

## *Book Reviews*



Yiftach Fehige (ed.), *Science and Religion: East and West*. London: Routledge, 2016.  
viii + 232 pp. ISBN 9781138488670 (pbk.) ISBN 9781138961364 (hbk.).

*Science and Religion: East and West* is the result of a conference held at Manipal University, India, in 2011. It suffers from the usual flaws of conference volumes: the chapters are of uneven quality, the overall theme is not as systematically implemented as one might wish for, and — despite the editor's honest attempt in the introduction — the book has no overarching argument. As an edited volume, then, its value for historians of religion is limited.

It must be noted, though, that the book is not primarily directed at a religious studies audience. Its disciplinary home is in the so-called Science and Religion field, associated with journals such as *Zygon* and a flurry of handbooks and encyclopedias that have appeared over the past two decades. Theologians, philosophers, and historians of science dominate this field, with only occasional contributions by scholars of religion. This is reflected in this volume as well: of eleven contributors only one is a scholar of religion (the South Asianist C. Mackenzie Brown), while four are historians of science, three are philosophers, two are natural scientists, and one is a sociologist. The editor, Yiftach Fehige, is a philosopher of science specializing (as the vast majority of “science and religion” scholars do) in Christianity and science.

The goal of the volume is precisely to overcome this Christocentric bias. One may question whether the broad-brush and connotation-heavy binary of “East and West” is particularly well suited for the task. This question is not engaged in the volume; instead, it speaks casually of the “intrinsic” relationship of “modern science” with “religion” on the “intersection of the East and the West” (p. 2). In practice, “the East” for the most part means India (seven chapters are devoted to the Indian subcontinent), with excursions to Japan and Persia, and one chapter locating the East in Greek Orthodoxy.

Despite these problems, Fehige's introduction does a good job of situating the volume in the context of the science and religion field. Fehige comes

out strongly in defense of the position that this is a legitimate field in its own right (a disputed claim), producing a long list of historical reasons why it has emerged. Some interesting observations are brought to light here. For example, the dominance of (primarily Anglo-American) philosophers in shaping the field is less surprising than it might first appear (pp. 4–5): In contrast to the common stereotype that analytic philosophy is the most irreligious and secular of philosophical branches (a reputation stemming from its association over half a century ago with logical empiricism), Fehige points out that analytic philosophy of *religion* is, in fact, “the most prolific of *all philosophical disciplines*,” and that Oxford University Press publishes more titles in this area than in any other branches of philosophy (p. 4, my emphasis). Most of this work, he notes, is heavily biased by Christian, more particularly Protestant, theology. Since the analytic philosophers of religion have been such strong influences on the science and religion field, then, these biases have been transported into that field, creating obstacles for a global approach.

Fehige teases out a number of other methodological imperatives that have already developed or else are in the process of developing in the field. One must contextualize, avoid categories based on normative epistemology (e.g., the fact/value dichotomy, or the distinction between context of justification and context of discovery), resist and question the “conflict model” as well as the “integration model” of science and religion, and one should deconstruct the many deep-seated chauvinist attitudes and the dubious arguments resting on them (e.g., “science developed *because* of Christianity!”).

The first regular chapter in the book is a theoretical contribution by Varadaraja V. Raman, which breaks with most of the above-mentioned heuristics. In contrast to Fehige, Raman argues for a notion of “trans-cultural science” that embraces generalizations, willfully brackets (i.e., ignores) local contingencies, and defines both science and religion as essential human phenomena that can be traced back to time immemorial, connected to a sense of wonder and curiosity. In direct conflict with the careful historian of science, Raman distinguishes “ancient” from “modern” science in normative epistemological terms, showing little interest in historical categorizations or even chronology (“ancient” science is still with us, for example, in the shape of “[a]strology, numerology, alchemy and omen mongering” [p. 31]).

Despite its many flaws, one commendable outcome of Raman’s argument is its disentanglement of “science” and scientific conduct from the clutches of theological biases that see it as intrinsically linked to “European Christendom.” Indeed, one senses in Raman an emancipatory drive, wanting to set science free from the contaminations of religion and culture. Viewed in its abstracted