
Review

Reviewed Work(s): Darwinism and the Linguistic Image: Language, Race, and Natural Theology in the Nineteenth Century by Stephen G. Alter

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search on this subject might help us learn why science is often not enough to nourish scientifically based professions and why some modern physicians are struggling to find and cultivate a *humanistic* medical ideal in an increasingly bureaucratic and commercial medical environment.

This limitation aside, Bliss deserves our gratitude for giving us much that is new and interesting about Osler, both in fact and in interpretation. He clarifies, for example, Osler's stance on women in medicine; his engagement, or lack thereof, in politics; the texture of his family life; and the cut and thrust of his pathological and other scientific and clinical work. He is to be thanked, too, for providing Oslerian scholarship with an example of industry, insight, and stylistic grace in a book that should do much to bring Osler's life to public attention in an age that sorely needs its inspiration.

JOSEPH W. LELLA

Stephen G. Alter. *Darwinism and the Linguistic Image: Language, Race, and Natural Theology in the Nineteenth Century.* (New Studies in American Intellectual and Cultural History.) xvi + 193 pp., illus., figs., bibl., index. Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. \$39.

Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* was written in a vivid style and, as such, is frequently studied as much as literature as scientific text. Particularly notable is Darwin's use of analogy and metaphor. In the work under review, Stephen G. Alter focuses on two of Darwin's literary devices—the metaphor of the tree and the analogy between languages and species—and in so doing demonstrates how both the supporters and the opponents of transmutation used ideas and images from linguistics to present their case.

Central to this discussion is the analogy between the development of languages and that of species, which was readily accepted by such Victorian scientists and philosophers as William Whewell, Charles Lyell, and John F. W. Herschel. Prior to Darwin's publication, it was widely held that one could study the past development of languages by accepting Lyellian actualism and Herschel's *vera causae*. Thus, language development was seen as a slow process in which the present was indeed the key to the past, and researchers were able to test retrodictions clearly despite the presence of incomplete data. What was soon realized (by Darwin, among others) is that the widespread acceptance of such a naturalistic mechanism of language develop-

ment, allied with its clearly successful methodology, logically implied that people should accept a naturalistic mechanism of species formation.

As Alter documents, subsequent years—at least up until 1917—saw naturalists using this analogy for support. Interestingly, this was a two-way street. The philologist Max Müller would, in 1861, speak of a “science of language,” and the obvious similarities between the goals of the philologists and the naturalists allowed the former to use the analogy as a rhetorical tool while seeking to formalize their field. Even more explicit is the “networking” between both groups—specifically, the interactions between the naturalists T. H. Huxley and Ernst Haeckel and the philologists F. W. Farrar and August Schleicher. Schleicher in particular felt that biology and philology were undergoing a form of convergence, and he explicitly highlighted the similarity between linguistic and phylogenetic trees, a message that was not lost on Haeckel. In 1863 Schleicher would write *The Darwinian Theory and Linguistic Science*, which Haeckel would apparently send to Huxley with the hope of its being encountered by Darwin. Clearly, the two groups were engaged in a symbiotic relationship.

It is interesting to note that in more recent times, the philosopher of science Robert Pennock has used similar linguistic arguments in his work *Tower of Babel* (MIT, 1999). In this powerful and accessible critique of Intelligent Design Theory as espoused by such critics of evolutionary thought as the lawyer Phillip Johnson, Pennock shows how arguments used over 150 years ago still hold in illustrating the strong positive case for evolution by natural selection.

The above can only scratch the surface of this thought-provoking book—omitted, for example, is Alter's extended discussions of the influence of polygenism on the rejection of common linguistic descent. Alter has written a highly readable work that usefully demonstrates that the gap between the sciences and the humanities was not always as wide as some people wish it to be. He is to be congratulated for writing a book that will prove enlightening to historians of biology and linguistics alike; I highly recommend it to both groups, if only because (as Alter shows) intellectual cross-pollination has many advantages.

JOHN M. LYNCH

Joseph Melling; Bill Forsythe (Editors). *Insanity, Institutions, and Society, 1800–1914: A So-*