

DOES FREE WILL EXIST?

Agents Under Fire: Materialism and the Rationality of Science.
Angus Menuge. 2004. NY: Rowman and Littlefield. 220 p. Cloth, \$37.50.

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Agents Under Fire is a book written by a philosopher, for philosophers. The reading is heavy and dense, with highly intricate arguments. Angus Menuge, who teaches at Concordia University Wisconsin, clearly presupposes the reader has a basic knowledge of classic philosophers, especially Kant, Hume, and Plato. However, with the possible exception of Hume, Menuge usually gives just enough background for the reader lacking philosophical training to comprehend his arguments. The first seven chapters are dedicated to refuting evolutionary reductionism. The fourth chapter specifically defends Behe's biological irreducible complexity argument. The eighth and final chapter shifts in focus to discussing the relationship between religion and science.

Menuge seeks to refute naturalistic reductionism by exposing its inadequate understanding of human agency. His overall strategy is to extend Behe's argument of irreducible complexity into the psychological arena by arguing that human agency is an irreducibly complex phenomenon. He repeatedly asserts that Darwinians cannot adequately explain human agency within the confines of naturalistic reductionism. While doing this, Menuge is thorough almost to a fault, making accurate use of his diverse and copious sources, and is more than even handed in his treatment of opposing opinions. His argumentation is strong, yet not belittling.

Menuge borrows Daniel Dennet's metaphor of "Skyhooks and Cranes," to develop his initial argument against a naturalistic explanation of human agency. In Dennet's metaphor, cranes provide objective, empirically verifiable evidence for drawing conclusions, while skyhooks dangle without visible support. Thus, cranes are asserted to be scientific while skyhooks are not. Menuge, however, argues that skyhooks are not always negative. First, history shows they have helped advance true scientific knowledge. Second, some naturalistic cranes have become so convoluted in the attempt to avoid agency, that their explanatory power is inferior to some skyhooks. Finally, he convincingly shows that some proposed cranes are actually relocated skyhooks. Thus, he clearly shows

that reductionist scientists rely on unprovable assumptions which influence the outcome of their work.

Menuge seeks to refute what he calls “Strong Agent Reductionism” (SAR). SAR denies any real agency, admitting only an appearance of agency. He cogently shows that if SAR is true, then scientific inquiry is impossible, for that task is based on experiments and analysis which are carefully designed and controlled. Thus SAR is incoherent and self-defeating. Additionally, he defends Plantinga’s argument that we have no reason to trust our cognitive abilities if evolutionary reductionism is true.

Menuge also shows that reductionism sometimes presupposes what it denies. For example, reductionist scientists tend to deny the actual existence of a “self” such as is found in “folk psychology.” The self is said to be just a collection of genetic and memetic impulses. Menuge, however, shows that something must process and organize these impulses in order to have meaning. He proposes that the concept of the unified self better explains this phenomenon than evolutionary reductionism. He also charges reductionists with unwittingly “smuggling” both the concepts of agency and teleology into the picture, while trying to deny both.

A key component of Menuge’s argument is based on computer and information engineering. Computers can be programmed to “learn” by mathematical responses to stimuli — for example when a computer “learns” to play chess — without any inherent intelligence. Menuge asserts that this implies that the mechanistic-reaction model demonstrates a superior ability to adapt to stimuli in a survival enhancing way. But this enhanced survivability means that the reductionist view of nature cannot provide any adequate reason to explain why agency evolved, as it would not be needed for enhancing survival. Menuge further argues that it is impossible for non-agency to spawn agency, and that the only reasonable explanation of human agency is a prior agent who intended humans to have that capacity. Thus, a divine agent is the best explanation for human agency.

In the final chapter, Menuge discusses the relationship of Christianity to science. First, Menuge cogently argues that Darwinism is dogma, not science. He asserts that Darwinism is to science what medieval Scholasticism was to theology. He characterizes this Scholasticism as a “flawed attempt to extend knowledge by uncritically affirming the logical consequences of preconceived opinions” (p 194). Thus, “dogmatic Darwinism” is prone to uncritical deduction from accepted premises, making it susceptible to accepting frauds as facts, and to offer proofs of naturalistic

reductionism that have already been refuted. (He gives 10 examples based on Jonathan Wells' book, *Icons of Evolution*¹.) Thus, Darwinism is essentially a secular religion, which like the medieval church, persecutes "heretics" who disagree with its dogmas.

Menuge then critiques Michael Ruse's book, *Can A Darwinian Be A Christian*?² While applauding Ruse's boldness in addressing the topic, he finds Ruse's work wanting. Ruse's concept of God is essentially the God of eighteenth-century deism. Such a God is incompatible with the concept of God held by traditional Christianity. Thus, Menuge concludes that, "[Scientific] Reductionism is not only incompatible with Christianity, but it is false" (p 208).

Menuge then proposes that the current relation of Christianity to Science is understood in terms of non-competing authorities over different domains as suggested by Stephen Jay Gould's Non-Overlapping Magisteria (NOMA).³ He asserts that this approach has, by definition, made Christianity an inherently unequal, inferior partner in any discussion with science.⁴ Menuge proposes that since Darwinian reductionism is not scientific but dogmatic, Science needs to forsake its propensity to dogmatism, and should dialogue with Christianity as an equal.

How effective is Menuge at demonstrating the inadequacies of Darwinian reductionism? His arguments are both potent and devastating. Philosopher and arch-defender of Darwinian naturalism Michael Ruse declares in the "Forward" to this book that he fundamentally disagrees with Menuge and continues, "for that reason I urge you to read his book. Partly because I think he is wrong, and I want him refuted. Partly because he makes a good case, and he is worth refuting" (p xii). This is noteworthy validation of the weight of arguments in *Agents Under Fire*. The significance of Menuge's work may not be fully grasped until years from now.

ENDNOTES

1. Wells J. 2000. *Icons of evolution: science or myth? Why much of what we teach about evolution is wrong*. Washington, DC: Regnery.
2. Ruse M. 2001. *Can a Darwinian be a Christian? The relationship between science and religion*. NY: Cambridge University Press.
3. Gould SJ. 1999. *Rocks of ages: science and religion in the fullness of life*. NY: The Library of Contemporary Thought, Ballantine.
4. According to Tim Standish, Nancy Pearcey has recently made a similar point. See: Pearcey N. 2004. *Total truth: liberating Christianity from its cultural captivity*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.