

From Darwin to Dover— a broad overview of creation vs evolution

A review of
*The Creation-Evolution
Debate: Historical
Perspectives:*

by Edward J. Larson
University of Georgia Press,
Athens, GA, 2008

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It is rare to find a book by an Evolutionist that is not hopelessly unfair to creationists, which is both fair to the creationist case and honest about the motivations of some of evolution's adherents. Historian Edward J. Larson, whose evolutionary bias is clear in the book, nevertheless tries to portray the creationist view fairly in *The Creation-Evolution Debate*. He should be familiar to *Journal* readers for other relatively fair books.¹

The book is only 66 pages long, a collection of three lectures that he delivered in January 2006. As such, it is subject to the flaws that one might expect from both the limitations of lecture transcripts and its brevity. At times, he seems to oversimplify or leave out details, but those instances are far fewer than one might expect from such a thin volume. Overall, the brevity of the book lends to its readability more than the lack of depth and detail detracts.

Darwin and the problem of evil

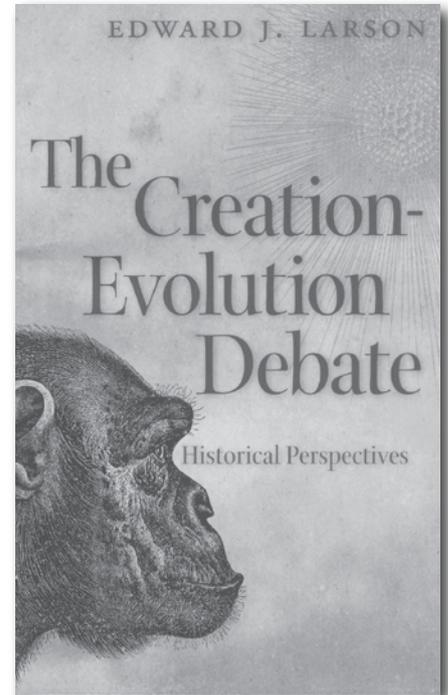
The first lecture, *Darwinism and the Victorian Soul*, covers Darwin's thought, the religious and scientific reaction against it, and the origin of the creation/evolution debate. He cites a letter from Darwin to Asa Gray, addressing the latter's concerns about the implications of evolution for theology. Darwin claimed that he could

not "see as plainly as others do ... evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world" (pp. 1–2). Darwin proceeded to use the supposed lack of evidence of a *beneficent* creator to argue for the *nonexistence* of a creator, and to propose a material origin of the human mind and reason. While Larson notes the illogical sequence of thought, creationists may note that the concept of an *originally good* creation which has since *fallen* and now has pain and suffering, such as Darwin notes, makes better sense of *all* the evidence than Darwinism.^{2,3}

"Dare to say the difference so great"

Larson also acknowledges Darwin's blatant racism which formed a basis for his theory of human evolution in *Descent of Man*, quoting entries from his early notebooks comparing black people to orangutans, "Compare, the Fuegian & Orangutan, & dare to say the difference so great" (p. 3). He compared both the Fuegians and Australian Aborigines to dogs, and seemed to conclude that the dog was possibly more advanced in the areas of "religious devotion" and self-reflection, respectively (p. 6).⁴ Darwinism has encouraged racism by promoting the evil view that dark-skinned people are inferior to light-skinned people and represent an earlier evolutionary stage of humanity.⁵ However, the biblical view affirms that all humans, regardless of the degree of dermal melanism, are descendents of Adam and Eve, with equal value and dignity.

Darwin believed that structures such as the tailbone and other "vestigial" organs were evidence for human descent from apelike ancestors. Some people tried to maintain that



humans evolved from lower life forms, but were given a spirit by God which distinguished them from animals. However, Darwin and Huxley both insisted that "the mental and moral attributes that supposedly uplifted humanity ... differed in degree, rather than kind, from those of other animals..." (p. 5). But most could not accept that they were truly no different from animals, so theistic evolution remained the dominant view through to the end of the 19th century.

Unscientific motives of Darwinists

Some Darwinists embraced evolution not because of a disinterested evaluation of the facts, but because a naturalistic view of human origins supported their economic, social, or anti-female⁶ views.⁷ Super-wealthy steel magnate Andrew Carnegie even used distinctly religious-sounding language in describing his discovery of Darwin's theory: "I remember that light came as in a flood and all was clear. Not only had I got rid of theology and the supernatural, but I had found the truth of evolution ... Man was not created with an instinct for his own degradation, but from the

lower he had risen to the higher forms” (p. 11).⁸ Some evolutionists admit even today that evolution is a religion; Michael Ruse said that, “[e]volution is promoted by its practitioners as more than mere science. ... Evolution is a religion. This was true of evolution in the beginning, and it is true of evolution still today.”⁹

Conversely, some scientists opposed evolution on *scientific* grounds. Harvard zoologist Louis Agassiz maintained that “highly complex individual organs, such as the eye, and ecologically dependent species, such as bees and flowers, could not evolve through the sort of minute, random steps envisioned by Darwinism” (p. 18).

The battle for American schools

Larson’s second lecture, “The American Controversy of Creation and Evolution” mainly covers the battle over what would be taught in schools regarding origins. The trial of John Scopes in Dayton Tennessee is iconic for the clash between creation and evolution in the public schools. Larson gives a balanced historical account of the trial, noting that it was a publicity stunt set up by the ACLU specifically to challenge Tennessee’s law against teaching human evolution, and that far from the *Inherit the Wind* portrayal, “the young teacher was neither jailed nor ostracized” (p. 17).¹⁰ Larson has written an entire book on the subject before.¹

In 1947, for the first time, the Fourteenth Amendment prohibition on establishment of religion on the federal level was applied to states, resulting first in the banning of school-sponsored religious instruction or activity. Not long after, the same reasoning was applied to the ban on teaching human evolution in a series of *Scopes*-like trials, resulting in those bans being overturned. In 1987, the decision in the *Edwards vs Aguillard* case resulted in banning creationism from the science classroom as religious instruction (p. 24). Ironically, the case in the schools today is even more hostile

to creation than it was to evolution; whereas the state laws in 1925 forbade teaching only *human* evolution, leaving the science teachers free to teach animal evolution and millions of years, today one is unable to mention even the *possibility* of design in the classroom, or even to question evolutionary theory.

Larson notes that even though creationism is prohibited in the public schools, approximately 40% of Americans believe in young-earth creationism. He speculates that Christian creationist organizations have been influential in spreading belief in a young earth (p. 28), and gives an overview of recent court cases regarding the teaching of evolution in schools.

Scientists and religion in America

The last lecture in the book, *Scientists and Religion in America*, is an overview of three possible relationships between science and belief in the supernatural, and how each has manifested itself in American science since the nineteenth century. In the nineteenth century, some such as Darwin and Huxley declared science and religion to be in irreconcilable conflict, but other scientists such as Lord Kelvin and James Clerk Maxwell saw science as compatible with and complementary to religion (pp. 40–41)—and they both opposed evolution.

Larson states that “[p]erhaps that most significant development in the relationship between science and American religion over the past two centuries within the religious community has been the disengagement of mainline Protestantism from the science and religion dialogue” (p. 42). While nineteenth-century theologians generally sought a way to harmonize science and religion, twentieth-century theologians like Karl Barth and Paul Tillich did not even address the issue. If Christians addressed scientific issues at all, it was generally only to comment on the ethical implications

of new technology. However, young-earth creationists, inspired by Henry Morris’s *Genesis Flood*, and members of the Intelligent Design movement began to challenge the Darwinian dogma (p. 43). Larson concludes that the warfare model best describes science and religion in America, which of course presupposes that evolution is science in the first place.

Larson concludes by analyzing a series of surveys given to groups of scientists in 1914, 1933, and 1996 which asked questions regarding their belief in God and in life after death. Whereas the original pollster, James Leuba, thought that religious belief would wane among scientists as scientific knowledge progressed, Larson found that the people polled in the 1996 survey were nearly as likely to believe in God and life after death as were scientists almost a century ago (pp. 48–9). Significantly, however, the surveys show that the more “elite” a scientist is, the less likely he is to believe in God or life after death. Scientists in general have greater percentages of disbelief than the American population, of which a majority believes in both God and life after death (p. 50). The results of the surveys are reproduced in an appendix.¹¹

Conclusion

While Larson is generally fair to creationists, there are a few times where he becomes patronizing to creationists, or when his comments clearly reflect his evolutionary bias. He accuses creationists of “militantly lash[ing] out” when they “feel their beliefs are under siege from science” (p. 43), although this is actually a *defensive* action against atheists continually trying to remove Christian influences from the public square. He also regards evolution as an established fact throughout the book. While this is a drawback, anyone familiar with authors such as Dawkins will be refreshed by the scarcity of such comments. While written from a strongly evolutionary perspective, *The Creation-Evolution Debate* is a good

overview of the topics covered, which is much fairer to creationists than most evolutionist books.

References

1. See review of his books:(a) *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* by Wieland, C., *J. Creation* 12(3):267–269, 1998; (b) *Evolution: The Remarkable History of a Scientific Theory* by Weinberger, L., *J. Creation* 19(1):43–45, 2005.
2. See Batten D. (Ed.), *Creation Answers Book*, chapter 6, “How Did Bad Things Come About?”, Creation Book Publishers, Australia, 2006; Sarfati, J. *Refuting Compromise*, ch. 6, Master Books, Green Forest, AR, 2004.
3. See also Sarfati, J., The Fall: a cosmic catastrophe, *J. Creation* 19(3):60–64, 2005, <creation.com/plant_death>; Gurney, R.J.M., The carnivorous nature and suffering of animals, *J. Creation* 18(3):70–75, 2004; <creation.com/carniv>.
4. See also Wieland, C., Darwin's bodysnatchers: new horrors—people deliberately killed to provide ‘specimens’ for evolutionary research, *Creation* 14(2):16–18, 1992.
5. Wieland, C., Evolutionary Racism, *Creation* 20(4): 14–16, and Bergman J., Darwin's influence on modern racists and white supremacist groups: The case of David Duke, *J. Creation* 19(3): 103–107.
6. Bergman, J., The history of the teaching of human female inferiority in Darwinism, *J. Creation* 14(1):117–126, 2000.
7. See also Weeks, N., Darwin and the search for an evolutionary mechanism, *J. Creation* 12(3):305–311, 1998.
8. See also Bergman, J., Darwin's critical influence on the ruthless extremes of capitalism, *J. Creation* 16(2):105–109, 2002.
9. Ruse, M. “How evolution became a religion: creationists correct?” *National Post*, 13 May 2000; quoted at “Leading anti-creationist philosopher admits that evolution is a religion”, <creation.com/ruse>
10. See also Menton, D., *Inherit the Wind*: an historical analysis, *Creation* 19(1):35–38, 1996.
11. See also Larson, E.J. and Witham, L., Leading scientists still reject God, *Nature* 394(6691):313, 1998. The sole criterion for being classified as a ‘leading’ or ‘greater’ scientist was membership of the NAS; cited in, National Academy of Science is godless to the core — survey, <creation.com/article/4158>.

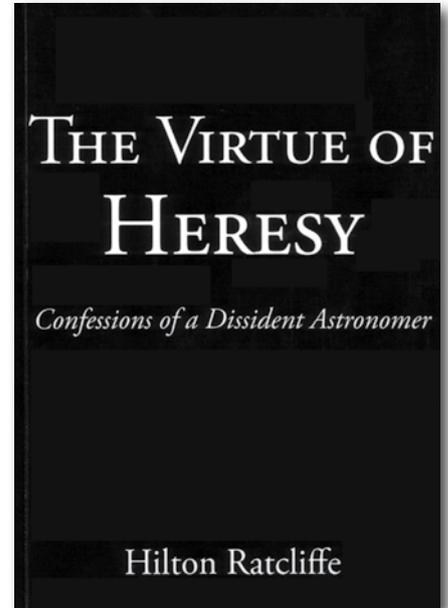
Heretic challenges the giants!

A review of
**The Virtue of Heresy:
Confessions of a Dissident
Astronomer:**
by Hilton Ratcliffe
AuthorHouse, Central
Milton Keynes, UK, 2007

John Hartnett

The subtitle of the book is “a daring exposé of cosmology's dark secrets”. I believe the author has achieved that, though in an unusual and somewhat “rambling” style. Ratcliffe is a daring author who lets go with blast after blast. He says after many attempts to “demystify the heavens, I became increasingly frustrated by ideas that just didn't harmonise.” That I can relate to. There is much out there in cosmology, astrophysics, relativity and quantum physics that doesn't seem to “stack up”, is internally inconsistent or needs to be explained with much hand waving nonsense. He certainly exposes many inconsistencies in these fields of science that (still) need serious consideration both experimentally and theoretically. He is not the first to expose these issues and cites other authors as he proceeds through the book.

He uses a few literary techniques/utilities that I really don't care for and which, on balance, I felt made it more difficult to follow than helped explain the ideas in the book. In his early chapters and in a few later chapters, he uses “Haquar” an imagined futuristic alien-like space traveller to refute notions in the cosmos that many have assumed to be true. In trying to attribute the design in the universe to a superior intelligence he uses the notion of “The X-Stream” but it is unclear, who or what that is.



He claims that science has been flawed by the current theoretical approach; that is, the mathematics has preceded the physics. I agree not all mathematics is realized in the physical realm, but also it may be a mistake to reject the symmetries found in mathematical studies that may show new insights into the laws of nature. Yet also I do agree with Ratcliffe when he argues the follies of string theorists and the like, who have long ago departed from a sound experimental basis. Without doubt it is dangerous to proceed into unknown territory, for four decades now in the case of string theory, without a single experimental verification. But I would also warn not to “throw the baby out with the bathwater”; mathematics is the language of physics and I believe a more conservative approach is needed to carefully examine new theoretical developments, combined with a will to discard the paradigm that is failing, instead of trying to prop it up with never ending patches—standard big bang cosmology for example.