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## REVIEW

**Steve Fuller, *Science* (Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2010), ISBN: 978-1844652044**

It is difficult to approach Steve Fuller's work without invoking the debate over the teaching of evolution versus "intelligent design" theory (ID). Notably, in the 2005 *Kitzmiller et al v. Dover* lawsuit, Fuller testified in favor of ID as a legitimate science and deserving of a place in public school curricula. Thus, Acumen Publishing's selection of Fuller to author a philosophical treatise on science seems perplexing, given his virulent opposition to what he deems as "institutional" science's authoritarian structure.<sup>1</sup>

Acumen's *Art of Living* series asks the broad question "How should we live?" and includes titles ranging from love and hope to money and distraction. The goal of the series is to bring philosophy, penned by notable authors, to the general public. Acumen's website ([www.acumenpublishing.co.uk](http://www.acumenpublishing.co.uk)) notes that authors "draw on their own personal reflections to write philosophy that seeks to enrich, stimulate, and challenge the reader's thoughts about their own life." The description of Fuller's *Science*, on the Acumen website as well as the back cover, showcases an examination of the conflation of science and faith. Science, the blurb relates, "is [only] now undergoing its own version of secularization" with the universal trust in "science priests" waning in favor of a movement (which Fuller terms "Protscience") of lay-scientists and alternative practitioners of medicine "claiming scientific authority as their own." The description sets the stage for a "challenging and provocative" book; one which hints at a fresh view of the structures of institutional science as seen through institutional faith.

The polemical tone of the opening sentences, however, somewhat belies the notion of, if you will, a fair and balanced examination of science and the underlying question of "How should we live [with science]?"

The pursuit of science is more often defended for what it makes possible than for what it actually does. In fact, what science actually does is readily seen as hard, boring, dangerous and often morally dubious. (5)

Chapter One ("The gospel according to Dr. Strangelove") reminds us that science is responsible for countless historical atrocities, in experimentation as well as in practice. It's difficult to argue with Fuller here, though the absence of science's positive aspects is conspicuous.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more complete discussion of the Dover case as well as Fuller's stated views on ID, see: Kevin Lambert, "Fuller's Folly, Kuhnian Paradigms, and Intelligent Design," *Social Studies of Science* 36, no. 6 (Dec. 2006): 835-842.

Fuller quickly asserts that he is not attempting to cast science in a negative light, but rather, he seeks to "redress any biases the reader might bring." (6) It is here we encounter the heart of Fuller's thesis, reinforced throughout the substantive body of *Science*: science is, in actuality, a faith based on the "familiar theologically inspired idea about the cognitively privileged place of humans in the cosmos" and moreover, science can specifically thank Abraham and the Abrahamic tradition for its existence at all. (6) The remainder of the opening chapter is spent situating scientific enquiry as merely the by-product of theological scaffolding, continually rotating examples from the Christian Bible while notably excluding examples from Judaism and Islam, both initially mentioned as part of the Abrahamic tradition and then discarded. Rather than foregrounding the promised questions in the book's description ("Can science give a sense of completeness to one's life? Can it account for the entirety of what it is to be human? What does our continuing belief in scientific progress say about us as a species?"), careful as well as casual readers alike will quickly grasp the elevation of institutional religion over science as morally and pragmatically superior.

The rhetorical structure of the complete text follows this pattern closely. Chapter Two ("Can science live with its past?") ties the roots of all modern knowledge to theology, while simultaneously excoriating figures who support a separation of scientific and theological systems. Fuller derides the notion that Abrahamic faiths can "coexist with the atheistic naturalism behind Darwin's theory of evolution." (30) Here, as with *Science's* numerous anti-Darwinian and pro-Newtonian binarizations, we are presented less with an examination of the intersections and interstices of faith and science and more with an outright attack on Darwinism as the generalized subtext of *all* science; in this way, readers are encouraged to believe that no other scientific models exist.

Chapter Three ("Styles of living scientifically: a tale of three nations") relates more explicitly science's point of origin as Christian, stating a belief that the mental discipline required to engage with a scientific life can be atheistic is fundamentally incorrect because "on the contrary, the earliest precedent for the austerity demanded of a life in science is Christian monasticism." (48) Totalizing, originary statements like this consistently problematize Fuller's conclusions, as does the insistence that the scientific "art of living" is actually a recapitulation of "stages in the history of Christianity." (61) If we are to assume that, for example, the aforementioned assertion is foundationally accurate, are we then to understand science and faith are inextricably tied as one, or might we see their structural similarities as disciplinary mechanisms, separate from ideological signification? The substantive structure of *Science* would have us believe only the former. This structural issue is perhaps most clear in Chapter Four ("We are all scientists now: the rise of Protoscience").

Fuller's concept of Protoscience is intriguing. Viewing science as an authoritarian gatekeeper of knowledge, he relates the Protestant movement to recover "the original biblical spirit behind centuries of encrusted tradition and ritual" to, (62) as he calls them, modern "cultural movements" like postmodernism and poststructuralism. (67) Chapter Four extols the virtues of the "public understanding of science" while again rejecting the "traditional" discursive formation of science. Unfortunately, Fuller's closed structure still requires the reader to accept a Christian framework in order to see Protoscience as an object of discourse. Fuller contends that authors such as Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard have subverted "authorized

readings of canonical texts—by, say, Plato, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger,” but only insofar as they have “taken the Bible’s place in higher education.” (67) Thus, we are again left with the understanding that science (in this case, the human sciences) is inseparable from Christian theology. In order to accept Fuller’s thesis, we *must* accept Christian history and dogma as the foundational and originary structure. In this way, any ground gained by questioning the basic structure of science is subsumed by a thinly veiled ID agenda.

A rather heavy-handed Christian foundationalism permeates the remainder of *Science*. Chapter Five (“The scientific ethic and the spirit of literalism”) begins with an account of a “scientific” reckoning (via the Bible) of the “exact date of creation,” (72) as well as incidentally containing another exhortation for public funding of intelligent design. (77) Fuller suggests that science is fundamentally weak because of the lack of a unifying theory:

Paleontology, ecology, genetics and molecular biology constitute more a *confederation* than a federal (let alone unitary) system of scientific governance. They are united only when under collective attack (e.g. by creationists or intelligent design proponents) but remain separate in peacetime. Thus, the response that a paleontologist would normally give to how findings in his field relate to those in molecular biology *vis-à-vis* evolution is likely to be rather different from the molecular biologist’s view of how his findings relate to those in paleontology. (80)

The subsequent paragraph advises intelligent design proponents to take on the branches of biological sciences separately and push specifically for absolutes like “(i) *when* did the various species come into being, and (ii) *by what means* did they come into being?” (81) Any differences between scientific methodology (testing) as a determinant as compared to Biblically based conclusions are dismissed. It seems dangerously oversimplified to suggest they are the same, yet this is the most prevalent theme in Fuller’s text.

The longest in the book, Chapter Six (“What has atheism—old or new—ever done for science?”), examines the distinction between atheism and what Fuller terms “Atheism.” In order to earn the capitalized signification and “go beyond the mere denial of certain religious authorities” (presumably a legitimizing action), Atheism “must be something more than a position that retains all the key metaphysical assumptions of monotheism.” (94) Perhaps above all, this chapter holds the most hope for what was promised in *Science*’s write-up. We find, however, only reinforcement of familiar arguments: *ad hominem* attacks on Darwin (100-102) and Richard Dawkins, (97) the binarization of good religion versus evil science, (108) and the conflation of the religious beliefs of historical individuals and their research and conclusions, (110) all leading to the “natural” conclusion that science “requires some personal engagement with the specifically cognitive demands of religion.”<sup>2</sup> (111; my emphasis) Perhaps the most problematical concept—as well as being foundational to Fuller’s totalizing argument—holds that “Atheism has not figured as a force in the history of science not because it has been

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<sup>2</sup> Fuller writes: “To be clear, by “the specifically cognitive demands of religion,” I mean three core metaphysical ideas about the nature of reality that inform the Abrahamic faiths, on which the New Atheists continue to trade: namely, that reality as a whole constitutes (i) a universe (not simply multiple realities) with (ii) ontological depth (not simply the sum of direct experience), all of which is (iii) potentially intelligible to the human mind, by virtue of our (divinely?) privileged place in reality.”

suppressed but because whenever it has been expressed, it has not specifically encouraged the pursuit of science." (111) At the risk of belabouring this point, again we encounter the notion that, in order to agree or disagree with Fuller's claims, his structural configurations (in this case, that Atheism is an organization on par with science or religion) must be adhered to.

Chapter Seven ("Science as an instrument of divine justice") places the root of theodicy in intelligent design, (113) in addition to asserting that "the laws of probability were originally presented as a divine instrument for harnessing the unruliness of matter in aid of intelligent design. Thus, the guiding dichotomy here was not *design versus not-design* but *good design versus bad design*." (114) This is an interesting claim, though one supported merely by a single reference to Reverend Thomas Bayes.<sup>3</sup> We find Biblical commentators inventing the scientific method, (126) a return to the wholly authoritarian structure of science, (129) and the claim that science "only" makes sense in light of Adam's relationship with God (131-132) in Chapter Eight ("Scientific progress as secular providence"). *Science* closes by asking if science can change the future without undoing the past, fearing an obsolescence of religion and nicely contextualizing the previous chapters. The final thoughts predictably encapsulate Fuller's argument, while at the same time commending the "sensibility" of faith:

There is something profoundly irrational in hitching one's fate to a theory in which all that is meaningful is ultimately based on chance-based processes, the plausibility of which depend on an ever-expanding and aging universe. In contrast, once an outer limit is placed on the age, size and shape of the universe, which in turn makes it easier to argue sensibly about how the world can be regarded as a just place, Atheism and maybe even agnosticism become less plausible as orientations to the world. (146)

In *Science*, Fuller discusses a wealth of interesting topics, though his points are grounded exclusively in a Christian, specifically Protestant, framework and lacking in supporting scholarship. All too often, the lack of evidential support, fundamentalist assertions, and steady stream of negativity toward (the perception of) "Darwinian" science and scientists, alternately with praise only for those with Christian leanings, fosters a disquieting air. Readers seeking the viewpoint and foundational arguments of the intelligent design movement will find useful information; those seeking a less polemical and antagonistic view of the interrelation of faith and science will likely be frustrated. It would seem that *Science*, while ostensibly aimed at carrying philosophy to the general public, has a quite highly specific agenda.

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<sup>3</sup> While there is a final chapter in *Science* called "Further Reading," there is only one citation in the entirety of the substantive text, appearing four pages before the close of the final chapter. Fuller represents that he has drawn from a wealth of materials, though the absence of direct linking evidence in the substantive text is troubling; we are to take his claims and their evidential support purely at his word, creating great difficulties in verification.

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