Thomas Fowler (1832-1904)

James E Crimmins
George Hamzo
FOX, WILLIAM JOHNSON (1766–1864)

Born on 3 March 1786 into a Calvinist family, W. J. Fox was educated at the independent academy at Horncastle, near Lincoln, and ordained a minister, serving an independent congregation in Fareham, Hampshire. After studying the divisive controversy over the Trinity, he converted to Unitarianism, which he announced in Letters to the Rev. John Pye Smith (1813)—containing his criticisms of the sacrificial view of the atonement as biblically and morally unsustainable. Fox’s reputation for controversy and skills as a preacher led to his succeeding William Vlidor in London’s Unitarian chapel in Parliament Court, Bishopsgate. In 1827, he became editor of the Monthly Repository, at that time a Unitarian magazine, which he subsequently purchased in 1831 and several times with Unitarianism, J. S. Mill was then an occasional contributor. Fox also wrote for the Westminster Review, one of a number of Unitarian contributors recruited by John Bowring, and used the platform to support the general reformative position of the philosophic radicals. His adoption of utilitarian ideas is evident in the sermons collected and published as Christian Morality (1833), in which, under the influence of William Paley, he offered a form of religious utilitarianism. Later, as an intermittent MP for Oldham, 1847–48, he spoke in support of religious liberty, popular education, the extension of the suffrage and women’s rights, and against the Corn Laws.

BIBLIOGRAPHY