

BOOK REVIEW
of
Cornelius G. Hunter,
Science's Blind Spot: The Unseen Religion of Scientific Naturalism,
Brazos Press, 2007.

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This review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

Ideas have consequences. This book is about science's commitment to naturalism to the point of being *scientism*, essentially a religion where anything that does not fit the naturalistic presupposition is ruled out as irrelevant and irrational, that includes anything that is religious unless your religion is of the type that only concerns your personal experience and says nothing objective about the nature of the real world or society. For those of us who believe that our religion informs all areas of life, this is unacceptable. Since the author, Cornelius Hunter, is himself a scientist as well as a Christian, his book is especially helpful.

Cornelius Hunter was senior vice president of Seagull Technology, Inc., a high-tech firm in Silicon Valley. He is currently, at least at the time of the writing of this book, engaged in molecular biophysics post-doctoral and engineering research in Cameron Park, California. He is also adjunct professor of science and religion at Biola University. He completed his Ph.D. in biophysics at the University of Illinois. He has, in addition to this book under review, authored *Darwin's God*, and also *Darwin's Proof*. With these books, Hunter has joined the ranks of a growing number of scholars who find scientific naturalism, and more specifically Darwinian evolution, without much, if any, scientific merit, and based more on aberrant philosophy and theology than on science. Phillip Johnson approvingly quotes Hunter from previous books in his observation that "at its core, evolution is about God, not science." Michael Behe notes that in "lucid and engaging prose, Hunter shines a light on Darwinian theology, making plain what is too often obscured by technical jargon." And William Dembski says that "Hunter unmask[s] [the] theological mode of argumentation and argues convincingly that it is not merely incidental but indeed essential to how Darwinists justify evolution." Guillermo Gonzalez writes of the current book: "*Science's Blind Spot* is a must-read for anyone wishing to understand why those who oppose intelligent design are becoming more entrenched as the evidence for it continues to build."

The book *Science's Blind Spot* contains a Preface and nine chapters. Chapter 1 is titled *What's Wrong with Science*. Chapter 2 is titled *The Revolution That Wasn't*. Chapter 3 is titled *Science's Blind Spot*. Chapter 4 is *A God in the Machine*. Chapter 5 is *Nature's Innovative Power*. Chapter 6 is *When Predictions Go Wrong*. Chapter 7 is *Inherit the Wind All Over Again*. Chapter 8 is *Theological Naturalism*. And Chapter 9 is titled *Moderate Empiricism*.

In Chapter 1, Hunter, who is himself a scientist, introduces the theme of his book, and argues that there is something wrong with science: what is wrong is religion being involved in it. However, surprising to some, the religion that corrupts science is not Christianity or some other organized religion, but the religion of naturalism. He suggests that "The problem is that religion has joined science. . . . science itself, according to many commentators, is free of theological guide or constraint. Nothing could be further from the truth. . . . the primary theological ground rule is that scientific explanation must be purely naturalistic. . . . The term *theological naturalism* reminds us that the assumption of naturalism in science is neither a result of atheistic influence nor an empirically based scientific finding. It is a consequence of metaphysical reasoning, and the implications for science are profound."

Chapter 2 is a little heavy in philosophy and theology, but that is at the root of where we are in science today so it appears to be unavoidable. Where theology went astray is where science went astray, precisely because it was erroneous developments within Christianity that led to incorrect theological assumptions within science. The basic split was between those who take the Scriptures as necessary revelation for proper religious understanding and those who assumed that reason alone was sufficient for a complete Christian understanding of men and God. Hunter focuses upon Bacon and Descartes as prominent representatives of the two approaches, because they were both Christians and both scientists. Bacon was the pragmatist who argued for limits to science, focused on the practical, and was the empiricist. However, Descartes argued for no limits to science, promoted speculation in the sciences, and was the rationalist. Descartes won out, but why was that? Hunter answers that question in this chapter. Surprising to some, Descartes won by his theological arguments. The arguments are a bit complex and perhaps even a little foreign to our thinking today, but they were based on such things as the problem of evil in the world, and that it would be somehow unbecoming for God to have to intervene in His own creation. Again, this sort of development occurred in the heady days of rationalism, where surely man with his own intelligence alone should be sufficient to figure all of these things out without the need for any revelation from God. These were the days of the development of Deism, and later liberal theology. Lest we think this is just historical and of little relevance to us today, Hunter quotes Ken Miller, a professing Christian, scientist, and leading exponent of evolution as asking the rhetorical question, would God "really want to take credit for the mosquito"? Among other developments that led to naturalism within science was the growing sentiment within religion as well as science against miracles, again against the revelation of Scripture and based solely on rational concerns: some theologians found miracles to be, well, awkward. For similar reasons, the tradition of uniformitarianism was embraced by many in the sciences not because of growing evidence for it, but for rational, theological concerns. The upshot of Chapter 2 is that scientific naturalism did not develop from atheism, but from theological naturalism. Theological naturalism, as well as scientific naturalism, "is not opposed to all things religious – it is religious." It is not God that is excluded, it is an intervening God that is excluded, contra to the Scriptures. From thence comes methodological naturalism. Hunter develops these ideas throughout the remainder of the book.

In Chapter 3, Hunter addresses directly what he calls science's blind spot. The blind spot is that science does not recognize that scientific pursuits are based on two main components: a certain amount of rationalism and also empiricism. Some seem to think that it is all empirical, and it isn't. One long quote seems to summarize the chapter fairly well: "The problem with science is not that the naturalistic approach might occasionally be inadequate. The problem is that science would never know any better. This is science's blind spot. When problems are encountered, theological naturalism assumes that the correct naturalistic solution has not yet been found. Nonnatural phenomena will be interpreted as natural, regardless of how implausible the story becomes. Science has no mechanism to detect the possibility of nonnatural phenomena. It does not consider the likelihood that a phenomenon might not be purely naturalistic. . . . Theological naturalism has no way to distinguish a paradigm problem from a research problem. It cannot consider the *possibility* that there is no naturalistic explanation for the DNA code. If a theory of natural history has problems – and many of them have their share – the problems are always viewed as research problems and never as paradigm problems."

In Chapter 4, cosmology is considered. In recent years, a great deal has been made by some of the high degree of fine tuning that seems to be apparent in the universe in order for intelligent life to occur on planet earth. Most cosmologists seem to recognize this problem, and that is why something as bizarre as proposed multiple universes (now isn't that an oxymoron!) are actually being considered. "The universe's fine-tuning seems quite peculiar, but theological naturalism mandates a naturalistic explanation. The multiverse hypothesis provides such an explanation. For some cosmologists, multiverses make the fine-tuning seem 'much less miraculous.' The multiverse hypothesis is another example of science's blind spot."

In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, evolution is considered. In Chapter 5 Hunter presents the idea that nature, according to some, is inherently innovative and has produced all of the wide variations of life by natural means through the mechanism of evolution. To some this is obvious. "According to Darwinists, the theory of evolution is so obvious and compelling that it should be considered to be a fact rather than a theory. Just as gravity and the roundness of the earth are facts, so too evolution is a fact. As Darwinists explain, there really is no counterevidence. Everything in biology is what we would expect if evolution were true. Evolution's predictions, they claim, have all come true." However, Hunter states that the problem with this last statement is that it isn't true: "The problem is that evolution has a great many fundamental predictions gone wrong." He points out a rather obvious problem that dates back to the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*: while modern adherents say that Darwin provided a mechanism through which evolution occurs, namely variation followed by natural selection, and that this is one theory by which micro-evolution may occur, the content of Darwin's book was on the origin of species: a problem that is unresolved and for which little if any progress has been made. Even the simple problem of adaptation seems to involve more than random variation and natural selection: the ability to adapt seems to be hardwired. Another basic problem is many complex functions that exist in a variety of species cannot conceivably have a common ancestor with that function. Another problem is that similar functions in what appear to be cousin species cannot be shown to have similar genes or developmental pathways, which evolution would logically predict.

In Chapter 6 Hunter continues with the problem of predictions based on evolutionary theory that have gone wrong. Hunter asks the following: "But what happens when similar designs are discovered in distant species, so distant that a common ancestor cannot be used to explain their origin? What happens when common solutions are found in species that, even according to evolution, are widely divergent? These cases are unexpected surprises to evolutionists, for they contradict evolution's prediction that biology is beholden to a contingent process. . . . Furthermore, there are too many known examples where similar designs appear in distant species, *in spite of* different environments and in spite of the availability of competing designs." Hunter also criticizes evolutionary theory due to a lack of consistency when it comes to evolutionary tree diagrams that are supposed to at least suggest potential developmental pathways. An "evolutionary tree based on one set of data (say the visible features of the species) should be similar to a tree based on a separate set of data (say the molecular features of the same set of species). It would be a daunting task to document the multitude of falsifications of this prediction that have been tallied so far. . . . Instead of a single evolutionary tree emerging from the data, there is a wealth of competing evolutionary trees." However, Hunter observes that "In the face of daunting evidential problems, evolutionists are oblivious to any hint of a theoretical breakdown."

In Chapter 7 Hunter reconsiders the play and movie by the title of *Inherit the Wind*. The play, and then the movie, were loosely based on the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial in Dayton, Ohio. For many, *Inherit the Wind* "reveals what they believe to be the core essentials of the origins debate: objective science versus religious dogma." However, Hunter believes it is just the opposite: whatever we had in 1925, today we have those blindly committed to evolution, and naturalism in general, who are "now part of a new kind of anti-intellectualism." It is those committed to naturalism who will not even permit serious objections to be raised against the theory of evolution. No counterevidence is allowed. No questions are allowed. Objections such as those raised in this book by Hunter are not permitted in the classroom: not at the high school level nor at the university level. Even in a court of law, highly qualified scientists giving testimony concerning serious scientific objections to the theory of evolution will be subjected to intense cross examination, looking into their motives and religious affiliations, while those presenting the party line receive no such examination.

In Chapter 8 Hunter investigates the underlying philosophy that has caused the reverse *Inherit the Wind* scenario and the blind spot in modern science. He demonstrates how philosophical naturalism, theological naturalism, and methodological naturalism are related. Hunter had shown in previous chapters that naturalism was actually developed by religious people for religious concerns, no matter how wrong they may have been, (see the index entry for theological naturalism), and therefore naturalism was not developed by atheists to promote atheism, as some Christians may assume it to be. The problem is laid directly at the feet of religious people, and it is still today that professing Christians give support to scientific naturalism. Although the ideas were not developed to promote skepticism, that has been the result. "Although the driving concern for

naturalists was theological and they were not promoting atheism, there can be little doubt that today their ideas have fueled religious skepticism. If there is no divine action, or at least no detectable divine action, then it is understandable that some might take the next logical step to religious skepticism.” As examples of two misguided modern professing Christians who are scientists, Hunter refers to Ken Miller and Howard Van Till: “Biology professor Ken Miller argues that God would never want to take credit for such evils as the mosquito. Furthermore, Western religion mandates evolution. ‘The freedom to act and choose enjoyed by each individual in the Western religious tradition,’ explains Miller, ‘requires that God allow the future of His creation to be left open.’ In other words, evolution must be true and it must be independent of God; otherwise ‘how could the future truly be open.’ Physicist Howard Van Till argues that a god who created the world and then subsequently set about creating species at different times is ‘theologically awkward.’” Hunter refers to a number of other scientists as well, who think they serve God well by embracing naturalistic evolution. “These views are typical of today’s theological naturalists. Their theological views are varied, but the common thread is methodological naturalism. Divine action must not be detectable. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that theological naturalists accept evolution as a scientific fact.” Hunter’s main point is that just like today, in Darwin’s day and before naturalism and evolution were developed for religious reasons, no matter how wrongheaded, and not because scientific evidence led to naturalism and evolution. And yet, many today are ignorant of such historical developments and even of the theological naturalism of today!

In Chapter 9, the last chapter, Hunter makes his positive case for what he calls moderate empiricism. In my opinion, although not specifically mentioned in the Preface and therefore maybe I am extrapolating, the contents of Chapter 9 are really the purpose for this book being written. In a delightful contrast with most books, all of the previous chapters come together in the last chapter allowing for a cogent positive statement of how things ought to be. In other words, the previous chapters were analysis of where we are in terms of the philosophy of science and what’s wrong with it, and Chapter 9 is a positive statement of the way things should be. Chapter 9 is the most impassioned plea for proper scientific investigation that I have read, and all of the earlier chapters explain how we went wrong. It sheds great light on the differences between empiricism and rationalism (and related presuppositionalism). The prevailing philosophy of science is based on rationalism, not, as many suppose, empiricism. It is based on a specific presupposition of naturalism, and excludes any line of investigation that does not presume naturalism. Hunter’s insights here, as developed throughout the book, are very helpful and penetrating. He does not embrace full empiricism, but rather makes good arguments for what he calls “moderate empiricism.” His appeal is not to embrace something really new, but rather the position that had been championed by Francis Bacon (father of the modern scientific method, according to Encyclopedia Britannica online at <http://www.britannica.com>), Robert Boyle, and others. It is a modest, humble approach to the pursuit of knowledge about the world, and therefore will not likely appeal to the arrogant, proud, adherents to the prevailing philosophy of science (even if, as is probably true of most, they have no idea of what their philosophy of science is), which assumes that the only acceptable answer to any question is a naturalistic one. This is, at the fundamental level, a philosophical or even theological position, not one based on empirical evidence. Moderate empiricism, while appreciating what science has accomplished and the power of the scientific method, also realizes how very little we understand and attempts to be open to where the evidence may lead. This seems like a modest appeal, and it is one that well-known scientists of an earlier era embraced, yet one rejected today.

This book takes on the basic approach that science as practiced today pursues. It illustrates how this is not how science has always been pursued, and gives good reasons why it is inferior to moderate empiricism. It makes a very important contribution to the current debate over intelligent design theory, as well as evidence for and against the theory of evolution. These current debates, in the light of this book, appear to be more over philosophy and theology than over science *per se*. Unfortunately, many, perhaps most, practicing scientists have no background, either formal or informal, in philosophy and/or theology. Their lack of education (either formal or informal) in these subjects, even though their degree may be Doctor of Philosophy (historically, pursuing a professional degree in science was recognized as an area of natural philosophy), certainly does not contribute anything positive to the current debate, and suggests that we, as a society, have become much too narrow in our professional degrees. This book, hopefully, will be widely read and serve to correct what is apparently a significant misunderstanding in our society.