky. Evans points out that Freud was guilty of the genetic fallacy which is making a decision concerning the truth or falsity of a viewpoint based on its origins. Evans turns the argument around and argues that our psychological need for God may be an indicator that God is real, having placed this need for himself within human nature.

Evans’s main audience would probably be intellectuals who cannot believe in God because they think faith is irrational. One of his major concerns is to point out the cumulative effect of the various Christian arguments. Just as a jury cannot decide a case based on one piece of data but must consider the overall evidence, so Evans makes a similar plea in regard to the evidence pointing to God. While the unbeliever might dismiss a single piece of the evidence, the cumulative effect of all the evidence is compelling.

I highly recommend this book for ministers and Christian teachers to buy in quantity to give to struggling intellectuals. There are other similar books on the market, but I thought this one was exceptionally persuasive.

Reviewed by Richard M. Bowman, Co-founder, Disciple Heritage Fellowship, Lovington, IL 61937.

From PSCF 49 (June 1997): 134.


*Invitation* is designed to be a college and graduate level introductory text in the field of psychology of religion. Paloutzian, a professor in psychology at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, openly emphasizes two claims. First, psychological research will never explain away religion. Second, different approaches to studying religion should yield complementary insights. An unemphasized third claim underpins the book: scientific research is defined by procedure and measurement.

*Invitation* summarizes academic research for a wide array of topics, including religious development, conversion, and attitudes as well as religion’s relationship to health. For me, the best parts were descriptive, such as the chapter on religion and experience. Also interesting were survey results which seemed to defy logic. For example, when asked to agree or disagree with statements that would logically be regarded as demonstrating an attitude of using one’s religion versus living one’s religion, respondents often agreed with both. Of the few experiments reported, one amusingly explained the behavior of the priest and the Levite in the good Samaritan parable: They were in a hurry. Overall, *Invitation* succeeds as an introduction to the current state of professional study of the psychology of religion, a state which is strongly conditioned by historical development and may be limited by an unhealthy emphasis on method.

The revival of the field comes after a precocious beginning at the turn of this century. Henry James wrote the interpretive-analytic *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) and his pupil Edwin Starbuck attempted the first questionnaire-based survey on the psychology of conversion. A long, dry period followed, brought on by many factors, including psychologists’ antagonistic view of religion, religious professionals who wanted to cure sick souls, and the philosophy department which once housed the field. Freud and Jung are mentioned only in passing.

During the past 25 years, a methodology-based psychology of religion emerged as a field of interest as new applications of ideas emerged from general psychology. Today, the goal of this field is to provide the means whereby we can begin to understand the ‘personal universe’ just as physics allows us to understand something of the physical universe (p. 66). This is one of several instances where the text sounds woolly. Does behaviorism really equate reward and punishment training to cause and effect (p. 58)? Is the probabilistic nature of scientific statements (e.g., in geology) the same as in psychology (p. 62)? Of greater concern is the fuzzy interpretation of questionnaire results. Dimensions of variability are introduced, developed, then found inadequate. One gets the impression that the only theories allowed are ones that can be tested by those slippery questionnaires. For example, several logic-based (deductive) models of development are presented, then evaluated as inadequate. So, though *Invitation* is well written and well documented, the field itself does not inspire confidence.

My unease may be framed by the following analogy: Suppose we wanted to know why some canines escape through invisible electronic fences and others do not. Would we learn much by formulating theories based on questionnaires designed to reveal each dog’s needs for social interaction, security, exploration, etc.? Or would we learn more by pondering biological theories and predicting what psychologies might have been adaptive for the social and ecological niche in which dogs evolved?

This leads to the problem of defining science. *Invitation*, reflecting current research, emphasizes complementarity rather than reductionism. To me, reductionism is part of science. Returning to the analogy, the way a dog thinks is founded on ancestral adaptations to a particular social and ecological niche. Dogs think like (juvenile) wolves. If the study of human psychology is to be scientific, then it needs to integrate with the burgeoning fields of animal behavior, experimental cognitive psychology, and evolutionary biology. Consistency with other fields is the hallmark of the natural and, increasingly, the evolutionary sciences. Should it not also be for the social sciences?

Near the end, the author confesses: “One of the greatest challenges to any science is the generation of good theory. This is missing in the psychology of religion” (p. 269). This admission aptly summarizes the somewhat barren results of ritual emphasis on methodology at the expense of integration with the natural and evolutionary sciences. As a supplement to this text, a Christian student interested in the psychology of religion would benefit from reading *The Moral Animal* by Robert Wright, *Evolution of Desire* by David Buss and *The Adapted Mind* by John Tooby, Leda Cosmides, and Jeremy Barkow. These books suggest biological and

Many teachers have recognized the need for a collection of short biographical essays on Christians who contributed to science. This inexpensive book makes an important contribution to the task. Graves has embraced the widest possible chronology by drawing on individuals over a 1600 year period. These biographical sketches offer candid two to four page snapshots of real people virtues and faults packing a large amount of information in a short space, enough for the instructor to present a picture in the limited time available in the classroom.

The first section A New Look at the Universe: Philosophical Science Before 1500 offers eight precursors to modern science including Robert Grosseteste, John Philoponus, and Nicole Oresme. A preliminary statement deftly sketches the theological and philosophical context of the period and links it with the present. For Graves:

Today many despair of science because they feel it has no soul, looking instead to Eastern religions and to New Age mysticism to give it a religious identity. Others cling tenaciously to scientism, refusing to consider the reality or relevance of the Creator. Both groups would do well to recall that it was God-fearing men like those introduced on these pages, who brought into being today's scientific methodology (p.13).

Hugh of St. Victor (c. 1096-1141) was one of the first to advocate the use of the study of nature in order to understand scripture. He also emphasized the intrinsic value of physical labor an appropriate point for students.

The next section The Picture Turns Modern: Descriptive Science 1500-1830 cover a period when many of the major and minor players were Christians. Here we meet familiar figures such as Robert Boyle, Blaise Pascal, Johannes Kepler and Carolus Linnaeus and the less known Thomas Young, Augustin Catty, and Ewald George von Kleist. Naturalist John Ray's Wisdom of God in Creation fused science with faith in a way that characterized British science well into the Nineteenth century. It is instructive how geologist William Buckland modified his views of the Noahic flood as scientific data was obtained.

The final section Science Without Limits: Effectual Science After 1830 closes at 1950. It's nineteen biographies include the well-known Michael Faraday, Philip Gosse, Clerk Maxwell, and Gregor Mendel and lesser lights such as Matthew Maury and John Adams. Contributions from Americans such as George Carver, Asa Gray, and Edward Morley appear in this period to join their European counterparts. Graves treats evolution in irenic fashion in the context of an investigator's discipline and time period rather than arguing a particular position.

His choice of characters was reasonably even-handed in the light of the many candidates available. I would have added (say) William Harvey and a few more life scientists to provide a better balance with the physical sciences and mathematics. Sadly there are no woman listed. Although there were few active before the current era their inclusion would have offered role models for the women who are a large part of the potential audience for this work. The author's statement "today the needless rift between science and Christianity runs deep" (p. 43) does not stand up in the light of historical analysis and the participation of a large number of Christians in every level of the scientific enterprise.

Graves is concerned about the expression of Christian character in his actors as well as their professional contributions. They often faced opposition and in declining to press their claims lost priority of discovery and fame. Some were sons of clergyman and were hard pressed whether to serve God in the pulpit or the lab. All of us can profitably read this book. Teachers in Christian institutions at all levels have a valuable and low cost link with the past. A very complete bibliography proves sources of more information on the chosen forty eight and beyond. We look forward to a similar account covering the period after 1950.

Reviewed by J. W. Haas, Jr., Gordon College, Wenham, MA 01984.

From PSCF 49 (June 1997): 132.


Authors. Brian Clack. Science and religion are closely interconnected in the scientific study of religion, which can be traced back to seventeenth-century natural histories of religion. Natural historians attempted to provide naturalistic explanations for human behavior and culture, for domains such as religion, emotions, and morality. For example, Bernard de Fontenelleâ€™s De lâ€™Origine des Fables (1724) offered a causal account of belief in the supernatural. People often assert supernatural explanations when they lack an understanding of the natural causes underlying extraordinary events: â€œTo the extent that one is