

olution or resorting to what Updike calls “verdict” and “directive.”

Prefacing the collection is Updike’s 1997 speech upon receiving the Champion Medal, awarded by the Catholic Book Club. After briefly questioning his eligibility, the author recalls his affiliation with three Protestant denominations (Lutheran, Congregational, and Episcopal) and the comfort and courage his Christian faith has given him: “For it tells us that truth is holy, and truth-telling a noble and useful profession; that the reality around us is created and worth celebrating; that men and women are radically imperfect and radically valuable.”

Updike notes that his first novel carried an epigraph from the Gospel of Luke, the second from Pascal, the third from Karl Barth, and the fifth from Paul Tillich. His character Harry Angstrom, he says, represents a Kierkegaardian figure: “man in a state of fear and trembling, separated from God, haunted by dread, twisted by the conflicting demands of his animal biology and human intelligence, of the social contract and the inner imperatives, condemned as if by otherworldly origins to perpetual restlessness.”

Updike, by his own admission, is not a “Christian writer.” What he has said of Harry Angstrom seems to apply to him as well: “Harry has no taste for the dark, tangled, visceral aspect of Christianity, the *going through* quality of it, the passage *into* death and suffering that redeems and inverts these things, like an umbrella blowing inside out.” And, while gratefully receiving the Champion Award, the novelist asked “to be absolved from any duty to provide orthodox morals and consolations in my fiction.”

In the thought-provoking essays that follow the Champion speech, scholars explore the influence on Updike of Pascal, Kierkegaard, Barth, and others, along with the impress of Updike’s early Lutheranism. Most memorable, on the literary side, is Charles Berryman’s essay “Faith or Fiction,” which argues that the dark, tragic visions of the great naysayers Melville and Hawthorne cut closer to the nerve of living faith than do the muted affirmations of Updike.

A minor complaint: This collection suffers from an excess of civility; more dissent would have been bracing. Critics as astute as Alfred Kazin have praised Updike’s dazzling prose

while questioning the depth of his work. The charge of “moral passivity” has been laid upon Updike’s writing more than once. His lavish depictions of sexual exploits—ostensibly a sort of hymning to the goodness of the created world—might also be viewed as evidence of the author’s captivity to the mores of contemporary secular culture. These essays duly note and answer such critical comments, but why not let a few of the critics speak for themselves? Surely the case made here for the authenticity of Updike’s religious search is strong enough, sufficiently supple and undoctinaire, to permit the unconvinced their full voice.

—A. G. MOJTABAI

*HUMAN NATURE
AFTER DARWIN:
A Philosophical Introduction.*

By Janet Radcliffe Richards.

Routledge. 336 pp. \$65

Richards, author of the much admired *The Skeptical Feminist* (1980), takes a philosophical approach to the perennial wars over Darwinism, with an emphasis on the bitter hostilities now being fought over sociobiology (and its equivalents under other, and safer, names, such as evolutionary psychology). The book, which grew out of her university teaching, uses modern Darwinism as a heuristic for identifying and defining the main subdisciplines of philosophy, and as object material for teaching the elementary operations of logic. The argument is supported, as in any good course of study, with practical exercises—and with answers thereto. These etudes are fascinating in their own right. Thus, what must have begun as a generous handout for a college-level course emerges as a lucid treatment of one of the most important intellectual (and political) conflicts of our time.

Human Nature after Darwin begins, as it should, with a short, reliable summary of the pertinent science. This is also the author’s opportunity to introduce some key concepts from the epistemology and philosophy of science. She follows with a taxonomy of influential commentary on Darwinian evolution and its implications, ranging from the radical, reductionist evolutionary claims, through the various categories of skepticism, and finally to the outright rejection of evolutionary biology, and hence of

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essentially all modern biology. She takes up the key arguments and reduces them to sets of clear statements that can be assessed in a straightforward manner. This is applied philosophy at its best.

Though Richards is sympathetic toward modern evolutionary science, she never proselytizes. The exposition identifies all weaknesses and ambiguities in the philosophical stands she favors as well as in those she rebuts. But her rebuttals are devastating. To begin with, she pays scrupulous attention to what the belligerents actually say, and the results sometimes surprise even the author. She writes, "If you follow up in detail any of the claims about what opponents [of one position in the controversy] are supposed to have said . . . you may be quite startled by the extent of misquoting, quoting out of context, looking for the worst

interpretation of what is said, and flagrant misrepresentation that goes on."

Largely, though, she concentrates on the logical validity of the complaints against Darwinism in general and sociobiology in particular. Not surprisingly, a central chapter addresses the common assertion that a radical Darwinian, materialist view of the world (and hence of human origins and behavior) requires the conclusion that there is no such thing as objective moral truth. The corollary is, of course, that some form of spirit or deity is needed if we are to have any moral universals at all. Richards's persuasive refutation of this claim should give comfort not only to biologists but to honest religionists as well. This book is a course that everyone with an opinion about Darwinism ought to take.

—PAUL R. GROSS

ARTS & LETTERS

LIBRARIES IN THE ANCIENT WORLD.

By Lionel Casson. Yale Univ. Press.
192 pp. \$22.95

The royal librarian to Ashurbanipal, the monarch who ruled Assyria from 668 to 627 B.C., apparently had a theft problem. A clay tablet dug up in Nineveh in the 1800s bears this inscription: "Your lordship is without equal, Ashur, King of the Gods! Whoever removes [the tablet] . . . may Ashur and Ninlil, angered and grim, cast him

down, erase his name, his seed, in the land."

Ashurbanipal maintained a library because he could read and write cuneiform, a rare skill among rulers of the ancient Near East. His collection has come down to us with such homely details of its bibliographic housekeeping still intact because it had the great good fortune of being engraved on clay tablets. These, as Casson points out in his short and elegant history of the early growth of libraries, are vastly more likely to survive than papyrus, because fire only makes them more durable: "When a conqueror set a Mesopotamian palace ablaze, he helped ensure the survival of any clay tablets in it."

This drama of preservation and destruction echoes through Casson's account of the gradual development of modern library practices. A classics professor emeritus at New York University and the author of many accessible accounts of ancient culture, Casson tracks that development through references in contemporary accounts, artistic depictions of people reading, and other such hints. The collections themselves, of course, have mostly vanished.

But the outlines of the story are clear. Near Eastern libraries such as Ashurbanipal's were the first to assign titles to their



Scholars read papyrus scrolls in a hall of the library in Alexandria, Egypt.