

which side of the Atlantic you live. Evolutionary theory on opposite sides has different emphases and sometimes different questions. Richards, from Chicago, tackles some issues that may be unfamiliar in the UK where ‘blind chance’ was disposed of years ago.

One of the last reputable UK zoologists to object to ‘blind chance’ (via support for Lamarck) was H. Graham Cannon, the Beyer Professor of Zoology in the University of Manchester. Cannon’s book *The Evolution of Living Things* (1958) is dedicated ‘To the memory of William Bateson’ (Bateson was one of those early twentieth-century writers who seized on mutations as offering an alternative to natural selection). The preface states, ‘If I can make it understood that evolution represents a continuous succession of amazingly efficient things that work, and not an incredible series of successful “treble chances”, then I shall feel that I have been justified’. ‘Treble chance’ refers to the UK’s football pools that were popular in the 1950s, long before the national lottery. Since then, books such as Richard Dawkins’s *Climbing Mount Improbable* (1996) have shown how apparently unlikely events can occur via a long series of small changes. Darwin does not need to be defended against charges of ‘blind chance’.

*Was Hitler a Darwinian* is an unusual book, worth reading for two reasons. First, its defence of ideas that ought to be attacked makes readers think about their established views, especially those from Europe; second, it contains some little-known additions to the history of evolutionary thinking, such as Chapter 8 on August Schleicher and the evolution of language. This essay shows how Haeckel acquired his early idea on evolution from Schleicher long before he heard of Darwin. Interest in language led to interest in culture. Embryology and biology came later. This helps to explain why Haeckel did not grasp natural selection. It is also another example of how ideas such as the so-called social Darwinism stem from writers other than Darwin, and not from people using his ideas. Hitler was not a Darwinist.

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CATHERINE MARSHALL, BERNARD LIGHTMAN and RICHARD ENGLAND (eds.), *The Papers of the Metaphysical Society, 1869–1880: A Critical Edition*. 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xxiv + 1,288. ISBN 978-0-19-964303-5. £320.00 (hardback).  
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The Metaphysical Society was a uniquely Victorian institution. It met every month during the Parliamentary season between 1869 and 1880 to debate the most pressing scientific and philosophical issues of the day, bringing together members of all religious sects and denominations, including those without any faith, to discuss such incendiary hot potatoes as the relation between morality and religious belief and the physiological reality of the Resurrection. Yet these predictably provocative discussions were conducted in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance and self-consciously old-fashioned civility that was rarely, if ever, contravened. It was, after all, in this urbane environment that, famously, Thomas Henry Huxley coined ‘agnosticism’ to differentiate his respectable unbelief from more contentious labels like atheism. The society’s diverse members, who as well as Huxley included Alfred Tennyson, William Gladstone, John Tyndall, J.J. Sylvester and Cardinal Manning, were likened by one of their fellows to a popular mid-nineteenth-century street show in Trafalgar Square, known as the Happy Family, in which cats, mice and birds were caged together without ever letting their predatory instincts get the better of them. After eleven years of its members keeping their claws concealed, the Metaphysical Society, as Huxley quipped, finally ‘died of too much love’ (p. 15). The brief blossoming of this fascinatingly flawed forum in the Victorian high noon is hardly unknown to historians of science, and many of its discussions, initially conducted in private, became the basis of celebrated contributions to periodicals such as the *Contemporary Review* and the *Nineteenth Century*, whose editor, James Knowles, was a founder member of the society. But many of the papers presented at its

monthly meetings were unsuitable for the press (most notably, Huxley's 1876 'The evidence of the miracle of the Resurrection' was thought too strong for the pages of the *Fortnightly Review*), and the full intellectual significance of the Metaphysical Society has often gone unrecognized.

This, in large part, has been due to the inaccessibility of the papers themselves, which, until now, have been available only in incomplete sets in Oxford and London. Scholars elsewhere have instead had to depend on Alan Willard Brown's admirable but now dated study *The Metaphysical Society: Victorian Minds in Crisis, 1869–1880* (1947), which, written during the Second World War, idealized the synthetic impulses of Victorian liberalism as a heroic contrast to mid-twentieth-century fascism. Brown had planned to also publish his own critical edition of the Metaphysical Society's papers, but, as the editors of the present edition have discovered, became waylaid, like so many other academics before and since, by administrative responsibilities. More recently, Bernard Lightman's efforts to produce an edition for Thoemmes Press were stymied by problems with permissions. As such, the present editors, including Lightman, are to be congratulated for having overcome the siren calls of administration and the quagmires of copyright to finally publish all ninety-five papers that were read at the Metaphysical Society's meetings, including four papers that were not printed for pre-circulation, as was the usual practice, and have instead had to be reconstructed from subsequently published incarnations.

Quite apart from the difficulties of actually getting the papers published, the scholarly apparatus included in this critical edition of *The Papers of the Metaphysical Society* is a magnificent achievement in its own right. Each paper begins with a headnote that provides a brief but incisive biography of its author, as well as an outline of the issues broached in the paper and how they develop or rebut the claims of previous contributors and pave the way for later ones. A particular boon to scholars is that, drawing on the newly rediscovered Minute Book of the society (held at Harvard), the editors are able to identify – for the very first time – exactly who attended which papers and discussions, and who acted as chairman. Interestingly, William Kingdon Clifford's notorious demolition of Christian morality in 'The ethics of belief' – which, following Knowles's dismissal as editor after he published it in the *Contemporary Review*, led indirectly to the foundation of the influential *Nineteenth Century* – was heard initially only by four members, an unusually small meeting of the society that, ironically, did not include Knowles. The scholarly apparatus allows the papers to be read as a sequence rather than as discrete contributions, showing how what might appear to be the distinctive outlooks of, say, the scientific naturalists Clifford, Huxley and Tyndall were in fact shaped and honed in dialogue with other thinkers from different traditions and with radically divergent perspectives. Reading the papers together also reveals that, alongside the self-consciously old-fashioned civility with which the debates over them were conducted, their topics often similarly harked back to the mid-nineteenth-century past, with references to Charles Darwin – who is mentioned in the papers on only five occasions – far surpassed by those to John Stuart Mill. It was Mill, of course, who identified the epistemological gulf between empiricism and intuitionism that, ultimately, provided the intellectual fault line which split the Metaphysical Society's rival camps asunder. Restrained by the quaint gentlemanly manners that the society's rules necessitated, empiricists and intuitionists remained convinced of their own respective positions and unable, or certainly unwilling, to take on board the arguments of their adversaries. It was at this stage that 'too much love', as Huxley noted, proved fatal to the society's original ambitions for intellectual adventure.

In the introduction the three editors contend that the 'Metaphysical Society and what it produced deserves to be given its rightful place in the Victorian history of ideas' (p. 25). Their critical edition of the society's papers fulfills that objective magnificently. It is a veritable treasure trove of nineteenth-century intellectual history that ought to be on the shelves of every serious research library.

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