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**Cornelius G. Hunter. *Darwin's God: Evolution and the Problem of Evil*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001. Pp. 192. \$17.99 (Cloth)**

[1] This book tackles one of the most important perennial topics in theology - the problem of evil and suffering - placing its consideration of this topic in the context of one of the most publicly engaging aspects of theology today - the dialogue between science and theology. With this topic and this context, the book might have made a real contribution to the relationship of religion and society, especially at a time when various states are considering the relation between religion and science in public school curricula. Unfortunately, the author does not have enough background in the philosophy of science or in theology to make his legitimate criticisms of "Darwin's God" clear without simultaneously making fatal flaws in epistemology and leaving enormous gaps in theological metaphysics. These shortcomings frustrate the book's potential at every turn.

[2] The author's principal thesis is that the notion of evolution by means of natural selection is a theodicy. From Darwin's time to the present, he contends, evolution has been just as much an attempt to justify the existence of (natural) evil in the face of an all-powerful and all-good God as it has been a scientific theory. And Hunter believes that it has been its success as a theodicy, more than its success as a scientific theory, that has provided the idea with an uncharacteristically strong grip on the scientific and popular imagination. But the treatment of theodicy by anyone, including scientists writing about evolution, always involves a particular conception of God and of God's relation to the world. That is to say, it ventures into theological territory. To the extent that the idea of evolution always already strays into theological territory, Hunter thinks that it is necessary to subject it to theological scrutiny. When it is so scrutinized, he finds that the conception of God that Darwin and other scientific writers assume is just that - an assumption, and an inadequate one as well.

[3] After introducing this thesis in chapter 1, chapters 2-4 "take up the evidence [from comparative anatomy, small scale evolution, and the fossil record] that is typically presented in support of evolution" in order to "show that the evidence makes evolution compelling only when a specific metaphysical interpretation is attached." (11) The central contention of these chapters is that many riddles remain to be solved about how evolution works, and

natural selection does not definitively solve them. The quantity and quality of these unresolved problems seems, to Hunter, to be incommensurate with the degree of certainty with which the idea is held. Any other scientific theory facing so many challenges would at least, he believes, be held more tentatively, if not positively discarded. Thus, Hunter concludes, a non-scientific explanation must be sought for the idea's support. Hunter believes that he has found it in scientists' metaphysical assumptions. In chapters 5-9 he takes up various aspects of these metaphysical assumptions, concentrating on how Darwin's formulation of natural selection was influenced by the "modern" strategy of "distancing" God from the evil of the world through the intervening power of secondary causes - like free will and natural laws - rather than holding God as the direct cause of natural (and moral) evil.

[4] To his credit, Hunter does have a keen eye for the fact that many scientists who make the argument *for* evolution also present an argument *against* the notion that species are created by God and that, in doing so, they exit the realm of their expertise and enter into theological territory. Though he fails to distinguish between scientists making an argument for evolution *because* they reject creation and scientists making an argument for evolution *and* rejecting creation (treating all cases as examples of the former) he rightly points out that if and when the discussion turns toward theological matters, meaningful conversation between various parties requires at least that theological assumptions be acknowledged (whether a theological *position* can ever be more than an *assumption* he does not say). Additionally, he succeeds in pointing out numerous examples of scientists displaying an unscientific hyper-confidence in their grasp of how nature can and must and cannot and must not work, thereby taking the same dogmatic attitude toward evolution that they accuse religious people of having toward creation.

[5] Unfortunately, these points in its favor are diamonds in the rough, as the book suffers from several major flaws. Its first is an over-reliance on Karl Popper's philosophy of science. Hunter has thoroughly digested Popper's logic of falsification, and the philosophy of conjecture and refutation that was built on that foundation. But he seems equally thoroughly unaware that the philosophy of science has acquired a sense of history in the last forty years, or of the impact this has had on the attempt to provide strictly logical foundations for science. In a paradoxical sense, one might say that Hunter does not recognize how Popper's bold conjecture about the nature of science was falsified, decisively by the mid-1970's, by data on the history and practice of science. So Hunter assumes that Popper's is the correct account of science, and shows no awareness that other options exist, much less of what the debate between different schools looks like. Thus, while rightly pointing out that *scientific writers* who speak about evolution make assumptions about God and creation, and that these influence *their* scientific assessment of the idea of evolution, Hunter does not recognize that *he* makes assumptions about the nature of science, and that these influence *his* assessment of the scientific character of the idea of evolution (which, it is true, does not measure up to Popper's notion of what constitutes science). That he is so adamant in pointing out the speck in scientists' eyes makes this plank in his own all the more tragic for the book. It is frustrating for the reader who knows something about the philosophy of science, and would be invariably misleading for the reader who did not.

[6] The book's second major flaw is that, while Hunter does a good job in pointing out *that* scientists who write about evolution often make assumptions about God and creation, he

does not make very clear exactly *what* those assumptions are, nor does he offer any clear and substantial critique of them (beyond pointing out that they are assumptions). The book takes great pains, then, to establish what is little more than a truism in a postmodern world: scientists make extra-scientific assumptions. It would have been better off identifying those assumptions and criticizing them as insufficient, or else offering a better alternative. Hunter not only fails on the first two counts, but he does not allow what appears to be his own theological alternative - that God is the author of evil - to rise above the level of innuendo. And the handful of Scripture texts he cites from time to time hardly constitute sufficient warrant to establish this position as "the traditional concept of God" (172). Thus, while he notes repeatedly that positions on God and creation are not amenable to *scientific* debate, he shows no awareness of how a *theological* debate is conducted. He rightly says "Modern pundits of evolution issue their theological dictums without apology, apparently oblivious that they have strayed into foreign territory where their science will do them no good" (159). But this, however backhanded, may be the only invitation to dialogue that the theologian receives. It is crucial to make the best of it. At the point where the discussion *does* enter theological territory, it is incumbent upon theologians to point out that scientists have wandered into foreign territory, as Hunter does. But, in addition to this, theologians must acquaint neophytes with the landscape of that territory, provide a roadmap that shows various paths and destinations within the territory, and to the benefits and drawbacks of each path and destination. In other words, the theologian must be ready with a primer on how an argument proceeds in theological territory. It may not seem fair, but at this point in history the theologian has to go the extra mile. This book does not do so.

[7] Finally, the book's closing section is titled "Who is your God?" This is an excellent closing question, in that it reminds the reader of the book's central claim: those who discuss evolution frequently, if tacitly, take positions concerning God and God's relation to the world, and those positions need to be raised from the level of tacit assumptions to the level of conscious claims. This conclusion also marks the book's final major shortcoming, since the author does not heed his own advice. While he criticizes scientific writers on the charge of making hidden assumptions, all references to his own confessional background are carefully *kept* in the background. Hunter's train of thought is characteristic of schools of Protestant theology that insist on the total depravity of human nature after the fall, with corollary ideas about predestination and the relationship between faith and reason. Specifically, the assumption of something like Calvin's double predestining God, with inscrutable purposes for causing (natural) evil, slowly reveals itself as the driving force behind Hunter's critique of "Darwin's God." But, as was the case with his adoption of Popper's philosophy of science, he seems not to realize that this is hardly the only option for a Christian theology. A better book would have developed these ideas on God and human nature as a conscious and fully articulated alternative to the free will and free process theodicies that the author criticizes. But these essentially Calvinist positions are never more than assumed or alluded to, as though any other theological position was simply unacquainted with Scripture. It is unfortunate that a book whose main point is to criticize those who make assumptions about God and creation in the discussion about evolution makes such enormous assumptions about God and creation in the discussion about evolution. As before, for the reader who is acquainted with various Christian theologies this

is exasperating, almost to the point of despair; for the reader who is not, it can only be misleading.

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