

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

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### GIVING AWAY THE STORE AGAIN?

**The Evolution-Creation Struggle.** Michael Ruse. 2005. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 327 p. Cloth, \$25.95.

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Michael Ruse is a familiar name to those involved in the controversy surrounding evolution. *The Evolution-Creation Struggle* is his latest in a long line of highly-respected works concerning the origins debate. This philosopher of science is possibly best known for his testimony in the infamous 1981 Arkansas trial, which concluded that creationism falls short of science. In this book, Ruse argues forcefully that “in both evolution and creation we have rival religious responses to a crisis of faith” (p 3). Both evolutionism and creationism are, ultimately, separate religions.

Ruse prefaces his book with a brief discussion of the debate, explaining that it exists for reasons larger than the simple assertion that creationists fail to grasp the science. Setting the context, he gives a brief history of Christianity, outlining the Reformation and Enlightenment, and discusses Descartes, Hobbes, Paley, and others. He introduces the idea of progress, which “was at sharp odds with any ideology, Christian or otherwise, that denied human autonomy and our ability to work things for the better” (p 24). Progress as a philosophical drive is a recurrent theme throughout the book. He notes that, for the French philosophers, “the very point of progress was to oppose Christianity directly” (p 24).

Exhibiting an astonishing command of the history of science, Ruse brings to the forefront the idea that, rather than pure science, philosophical and religious motivations drive both sides. By the time Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, Ruse argues, “Evolution had been in the air for a long time and many people had been looking for a reason to believe it” (p 85).

Ruse answers a question many have asked: Was Darwin a Christian? He explains that Darwin's views evolved from Christianity to Deism to, by the time of his death, agnosticism. He also provides details on the religious beliefs of other important players, including John Henry Newman and Richard Owen. These details bolster his case that evolution was fueled by predetermined philosophical views.

Describing the work of evolutionists in the 1940s and beyond, Ruse explains that, although they were committed to rigorous research, they were also committed to progress: "Evolution was their profession. Evolutionism was their obsession" (p 187). They "would publish two sets of books. One professional, with no hint of progress. One popular, with much talk of progress. Two messages, for two audiences" (p 187).

Ruse also discusses Spencer's "social Darwinism," the growth and decline of progress throughout the centuries, and the various trends in Christianity (fundamentalism, pre-millennialism, post-millennialism, theistic evolutionism, etc.). Periodically, Ruse reminds the reader of historical contexts: the French revolution, World Wars I & II, the Cold War, and Vietnam.

The reader is further treated to a refreshing version of the Scopes Monkey Trial, which differs markedly from the standard Hollywood-based interpretation. *Inherit the Wind*, a film derided by many as a gross distortion, "took many liberties in telling the tale" (p 166). Ruse points out that William Jennings Bryan "was made to look like a buffoon when asked [about] the actual length of the days of creation. In true life Bryan always believed that the days were periods of time" (p 167).

An exciting history is given of how Intelligent Design (ID) has developed, from Phillip Johnson's *Darwin on Trial* through Michael Behe and irreducible complexity up to William Dembski's explanatory design filter. His explanation of ID is surprisingly fair (p 251-255) acknowledging that "it would be a mistake simply to categorize the intelligent design movement as creationist without qualification" (p 256), and explaining that many design theorists accept various aspects of evolution. He does point out, however, "one has good reason to see the group as part of this ongoing tradition" (p 261). Fair enough.

Ruse's summary of the current status of evolutionary theory however, leaves a lot to be desired. According to Ruse, "fossil discoveries of the past half century have been absolutely stupendous" (p 198), providing new evidence for evolution. But he admits the origin of life "has always been a major headache for evolutionists" (p 200), and claims that the chief obstacle is that origin of life researchers suffer from an abundance

of ideas. Ultimately, he acknowledges that “large gaps in our knowledge of evolutionary mechanisms...persist” (p 200-201).

One fascinating aspect of this book is the parallels readers can draw (although Ruse does not) between evolution’s fight for recognition as a “professional science” and the work currently being done to advance ID. Until the time of Huxley and Darwin, according to Ruse, evolution was merely a pseudoscience. It wasn’t until the work of Ronald Fisher and Sewall Wright decades later that a “professional science” of evolution developed. How far along the intelligent design community is in this process remains to be seen.

What makes this book appealing is its warm, good-natured tone. Ruse’s dry wit more than compensates for occasional tiresome poetic interludes. Discussing the Catholic Church’s response to evolution, for example, he explains its reluctance to join the fray: “Their fingers had been burned two centuries before, over that mess with Galileo, and they were glad to let the Protestants run with this one” (p 142). Other one-liners include: “God is notorious for moving in mysterious ways” (p 163) and his description of Robert Chambers’ *The Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* as “the Big Mac of popular science — very tasty, very filling, very accessible and (in the opinion of the authorities) of very dubious value to one’s health” (p 48).

Concluding with a call to arms, Ruse laments that while the anti-evolution community is able to work together despite religious differences, evolutionists are bitterly divided between theistic evolutionists and the Richard Dawkins of the world, who “are but the tip of a very chilling iceberg” (p 273). He exhorts his colleagues to go beyond bashing creationism and intelligent design to discovering “why others have (often) legitimate concerns...a more informed and self-aware approach to the issues” (p 288) in this controversy that simply won’t go away.