

consequences – although these are not the author’s concern – and it will, it is to be hoped, ensure that the term ‘Cynic’ will be used with more precision than has often been the case.

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Nathan Lyons, *Signs in the Dust: A Theory of Natural Culture and Cultural Nature*

(Oxford: OUP, 2019), pp. xvi + 252. £64.00/\$99.00.

Matthew Fell

Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK (mwf28@cam.ac.uk)

Signs in the Dust, Nathan Lyons’ first monograph, offers an account of the semiotic tradition of the Christian West (represented by Aquinas, Cusa and Poinsoot) and brings it into dialogue with evolutionary science. The book’s theory is intended to address modern existential crises concerning the value of – and the relationship between – nature and culture. To do this, *Signs* develops an expansive theory of semiotics, constituted by Christian doctrine, that can insightfully account for the processes of information exchange that occur at every level of nature, suggesting that culture naturally arises within nature, expanding it and opening it to meaningful change.

Chapters 1 to 3 trace the semiotics of Poinsoot, Aquinas and Cusa, advocating them as forerunners to modern theorists like C. S. Peirce, and as alternative sources that can help resolve modern aporia. Poinsoot’s semiotics allow Lyons to account for the breadth of semiosis amongst creatures, including non-human animals. Aquinas’ contribution is his grounding of creaturely semiotics in an ontological relationship to the eternal semiosis that constitutes the triune life of God (in which the Father signifies himself in the Son, and the Spirit is the loving interpretation of that Sign). This allows Lyons to state that the triune life is cultural and therefore creation is primordially oriented toward culture. Finally, Lyons draws upon Cusa’s framing of creation as an artistic movement that participates in the divine culture through innovation and multiplicity, indicating the diachronic reach of semiosis. These chapters provide a fine example of how to closely read premodern thinkers and bring them into constructive dialogue with contemporary issues.

The remaining chapters draw upon these thinkers in order to consider the depths of semiosis in nature. Here the challenge of evolutionary science is seen as an invitation to rethink the ontological contours of creation. Lyons’ move is to show how his semiotic theory offers a way of understanding the exchanges of information that constitute all biological sensing, perceiving and responding, and going further, how semiosis occurs ‘virtually’ in the movements of energy that transpire in every physical and chemical change.

Not only does this account show the entire cosmos to be communicative, Lyons develops it with the help of the nineteenth-century French thinker Félix Ravaisson to show how exchanges of information/energy become customary, then habituated and

finally an evolved second nature. Evolutionary change is a culturing of nature so that that culture becomes a newly realised nature. This is a very elegant and novel account of evolution, which mitigates against reductionism.

Throughout *Signs*, Lyons dialogues with the ‘extended evolutionary synthesis’ (EES), a recent movement that is reframing the way biologists conceive of the evolutionary process. Advocates of the EES emphasise the agency of organisms in shaping the future evolutionary pathway of their species and as such EES resonates with the tradition that *Signs* reappropriates. The work is liberally seasoned with scientific research that grounds Lyons’ theory in empirical data and elicits wonder. Whilst Lyons acknowledges that the EES is fiercely debated, he stays clear of the arguments, stating that they have little bearing on his theory. This is naïve since if the EES is mistaken, and the orthodoxy of the gene-centred modern synthesis prevails, then Lyons’ theory has little purchase on reality. It would have been valuable for the book to have argued how its theory either further substantiates the EES or critically points to ways in which it might be strengthened.

Lyons demonstrates how theology can fruitfully respond and thrive in dialogue with contemporary science, serving other disciplines by opening broader vistas for thought. At the same time, *Signs* implicitly invites one to consider the rationality and beauty of Christian doctrines. The work also opens new avenue for theological enquiry, such as how this theory of natural culture might contribute to questions concerning nature and grace. In my judgement *Signs* does not adequately address the question of what it means for *Homo sapiens* to be the *imago Dei*, nor the issue of scripture’s claim that the human soul is a special creation. These questions are not unrelated to Lyons’ thesis and merit further reflection.

In the process of advancing his argument, Lyons makes several contributions to the innovative reformation of doctrines such as creation, the Trinity and the incarnation. These moments are highlights and mark out Lyons as an exciting theological voice. I would be happy to place *Signs* in the hands of a competent undergraduate looking for inspiration on how to do constructive theology in the twenty-first century.

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Michael W. Goheen, *The Church and its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology*

(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), pp. xv + 220. \$22.99.

Graham Adams

Luther King House, Manchester, UK (grahamadams@lkh.co.uk)

Throughout this book, Goheen faithfully conveys Newbigin’s compelling account of the holistic gospel, which simultaneously humbles and emboldens the church to witness to God’s transformative power in weakness. Goheen shows how Newbigin challenges both evangelical and ecumenical Christianity (where I position myself), urging reticent