

LITERATURE REVIEWS

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DARWIN RETRIED: AN APPEAL TO REASON. Norman MacBeth. 1971. Boston: Gambit, Inc. 178 p.

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After reading four paperbacks on the subject of evolution, Norman MacBeth, a retired lawyer, did further research into the accepted theories of evolution. He concentrated especially on the aspects answering the how and why of changes in the earth and in living species. His study discloses that classical Darwinism has been supplanted by neo-Darwinism. However, the public has not been informed of this departure.

To show that qualified biologists have rejected classical Darwinism as a valid tenet, MacBeth, utilizing his legal training, places Darwinism on trial, coolly focussing upon the glaring weaknesses within each component of the Darwinian theory. He concludes that its major premises do not contain adequate support. His witnesses against classical Darwinism are the present leading professional advocates of neo-Darwinism, primarily G. G. Simpson, Julian Huxley, and Ernst Mayr.

For example the shibboleth “the struggle for existence” ignores the other aspect of nature, cooperation and harmony; “natural selection” is derived from abstract theorizing, for this process is explained as happening beyond our power of observation (which is another way of saying that no proof exists); “survival of the fittest” has been discarded by biologists, while being used by the public; “adaptation” is challenged by too many exceptions; the micro changes found in the breeding pens are presumptuously extrapolated to validate the idea of macroevolution, which has supposedly occurred over a long period of time; and, finally, unexplained phenomena indicate that this earth’s history has not evolved in a steady, slow, tranquil, and progressive linear path but give evidence, instead, that at least one major catastrophe occurred involving upheaval of the earth and a total breakdown of the climate.

After examining Darwin’s major premises and also the modifications proposed by the synthetic theorists, MacBeth pronounces his judgment upon the court case: since all the basic components used to explain

evolution are sadly decayed, the new synthesis is also decayed and therefore invalid.

MacBeth feels no burden to suggest an alternative theory, neither does he revert back to fundamentalism: “The proponents of a theory, in science or elsewhere, are obligated to support every link in the chain of reasoning, whereas a critic or skeptic may peck at any aspect of the theory, testing it for flaws. He is not obligated to set up any theory of his own or to offer any alternative explanations. He can be purely negative if he so desires.”

As a result of this philosophy, MacBeth is liberated from the accusation of having an axe to grind or of debunking other theories to make room for his; his entire attention is focused on the weaknesses and unsolved problems, the contradictions and illogical contentions within Darwinian philosophy, and especially the tendency to employ tautology (circular reasoning) as a method of arriving at truths. In other words, Darwinism is tried on its own merits, against itself.

While showing the flaws of classical Darwinism, MacBeth also manages to level a strong indictment against the newer synthetic theory, supposedly the perfect answer or solution to all questions regarding the how and why of changes. In his easily readable style, with occasional flashes of dry humor, MacBeth calmly smashes the synthetic explanations for evolution. Extinction, for example, cannot be explained, for to say “He stopped breathing” does not give the real cause, the underlying factor for death; rather, it is a statement of fact, not an explanation of the fact. To say that “...‘ultimately their extinction is due to an inability of their genotype to respond to new selection pressures’” is impressive but entirely meaningless, “because the same could be said of every extinct species and of every dead person, including Julius Caesar and Abraham Lincoln”!

Then MacBeth assumes the role of a solicitous advisor, appealing to modern biologists to go beyond the hypotheses worked out by Darwin, whom he qualifies as a lone amateur with very little equipment. These biologists should admit that unresolved problems remain:

It is my conviction, after examining the literature, that intelligence and integrity are still very much alive among the biologists. In their own circles they speak candidly and express their misgivings freely. Only when they popularize do they become pompous and pontifical. Perhaps they are reluctant to confess error. Perhaps they fear that the fundamentalists will gloat over their discomfiture. These would be human tailings, but just the sort that one must resolutely put aside. I urge the Darwinists to take the public into their confidence by a full

disclosure. They are not expected to be infallible, confession is good for the soul, and candor is always highly valued.

MacBeth does not sound entirely optimistic, for he observes that Darwinism has become just as much an emotional religion as has creationism, for it is carefully cherished and defended by those professionals who are reluctant to yield up their antiquated beliefs in the face of opposition.

As he crushes the evolutionary theories, we are tempted to hail MacBeth as our advocate, only to remember that he also appears to reject creationism as well. But it is encouraging that an apparently impartial examination of classical-and-neo-Darwinism finds it to be definitely non-factual.