

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,

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as did, he said, "the discreter sort of doctor". Smellie, the obstetrician, never carried out such a section.

This book continues the historical account of the operation into the early modern period and summarizes the changing indications for it and the lowering of mortality and morbidity in the Copenhagen hospitals. The book is handsomely printed, is remarkably well illustrated, and has fine bibliographies and indices. A curious method of folding the uncut pages requires major surgery to examine the contents, which, like Caesarean section, leaves some damage behind.

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JOACHIM GABKA and EKKEHARD VAUBEL, *Plastic surgery, past and present. The origin and history of modern lines of incision*, Basle, Karger, 1983, 4to, pp. viii, 179, illus., SFr.295.00.

Plastic surgeons claim that they are the last of the "general" surgeons, since the reconstructive techniques in which they are particularly skilled can be applied to any part of the body. Drs Gabka and Vaubel are determined that they shall develop a sense of modesty, by making it clear that much of today's practice is directly based on the techniques of earlier generations. It would have been better if they had kept to their subtitle, although they omit the work of Langer and others in the nineteenth century, which, however controversial, has an important part in the history of surgical incisions. They insist that their book is not intended as a history of plastic surgery, but the useful material on incisions is scattered in a great deal of potted general medical and surgical history. There are some nice photographs of some of the authors' successful operations.

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G. K. BEHLMER, *Child abuse and moral reform in England, 1870–1908*, Stanford, Calif. Stanford University Press, 1982, 8vo, pp. ix, 320, illus., \$30.00.

What to do about the "residuum" – the 10 per cent of the population living at or below the level of subsistence – was a constant preoccupation of middle-class reformers in late-Victorian and Edwardian England. Part of this concern was directed to the subject of child abuse and its connexion with alcoholism, prostitution, and "baby farming" or wet-nursing. The extent to which this issue touched the sentiments and beliefs of middle-class zealots can be gauged from this scholarly and concise history of the formation and development of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). Behlmer's study presents a clear picture of the motivation of key reformers and their legislative and investigative work on behalf of children at risk in the generation prior to the First World War.

The most striking finding of this research is that, while sharing many contemporary assumptions about the harsh domestic environment of the very poor, the NSPCC also recognized that child abuse was not solely a problem of the unskilled, but extended to families supported by men earning good wages, and occasionally to the homes of their social superiors. This hardly justifies Behlmer's claim that the NSPCC subscribed to a "theory of classless cruelty", but it does show that activists in this field did not simply parade middle-class prejudices in their thoughts on the aetiology of degradation. In this respect, they were certainly the forerunners of those in the 1950s who revived public interest in the "battered-child syndrome".

To suggest that well-paid men were capable of brutality is one thing; to argue that an improvement in living standards would not necessarily reduce child abuse is another, and more problematic claim, which Behlmer appears to support in this study. And yet an improvement in material conditions does seem to be the most likely explanation for the decline in prosecutions for child abuse (and interest in the question) after 1914. It was one of the ironies of the 1914–18 war that its waging unintentionally eliminated a substantial part of the "residuum", which even the interwar depression did not resurrect. In its place came "special areas" and "problem families", but the pre-war pattern of urban squalor, malnutrition, and crime did not survive past the Armistice. This is not to say that brutality of any sort is simply a reflection of economic