

BOOK REVIEW

of

William A. Dembski, editor,
Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing,
ISI Books, 2004.

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

Many challenged Darwinian evolution, primarily on scientific grounds, when it was first proposed by Darwin. Also, many have challenged Darwinian evolution over the years since, with significant challenges in print from time to time. What is different now, it appears, is that the implications of Darwinian theory to many disciples beyond biology have been thought through, an organized movement is in place consisting of people with varied scholarly and religious backgrounds, a significant focus has been placed on the materialism implicit within Darwinism, and there is almost an explosive growth of opposition to Darwinism. A significant center of opposition is the Discovery Institute in Seattle, which funds scholars, and writing and speaking programs. One person who is a senior fellow with the Discovery Institute, and also on the faculty of Baylor University, and a significant leader in the current movement in opposition to Darwinism, is the editor of the book under review, William A. Dembski. Dr. Dembski holds two doctorates: one in mathematics and one in philosophy. In the book under review, articles have been gathered in opposition to Darwinism by sixteen authors. About the only thing in common among these sixteen is their unified opposition to Darwinism. They represent a broad spectrum of disciplines including biology, law, mathematics, philosophy, and political theory. They also represent a broad spectrum of religious commitments including agnosticism, atheism, Catholicism, Judaism, and Protestantism. Darwinism, at least up to the present day, has reached mythic proportions in our society. The basic tenants of materialism cannot be questioned, at least not in the public arena such as in public schools and universities, law, and science. But in spite of the lack of openness and suppression of opposing points of view, a remarkable opposition has been maintained and now appears to be reaching critical mass. Nonetheless, John Wilson (founding editor of *Books & Culture* and an editor at large for *Christianity Today*) writes in the Forward, "the book you're holding is dangerous; it may get you into trouble. By questioning Darwinism, you place yourself in the company of all the cranks who have violated the taboos enforced by our current opinion-makers." Dembski writes in the Introduction, "Darwinism, its proponents assure us, has been overwhelmingly vindicated. Any resistance to it is futile and indicates bad faith or worse." Further on in the Introduction, Dembski writes, "We now face a Darwinian thought police that, save for employing physical violence, is as insidious as any secret police at ensuring conformity and rooting out dissent. To question Darwinism is dangerous for all professional scholars but especially biologists." Given that this is true, we should not only be thankful for all those guided by conscience and compelled by a sense of truth that have written and spoken in opposition to Darwinism in earlier years, but also those who put their careers in jeopardy today, including those who have contributed to this volume under review.

What follows below is a collection of comments from a few chapters of the book. Only a few can be offered, but hopefully enough is given to indicate what the authors have to say.

In Chapter 1, *The Check is in the Mail*, Robert C. Koons (professor of philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin) discusses how Darwinism has made many strong, confident claims, and how it is our right and duty to ask for the evidence. He writes, "We have, therefore, the right and even the duty to compare what Darwinian scientists have actually accomplished with what they still must accomplish if their strong claims of certainty are to be sustained. The evaluation of the arguments of biologists is within the competence of each person, as is the task of assessing the appropriate degree of doubt or certainty that attaches to their conclusion." "It is often claimed that the progress of science is simply the progress of materialist philosophy, with the consequence that every new scientific discovery, in whatever field, confirms the soundness of methodological naturalism. I have argued elsewhere that this notion is historically uninformed and epistemologically naïve." "Darwin's so-called theory is not really a theory at all: it is a schema for future theories. By failing to distinguish between a theory and an abstract sketch of the form of possible theories, Darwinian biologists have lost sight of the goal of building a genuine science."

In Chapter 10, *Why I Am Not a Darwinist*, James Barham (independent scholar trained in the classics at the University of Texas at Austin and in the history of science at Harvard) discusses what he considers to be Darwinist shortcomings. He writes, "Darwinism has got it wrong. Invoking chance in the way that it does is tantamount to saying: 'Here the laws of nature as we understand them are suspended.' It is no different from invoking miracles." "The Darwinian view of life is so crude, so thoughtless, so utterly false to all that is noblest in human beings, that truly one does not know whether to laugh or cry." "Given its colossal philosophical pretensions compared with its modest scientific achievements, the theory of natural selection may one day come to be seen as a blunder of historic proportions, on a par with crystalline spheres, phlogiston, and the ether. Metaphysical Darwinism simply does not live up to its billing. It claims to explain everything about life, but in fact explains almost nothing".

In Chapter 11, *Why Evolution Fails the Test of Science*, Cornelius G. Hunter (Ph.D. in biophysics from the University of Illinois, currently a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California at San Diego) looks critically at Darwinism as science. He writes, "What I find intriguing is not the various unresolved problems with origin-of-life research, but rather the utter confidence of origin-of-life researchers about where the solution to life's origin lies." "As with the origin-of-life problem, there is a tremendous disparity between the scientific evidence and the claims of evolutionists. This problem is deeper than merely misunderstanding the science." "Evolutionists like to say there is a convergence of evidence and the weight of all this evidence taken together makes evolution the unavoidable conclusion. The convergence, however, lies not with the evidence but rather in its religious interpretation. I discovered this when I surveyed the evolution literature and assembled all the evidence and the arguments used to promote evolution. The arguments for evolution inevitably and consistently rely on an underlying conception of God." "In fact, evolution is not a scientific theory but rather a religious belief about God and nature, held so strongly that it is called a fact."

In Chapter 12, *Darwinian Evolutionary Theory and the Life Sciences in the Twenty-First Century*, Roland F. Hirsch (Ph.D. from the University of Michigan and program manager in the Office of Biological & Environmental Research in the Office of Science of the U.S. Department of Energy) discusses the highly complex nature of biological life. He writes, "life is far more complicated than was imagined in 1959 [the optimistic and centennial year of Darwinism], and that much of its complexity cannot easily be addressed by existing evolutionary theory." "Recognition of the true complexity of cellular processes has led to major change in the vocabulary used to describe cells. Words such as 'machine', 'factory' and 'motor' are in routine use".

Will opponents to Darwinism win the day? Will Darwinism become recognized as a terrible scientific blunder? Given the fact that there is much more involved than objective science, that does not seem likely. But whatever the outcome of the current debate, it is useful to recall that truth is not determined by a popularity contest nor by a public opinion poll. Nonetheless, all those concerned about our society, about quality public education, about truth and justice, and about being salt and light, have cause to be encouraged.