

Book Reviews

PAUL HEYER, *Nature, human nature, and society: Marx, Darwin, biology, and the human sciences*, Westport, Conn., and London, Greenwood Press, 1982, 8vo, pp. xvi, 266, £23.95.

HOIMAR VON DITFURTH, *The origins of life. Evolution as creation*, translated by Peter Heinegg, London, Harper & Row, 1982, 8vo, pp. xv, 279, £9.50.

One way or another, Charles Darwin has always been linked with people he did not know or topics that he did his best to discount – often coupled by the flimsiest of excuses. Interest still runs high in the Darwin-Marx relationship, for example. Engels probably started it with his famous graveside peroration that “just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history”, and many similar connexions (usually less sweeping) have been drawn out since that time. Paul Heyer, however, has returned to the cemetery with Engels and in *Nature, human nature, and society* examines the parallels and interweaving of interests between the work of these two intellectual giants. Put rather bluntly, his thesis is that Darwin was concerned with social theory and Marx with the human sciences. A synoptic review of their work pinpoints areas in which Darwin and Marx held a common theory – primarily the idea that human behaviour and thence social activity was, at root, biologically determined or, in Heyer’s euphemism, was “natural”. A further section deals comparatively with Marx and Darwin on primitive society, race, and slavery. The final chapters present a slightly uneven plea for the relevance of biology to the social sciences. For many historians of science and medicine – and possibly many biologists and historians as well – there is little truly new here although it has been put together with great thought.

Juggling two apparently incompatible subjects is also Hoimar von Ditfurth’s theme in *The origins of life. Evolution as creation*. The origin of life, however, is not one of them, for this intractable problem remains firmly in the realms of the unknowable. Ditfurth is more concerned with balancing the claims and counter-claims of science and theology, evolution and creation, arguing at length that these are compatible. Few historians, particularly those familiar with the natural theology tradition, would disagree with him, and most of this book will seem uncannily like a twentieth-century re-run of (say) Asa Gray. Like Gray, Ditfurth is anxious to retain both faith and scientific objectivity by insisting that evolution is a process brought into being through some divine agency. Creation was not an *event*, Ditfurth argues, but a long-term process that is still in action: creation is the same as evolution. Humankind is thus progressing onwards and upwards, not to the angels as Disraeli may have quipped, but to a state of greater consciousness where God is transcendent. The author obviously means well and provides a sincere attempt to reconcile what he sees as conflicting positions; it will be interesting to see what the English-speaking world makes of his solution of a problem that now seems a bit out-of-the-way, in Great Britain at least. But for many readers Darwin’s theories will seem as uncomfortable here, married to creation, as they do linked to Marx.

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DYRE TROLLE, *The history of Caesarean section* (Acta Historica Scientiarum Naturalium et Medicinalium, vol. 33), Copenhagen, C. A. Reitzel, 1982, 8vo, pp. 109, illus., Dkr. 102.50 (paperback).

To be born by Caesarean section was a godly way to enter the world. In ancient times, it was a surprisingly common operation, given the state of the surgical art. This monograph explains these matters clearly, and the fame of the operation simply results from the need in early times to deliver an important child by desperate means. Future kings, emperors, and heirs were, like Macduff, untimely ripped from the womb of mothers in prolonged, failing or obstructed labour. Another use of the operation was when the mother had died in labour, and to satisfy Roman law, the child was delivered by section, if only to baptize the dead infant.

As was usual during most of recorded history, this major operation was left to itinerants and irregularly qualified persons. The settled surgeons of the towns avoided Caesarean section for the same reason as they avoided cutting for the stone and hernia surgery: operations with a high mortality dented one’s professional reputation. Ambroise Paré rejected the use of the operation,