

Rod Kedward is a leading historian of the Resistance, and his book comes trailing almost worshipful reviews in Britain. A skillful chronicler of Dreyfus, Pétain, and de Gaulle, he is also marvelous on social change and intellectual life. He is splendid, too, on the selective and delayed French memory, and the ways that the collaborations of Vichy and the torture of Algeria have recently returned to haunt a chastened France. He presents a France torn and yet also defined by competing identities and differing narratives and realms of memory, an approach that leans on historian Pierre Nora's celebrated divisions among the traditions of the Republic, the Nation, and *les France*, the last an almost untranslatable notion of a single France composed of many different elements.

Kedward concludes that "the identity sought by France within Europe had long become inseparable from attitudes to the global market economy," which is to say that one way or another, France's future as a nation is increasingly being subordinated to the grander narratives of Europe and of globalization. But at least the soldiers finally seem to have faded from the picture, and President Jacques Chirac's recent decision to end conscription is taking the army from the central role in national life that it has enjoyed and endured since Napoleon.

—Martin Walker

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RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

## Seeing God's Hand in Evolution

THE MOST DANGEROUS place to be on any battlefield is smack in the middle, between the opposing forces. So one can only imagine the scorn likely to be heaped on this mild and eloquent book as it seeks to appeal to both sides in a war that seems endless. Francis S. Collins is a noted genetic scientist who chaired the Human Genome Project, and a self-described evangelical

Christian. His topic here is evolution, and he wants to reach out not only to the scientists who, as he does, embrace and study it, but also to the evangelicals who spurn it. If both sides dismiss him as insufficiently doctrinaire—he rebukes atheists as illogical while imploring his fellow Christians to reconsider their antievolution orthodoxies—then both will be the poorer for it.

Collins is hardly the only scientist with religious convictions. As he notes, some 40 percent of biologists, physicists, and mathematicians say that they believe "in a God who actively communicates with humankind and to whom one may pray in expectation of receiving an answer," a proportion that hasn't changed significantly over the years. But Collins is one of the few such scientists who habitually and publicly use the language of faith in talking about science. Appearing alongside President Clinton in 2000 to announce the first complete draft of the human genome—the DNA sequence in each of our cells that holds the building blocks of life—Collins took the podium to remark that he was awed to catch "the first glimpse of our own instruction book, previously known only to God." And he's one of the few in this polarized debate with the nerve to point to the elegance of the evolutionary mechanism, and the splendor of its results, as evidence of God's hand in the world.

This book does more than just review the voluminous evidence for evolution, though the author's intimate acquaintance with the genome makes him ideally situated to do so. Collins's aims are broader, more ambassadorial. Seeking to give nonreligious readers some sense of the religious mindset, he offers a narrative of his own conversion in young adulthood, quoting at length from the writings of C. S. Lewis and St. Augustine that influenced him. He challenges his fellow Christians to see the dangers posed to faith both by young earth creationism (the doctrine that all life was created in its current form several thousand years ago) and by intelligent design, which he calls a "God of the gaps" theology—one that's dependent for reverence on the puzzles in nature that we do not yet understand. And he

**THE LANGUAGE OF GOD:**

A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief.

By Francis S. Collins.  
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demonstrates that those puzzles aren't necessarily insoluble. For instance, intelligent design adherents often describe the mammalian eye and the bacterial flagellum as so "irreducibly complex" that they couldn't have resulted from evolution, but Collins offers clear and accessible explanations of how step-by-step evolution could indeed produce such structures.

To Collins, evolution and faith are altogether compatible—indeed, each lends depth to the other. Why, he asks, would studying the laws of nature and the intricate mechanisms of the universe do anything but increase one's wonder at creation? "Many believers in God have been drawn to young earth creationism because they see scientific advances as threatening to God. But does He really need defending here? Is not God the author of the laws of the universe? Is He not the greatest scientist? . . . Most important, is He honored or dishonored by those who would demand that His people ignore rigorous scientific conclusions about His creation?"

This approach, known as "theistic evolution," probably predominates among scientists of faith. Collins suggests, with sweet ingenuousness, that it might attract broader support if it had a catch-

ier name. He proposes "BioLogos," from the Greek *bios* (life) and *logos* (the word of God). Alas, this sounds less like a theology than a macrobiotic cereal. But never mind. The book itself has a credible shot at spreading the word about the little-appreciated middle ground—at least, that is, for those who have ears to hear.

—Amy E. Schwartz

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SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

## Spectral Mathematics

MOST OF US CAN HANDLE A little arithmetic. We can tot up grocery receipts, buy enough cookies for a children's birthday party, or estimate how much gas we'll need to reach our destination. Numbers that represent familiar things—dol-

lars, cookies, gallons of fuel—generally don't induce mental panic. But once we begin to think of those numbers as entities in their own right, obeying an abstract system of rules, we leave mere arithmetic behind and enter the realm of

**UNKNOWN QUANTITY:**  
A Real and Imaginary History of Algebra.

By John Derbyshire.  
Joseph Henry Press.  
374 pp. \$27.95

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