

Darwin's God: Evolution and the Problem of Evil. Cornelius G. Hunter. 2001. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press. 192 p. Cloth, \$17.99; paper, \$12.99.

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The main thesis of this book is that Darwin's construction of the theory of natural selection, and (naturalistic) evolutionary theory in general, was primarily motivated by theological concerns rather than by scientific data. More specifically, evolution is a theodicy. The thesis is well supported by numerous quotations from past and present evolutionists, who often use theological arguments to justify their conclusions. The significance of theological concerns for Darwin's thinking has been described previously,¹ but Hunter expands the discussion and repeatedly identifies specific theological themes in the arguments of darwinists. The importance of Hunter's argument is summarized in the final line of the book:

We need to understand these things because, ultimately, evolution is not about the scientific details. Ultimately, evolution is about God (p 175).

According to Hunter, evolutionary theory is more a reaction against a certain view of creation than it is an exposition of science:

He [Darwin] was motivated toward evolution not by direct evidence in favor of his new theory but by problems with the common notion of divine creation (p 10).

In particular, evolution is a response to the problem of evil. Darwin was troubled by the evil he saw in nature. In an oft-quoted letter to Asa Gray, he wrote:

I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the [parasitic wasp] with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or the cat should play with mice (cited on p 140).

Darwin returned to this theme in his Autobiography:

It revolts our understanding to suppose that his [God's] benevolence is not unbounded, for what advantage can there be in the sufferings of millions of lower animals throughout almost endless time? (cited on p 18).

The book is divided into nine chapters. The first chapter serves as an introduction, in which the main thesis is defined. According to Hunter, evolution cannot be understood without considering its metaphysics:

If one already agrees with that metaphysic [God wouldn't do things that way], then evolution is compelling; otherwise the theory is a failure (p 11).

Chapters 2 through 4 consider some of the evidence often used to support the theory of evolution: homology, microevolution, and the fossil record. Each of these chapters ends with a section on metaphysical arguments, in which the role of negative theology (God wouldn't do things that way) is identified. For example, Darwin wrote in the *Origin*:

Why should similar bones have been created to form the wing and the leg of a bat, used as they are for such totally different purposes, namely flying and walking? (cited on p 46).

Here, Darwin tries to use a theological argument to support his own interpretation of the evidence.

Regarding microevolution (Chapter 3), Hunter writes:

When evolutionists use evidence against fixity of species to lend credence to evolution, they incorporate a particular metaphysical notion into a scientific theory. Evolution is supported by the premise that God must make species absolutely fixed — beaks must not get longer and coloration must not change. And since beaks do get longer and coloration does change, we know that God must not have created them (p 64).

The fossil record (Chapter 4) must be interpreted within an evolutionary framework because there is too much death and extinction to attribute to a Creator. As Kenneth Miller² puts it:

...[the designer] just can't get it right the first time. Nothing he designs is able to make it over the long term (cited on p 82).

The next two chapters outline the history of the influence of theological arguments on understanding of nature. In Chapter 6 the views of Joseph Le Conte, H.H. Lane, Arthur W. Lindsey, Sir Gavin de Beer, and Verne Grant are examined. Each is based on what they believe a Creator should have done. Chapter 7 discusses the status of miracles and the autonomy of nature, and the problem of evil, focusing on the

views of Hume and other Enlightenment philosophers. These issues played an important part in Darwin's philosophy of nature:

The more we know of the fixed laws of nature, the more incredible do miracles become (cited on p 120).

Chapter 8 discusses the metaphysical basis of evolution. The evolution theodicy distanced God from nature, thus requiring that nature be autonomous — governing itself without outside divine intervention. God was said to be too important to be directly involved with creation. As Robert Chambers put it:

How can we suppose an immediate exertion of this creative power at one time to produce the zoophytes, another time to add a few marine mollusks, another to bring in one or two crustacea, again to crustaceous fishes, again perfect fishes, and so on to the end. This would surely be to take a very mean view of the Creative Power (cited on p 147).

The poverty of this argument can be illustrated by considering the question: What would be the reaction of the scientific world towards any contemporary scientist who succeeded in producing “a few marine mollusks” from nonliving materials?

Hunter outlines the importance to evolutionary thinking of the restriction of God to secondary processes (“evolution's divine sanction”), and the need for science to have unanswered questions to study (“evolution's intellectual necessity”). Hunter points out the significant influence of gnostic thinking on modern scientists who propose a kind of dualistic distance between the creator and the creation. This gnostic dualism forms the basis of the evolution theodicy.

In the final chapter (Chapter 9), Hunter discusses two reactions to the evolution theodicy of distancing God from nature. One of these reactions is that God actually planned that nature would be autonomous, but He is not responsible for the details, such as natural evil, because He is too distant. This kind of view is commonly called “theistic evolution,” although it has a strong deistic flavor. A second reaction is process theology — God is too incompetent to be held responsible for the evil in nature. He learns and suffers with the creation, and some of the events that occur are such that we consider them to be evil. Both reactions are based on acceptance of the evolution theodicy: God and nature are insulated from each other.

Understanding the metaphysical basis of the evolution theodicy helps us understand both its weaknesses and the difficulty of engaging in a meaningful dialogue with its exponents:

Evolution's real problem is not its metaphysics but its denial of its metaphysics (p 159).

I highly recommend this book. It is readable, clearly written, and its propositions are well supported with examples and explanation. The book well illuminates the basis for the depth of feeling that underlies the conflict between creation and evolution. Anyone who wants to truly understand the issues should read it.

ENDNOTES

1. Gillespie NC. 1979. Charles Darwin and the problem of creation. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
2. Miller KR. 1999. Finding Darwin's God. NY: Cliff Street Books.