

sistent with a principle that the physical processes should enable the emergence of intelligent advanced life and appear surprisingly well set up for this to occur. Thirring takes pains to discuss the stability of the solar system. This cannot be taken for granted. Despite Laplace's conviction two centuries ago that he had proved that the planetary orbits are in the long term stable, it later became realised that his arguments lacked the necessary precision, and even now we cannot be completely certain of the situation. But yet the earth has survived for the necessary millions of years in a condition that has enabled life to evolve. Thirring argues that this is far from being an obvious expectation.

The style of the book is very idiosyncratic, but there is no sin in that. Much of the text has the flavour of after-dinner occasions in which a distinguished guest affably discourses on the subjects that have provided him with so much fascination during his long career. Thirring's enthusiasm is palpable even when the arguments become a little difficult. Some sections are written as conversations between various characters, such as between the planets Uranus and Neptune over the aberrant behaviour of their small companion, Pluto! I found Thirring's reminiscences and anecdotes about various well-known physicists – and some less well-known ones – very valuable to have.

Probably this does not represent a major new contribution to the science-religion debate, despite some very interestingly presented points of view. There are better books on the market if one is seeking an in-depth account of the Anthropic Principle as such. On the whole, I think the present book will appeal most to physically well-informed readers who are able to follow the mathematical aspects without difficulty; however any reader who is willing to skip over some of these will obtain new insights and an appreciation of the style of thinking of a researcher who holds a

high place in his field. It will certainly be a welcome addition to my own bookshelf.

Peter Bussey is Reader in Physics at the University of Glasgow.

Agneta Sutton

Christian Bioethics: A Guide for the Perplexed

London: T&T Clark, 2008. 180pp. pb.
£14.99. ISBN 978-0-567-03197-6

John Wyatt's book, *Matters of Life and Death*, has somewhat dominated the Christian bioethics book scene for a while now. My guess is it will continue to do so, but Agneta Sutton's new book, with its self explanatory title, is a very useful addition to this scene.

In some ways, Sutton's book can be seen as an updated version of Wyatt's – albeit shorter, and with more John Paul II and fewer biblical references – as it includes new legal and scientific developments, such as hybrids and cybrids. Although, of course, even some of these will be out of date by the time the current Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill completes all its stages through Parliament. Sutton states in the preface that her book is written as an introduction to the subject from a Christian standpoint and is for the informed general reader and university students (x). I would agree. It is not really pitched at the average person in the pew who is intrigued by the issues but at someone who already has a basic interest and who wants to know more facts, theology and the location of bioethics within its philosophical context.

Sutton takes bioethics in its widest sense. She covers not just the traditional medical ethics issues (beginning of life, abortion, euthanasia, genetics, eugenics, cloning, stem cells, hybrids and chimeras) but other disciplines too, such as animal welfare and ecology. However, she deliberately does not explore newer technologies such as nanotechnology, AI,

pharmacology etc, arguing that: *'The present is giving us enough pause for thought.'* (7)

Sutton's philosophical background provides a solid foundation for the book. Her central thesis is that there are two main schools of thinking in bioethics, or an 'old' and a 'new' medicine. The 'new' medicine, or the secular, utilitarian school, is exemplified by Peter Singer, who is quoted extensively by Sutton. The 'old' medicine is exemplified by the Hippocratic and Christian traditions, particularly the Roman Catholic position. Throughout the book Sutton pitches these two against each other. Whilst this divide is a useful means of introducing the broad philosophical context of Christian bioethics to readers, and there is obviously conflict and strong disagreement between these competing world-views, by necessity there is a tendency to oversimplify the context and overlook the variety of philosophical influences on bioethics today. Indeed, differences have existed for centuries in the various strands of the Christian church alone, filling many books, so it is always going to be hard to categorise 'the' Christian bioethics position, let alone 'the' secular position on controversial ethical dilemmas. Sutton's sympathies clearly lie within the traditional Hippocratic tradition, veering more to the Catholic than the evangelical side, with the result that some biblical doctrinal themes undergirding the Old and New Testament, that play a key role in Christian ethics (Creation, the Fall, Redemption and Consummation), are not as well covered. For this readers will have to go back to Wyatt, or try Hollinger (*Choosing the Good*) or Meilander instead.

Nevertheless, Sutton's continual engagement throughout the book with secular thinking is both informative and relevant (who amongst us isn't trying to engage on a daily basis with the world around?) and it is useful to have consistent, clear, well argued and persuasive lines of response. This book works for the

reader both as reference and to read straight through. It is well structured, with plenty of subdivisions, headings and good quotations, making it easy to dip in and out of it. If any further recommendation is needed, my review copy is already well thumbed and I have referenced it a number of times when needing a clear, simple explanation and analysis of a bioethics dilemma or written confirmation of a position I am already inclined towards.

Philippa Taylor is an Independent Consultant on Bioethics and Family issues and is currently studying for an MA in bioethics.

Graham Dunstan Martin

Does It Matter: The Unsustainable World of the Materialists

Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2005. 282pp.
pb. £20.00. ISBN 0-86315-533-2

As I write this review, Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* – a trumpeting of materialism – is at the top of the best-seller lists. Dawkins is operating outside his field of expertise and it shows in what Terry Eagleton aptly describes as a 'lunging, flailing, mispunching' book (*London Review of Books*, 19 October 2006). Dawkins constantly reiterates the importance of truth and evidence, but in the context of a belief that science is the only possible source of knowledge and hence of any evidence to be considered, or truth to be attained. Science is such an ever-present part of all our environments today that *scientism* is probably widespread. Even for Christians, it can be almost impossible to remove all its influences from our thinking. Time spent with Martin's lucid book can be the mental equivalent of the time spent at a top class health spa.

Martin ranges into areas as diverse as quantum physics, cosmology, artificial intelligence, brain science, biology, mysticism, theology and philosophy in order to