

## Philip Kitcher's "*Living with Darwin*"

Leonard Finkelman

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The German philosopher Immanuel Kant famously remarked that one must "limit reason to make room for faith." Kant meant that there are some beliefs—belief in the existence of God, for example—whose truth or falsity could never be conclusively proved through logic or experience. Acceptance of such beliefs could only be determined by an act of will, that is, a choice to believe. Modern proponents of intelligent design theory seek to muddle this distinction: Biological evidence (supposedly) reveals the necessity of a designer, and so belief in a higher power becomes a matter of scientific responsibility. Their opposition to Darwin's theory of evolution by means of natural selection stems from the idea that it reduces such religious belief to a choice that is at best arbitrary and at worst incorrect.

It is against this opposition that Philip Kitcher writes "*Living with Darwin: Evolution, Design, and the Future of Faith*." Kitcher, the John Dewey Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University, is well aware of reason's limits; however, he is also adept at playing to its strengths.

Kitcher analyzes the arguments for intelligent design in terms of three levels of commitment to religious faith, then shows how "Intelligent Design-ers" range from one level to another to dodge the Darwinian response. The most stringent of these levels, which he calls "Genesis creationism," accepts a literal reading of religious texts and rejects Darwin's theory on those grounds. Less rigorous is "novelty creationism," which accepts the Darwinian account as adequate to explain some biological phenomena

but requires special acts of divinity for others. Least demanding of the will to believe is "anti-selectionism," which accepts that biological phenomena result from evolution but rejects the Darwinian mechanism of natural selection as sufficient to explain all such phenomena. Intelligent design theorists insist that theirs is an anti-selectionist theory, but Kitcher shows that their arguments must extend into the broader spectrum of creationist belief to have any force. The majority of "*Living with Darwin*" is devoted to a rehearsal of the myriad objections to the arguments made at all three of the aforementioned levels. It is here that interested readers will likely find Kitcher to be most effective, as he lays out the case against intelligent design in clear, logical fashion.

The latter portion of Kitcher's book is directed towards another goal: To understand the function of faith and why so many who exercise their will to believe find Darwinism threatening. Kitcher speculates that faith succeeds where our social impulses are left unsatisfied by secular institutions. For example, in the rugged individualist culture of the United States, one finds faith in the ascendant; by contrast, religion is less successful in contemporary Western Europe, where the ideals of Socialism are not met with such contempt. The fear of Darwinism held by many of the faithful is that acceptance of the theory, even if it does reveal some literal truth, comes at the cost of religion's social utility. What good is it to find our place in the world if doing so destroys the bonds that keep us together? Kitcher's suggestion is to limit faith to make room for reason: Religion may have its place in Darwinian world, but that place is in the search for comfort rather than for truth.

It is in this last portion that Kitcher's analysis falters somewhat, if only by an error of omission. With religion "in retreat" from those sources—such as Darwin—that give

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L. Finkelman (✉)  
Department of Philosophy,  
City University of New York Graduate Center,  
365 Fifth Avenue,  
New York, NY, USA  
e-mail: lfinkelman@gc.cuny.edu

us literal truth rather than spiritual fulfillment, he admits that Darwinism, with its emphasis on the struggle for existence, fails to provide the sort of comfort offered by faith. Perhaps Kitcher prefers to keep reason within its boundaries and faith safe from encroachment; nevertheless, one may find comfort in Darwin's works, if one knows where to look. Darwin himself envisaged the aforementioned "struggle for existence" as a largely metaphorical one. Rather than a Hobbesian struggle of one against all, he concluded that the story of our species must be one of social cooperation. It is precisely this insight that underlies some of the most enduring—and, one might expect, therefore most comforting—moral theories in the Western tradition. In enshrining faith as a bulwark against any supposed

Darwinian despair—and overlooking the Darwinist's own escape from that despair—Kitcher's emphasis is less on living with Darwin, which he seems to take for granted, and more on living with religion.

After all, there is little here that would prove persuasive to the faithful, for whom the choice to believe is made independent of scientific evidence. To be fair, Kitcher does not seem to have such people in mind as his audience, and the arguments presented here would be best appreciated by an inquisitive secular mind. As a primer for those who want to rise to Darwin's defense, Kitcher's work here is invaluable. Nevertheless, such an audience is already acclimated to living with Darwin, leaving Kitcher—ironically enough—preaching to the choir.