

Frei's deep and abiding concern with the thought and sensibility of the secular age at its most powerful and appealing. The two previously published essays on H. R. Niebuhr (the longest in volume 2), written in the late 1950s and not Frei's clearest writing, are a goldmine of insights on Frei's reading of nineteenth-century Protestant liberalism and Barth, along with Niebuhr.

Finally, besides a bibliography of texts cited in each volume, volume I also provides a convenient chronological listing of each item in both volumes (vol. 1, pp. xix–xx). These volumes will be indispensable for further study of Frei and (more importantly, I think he would say) the issues he resolved and left unresolved.

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Roger Wagner and Andrew Briggs, *The Penultimate Curiosity: How Science Swims in the Slipstream of Ultimate Questions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. xx +468. \$25.

The sheer sweep of history that this book overviews is enough to take one's breath away. This beautifully illustrated book is no coffee table collection, but achieves something far more serious. And it does this by garnering encyclopedic details of historical events in the human historical record, going back even prior to the time when *Homo sapiens sapiens* roamed on this planet. One core argument in this book is that the scientific revolution happened in a heavily religious context. The reader has the impression that the authors in some way model the very quest that they are seeking, probing era after era of key events that led to particular scientific discoveries. The tidy categories of *religio* as inner devotion and *scientia* as intellectual enterprise are rather more complex than this.

The book begins with a breathtaking survey of palaeohistory, including a focus on cave art. The initial presupposition that Altamira paintings must have been done in the same century as the discoveries were made soon gave way to the realization that this work was far more ancient. The quest to know who we are as humans is illustrated through a combination of the history of archaeological studies, the history of early practices of participant observation among bush men and hunter gatherer societies, ethnobotany and what seemed to be distinctive burial practices. The authors probe further into the neuroscience of the mind and the cognitive science of religion in trying

to work out what it is about the human that is specifically distinct. Curiosity and capacity for integration come out high on the list.

The section on science that is specifically spurred on by religious imperatives is relatively short, but what is fascinating in this book is that the authors do not, as many others have done, limit their studies to Western science and Christian monotheism. Rather, they boldly explore where their own curiosity takes them, taking on board scientists who are not discussed as frequently in standard courses, such as Persian scientist Abu Rayhan al-Biruni and the Baghdad Aristotelians. The history of ideas that this book maps out will be useful for those approaching these topics for the first time, but the depth covered is also remarkable, considering the range of histories under view. A large section is devoted to the discussion of Galileo and his refutation of Aristotelian views on matter and motion. Yet the book also has room to discuss that great scholar of the Reformation, Martin Luther. By the end of the eighteenth century, science had begun to take over religion as a way of explaining the world. But the authors give no simple answer to the reasons for such a transition. By tracking down the historical details they are able to show clearly that even scientific genius is only possible as a result of the collective aspects of scientific research. It is, therefore, a very human exercise.

The last main chapter finishes the narrative in the nineteenth century. It is as if the authors ran out of steam at this point; and given the scale of history covered, perhaps it would be impertinent to ask for much more. The epilogue does attempt to map out the chief contours of the current debates in the field, highlighting the more recent struggles between science and religion that manage to achieve high publicity. The ethics of science practice raised in this context reflect implicit religious beliefs. Their narrative of conflict, subversion followed by resolution, includes an analysis of political issues at stake as well as historical questions. It is hardly surprising, perhaps, that the authors use examples from their own backyard, namely public debate on vivisection at Oxford. Given the range of religious and scientific traditions covered in this book, this ending was somewhat unsatisfying. Further, it showed overall a lack of real awareness of the analytical tools developed in the social science of science through science and technology studies. Philosophy is included here, but only as an aid for deeper historical analysis. In addition, in spite of the considerable achievement of this book, it is hard to imagine the kind of course where it could be used effectively. Perhaps the authors are not too bothered about the potential pedagogical range of this book. My own view is that it would work best among an educated laity who are curious for more knowledge about the relationship between science and religion. And if the authors have convinced the reader that such discussion

incites a curiosity beyond measure, they will have done a great service to the field.

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Paul M. Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 284. £65.

Blowers' aim is to reread the work of Maximus the Confessor with a deliberate appreciation for the 'complexities' of his theology and historical context (p. 5).

Chapter 1, on 'Maximus in His Historical Setting', journeys through the military, political and ecclesiastical dramas of Maximus' time and catalogues what we know of his life. Whilst offering little that is new, this historical summary's clarity, detail and orderliness will make it invaluable for new or seasoned Maximus students. Helpful in particular is Blowers' generous, non-partisan summary of the scholarly debate over Maximus' Constantinopolitan or Palestinian provenance. Along with most scholars today Blowers trusts the latter option, but he nonetheless offers new and serious evidence for the other side. Blowers' concluding chapter on Maximus' reception through the centuries will also be a valuable starting place for readers hoping to explore any aspect of Maximus' diverse legacy.

The body of the book has many virtues. Blowers offers exhaustive discussions of textbook themes – Maximus' view of the world; creation; salvation; the work of Christ; the church; human nature – some of which come from formerly unreached places of understanding; see, for example, the sections on the Confessor's writing style (pp. 64–73) and his conception of Adam as a 'proto-ascetic' (pp. 211–17). Achieving his goal of representing the 'complexity' of Maximus' thought, Blowers frees Maximus from some recurring scholarly characterisations: the 'anti-Origenist', the 'Alexandrian', the student of Gregory Nazianzen. These characterisations hold truth, but, Blowers points out, they limit our view, which he broadens with novel observations: Maximus is an Origenist in multiple respects; Maximus' story of creation and salvation mirrors Irenaeus' more than that of any Alexandrian thinker; Maximus everywhere draws not only from Gregory Nazianzen, but Gregory of Nyssa. These repositionings of the Confessor perhaps make up the book's clearest contribution, and leave plenty of interesting work for readers to continue themselves.

The book has a few downsides. Digesting the work sometimes requires a patience that new or casual readers of Maximus may not possess. From