

Biology, Religion, and Philosophy

The intersection of biology and religion has spawned exciting new areas of academic research that raise issues central to understanding our own humanity and the living world. In this comprehensive and accessible survey, Michael L. Peterson and Dennis R. Venema explain the engagement between biology and religion on issues related to origins, evolution, design, suffering and evil, progress and purpose, love, humanity, morality, ecology, and the nature of religion itself. Does life have a chemical origin – or must there be a divine spark? How can religious claims about divine goodness be reconciled with widespread predation, suffering, and death in the animal kingdom? Peterson and Venema develop a philosophical discussion around such controversial questions. The book situates each topic in its historical, scientific, and theological context, making it the perfect introduction for upper level undergraduates, graduate students, scholars, and interested general readers.

MICHAEL L. PETERSON is Professor of Philosophy at Asbury Theological Seminary. He is author of numerous books, including *C. S. Lewis and the Christian Worldview* (2020) and *Reason and Religious Belief* (with William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger, 2012). He is coauthor, with Michael Ruse, of *Science*, *Evolution*, *and Religion*: *A Debate about Atheism and Theism* (2016).

DENNIS R. VENEMA is Professor of Biology at Trinity Western University, where he specializes in molecular biology and genetics. He is coauthor, with Scot McKnight, of *Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture after Genetic Science* (2017).



Cambridge Introductions to Philosophy and Biology

General editor

Michael Ruse, Florida State University

Other titles in the series

Derek Turner, Paleontology: A Philosophical Introduction
R. Paul Thompson, Agro-Technology: A Philosophical Introduction
Michael Ruse, The Philosophy of Human Evolution
Paul Griffiths and Karola Stotz, Genetics and Philosophy: An Introduction
Richard A. Richards, Biological Classification: A Philosophical Introduction
Lynn Hankinson Nelson, Biology and Feminism: A Philosophical Introduction



Biology, Religion, and Philosophy

An Introduction

MICHAEL L. PETERSON

Asbury Theological Seminary

DENNIS R. VENEMA

Trinity Western University





CAMBRIDGEUNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107031487

DOI: 10.1017/9781139381765

© Michael L. Peterson and Dennis R. Venema 2021

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2021

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Peterson, Michael L., 1950- author. | Venema, Dennis R., 1974- author.

Title: Biology, religion, and philosophy: an introduction / Michael Peterson, Dennis Venema.

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University

Press, 2021. | Series: Cambridge introductions to philosophy and biology | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Subjects: LCSH: Biology-Religious aspects.

Classification: LCC BL255 .P48 2021 (print) | LCC BL255 (ebook) | DDC 570.1–dc23

LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020039592

LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020039593

ISBN 978-1-107-03148-7 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-66784-6 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.



For our wonderful family members ...

Our wives

Rebecca Peterson and Valerie Venema

Second-generation Petersons and their wives

Aaron and Melissa Peterson

and

Adam and Claire Peterson

Second-generation Venemas

Elijah, Davin, and Preston

Third-generation Petersons

Mason, Daisy, Brody, Ruby, and James





Contents

Acknowleagments	page VIII
Introduction	1
PART I GENERAL ISSUES	5
1 Science, Biology, and Religion	7
2 The Origin and Nature of Life	32
3 The Question of Design in Living Systems	57
4 Biology and the Problem of Natural Evil	81
5 Progress, Purpose, and Providence	104
PART II RELIGION AND HUMAN BIOLOGY	131
6 Human Nature and Human Uniqueness	133
7 Love and Altruism in Biology and Religion	157
8 Biology, Ethics, and Debunking Arguments	184
9 Biological Accounts of Religion	205
10 Humanity, Religion, and the Environment	228
Glossary	253
Further Reading	259
Index	263

vii



Acknowledgments

We would like to thank a number of persons who helped greatly in the production of this book. Susan Olin proofread the original manuscript and offered insightful advice. Mara Eller proofread during later stages of production and provided suggestions for further improvement. Chris Holland and Robert Williams, our research assistants, worked diligently on many aspects of the book, from checking the accuracy of citations to providing commentary on readability.

We would also like to thank our editor, Hilary Gaskin, who gave guidance during the book's preparation. Perhaps less visible – but still so very important to the eventual appearance of the book – is our series editor, Michael Ruse. It was Michael who had the initial vision for this kind of project and enlisted us in the service of that cause.

Last, we thank our families – wives, children, and grandchildren – who were supportive and patient during our writing, and we dedicate the book to them.

viii