

mission and character. The pervasive tendency to accept artificial contraception, pornography, pre-marital sexual intercourse, remarriage after divorce, and legalization of abortion, he stresses, underscores the decline in the institutional life of the Church in America. "The pluralistic society, therefore," Father Canavan declares, "stands upon no moral principles but is unified only by the procedural principle of an official neutrality that treats all beliefs equally." This "pluralist game," in effect, has no common standards, no absolute values, thus carrying with it the inevitable consequence that pluralism will degenerate into mere individualism, that is to say, a curious mixture of libertarianism and egalitarianism that is at once vacuous and yet destructive, and concludes in the dissolution of norms, or as Father Canavan notes: "We lack...an ordering principle [that is, a common moral principle] because we are so devoted to liberty and equality as the supreme norms of a democratic society that we will not admit their subordination to any higher norms."

No less than Lindbom, Father Canavan is deeply preoccupied with the problem of liberty in a democratic society. And for both commentators liberty, when lacking some inner check, or restraint, leads to the excesses now found in the attitude that rights transcend obligations, moral laws, moral virtues. The belief that there is an irresolvable conflict between individual rights and public morality is central to the liberal ideology and its unceasing effort to establish what Father Canavan terms "a purely procedural and substantively neutral model of society." This belief now fashions the new morality of the Western world in general and of American society and culture in particular. *The Myth of Democracy* scrutinizes the metaphysical dimensions of "the Luciferian process"; *The Pluralist Game* measures this process in its distinctly American con-

stituents, as a case study, so to speak. It is a real privilege to have in hand two books which complement each other in powerful ways, and help one to see the nexus of causes and effects. That which, finally and firmly, unites these two books is a common concern with the moral virtue of order in the soul and in the commonwealth. How liberty plays a fateful role in the order of human existence has an overarching part in this concern. Tage Lindbom and Father Francis Canavan never forget these words of Edmund Burke: "But the liberty, the only liberty I mean, is a liberty connected with order, that not only exists with order and virtue, but which cannot exist at all without them."

A Hyper-Darwinian Enterprise

JOHN C. CAIAZZA

Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life, by Daniel C. Dennett, *New York: Touchstone Books, 1995. 521 pp. \$30.00.*

THIS BOOK FEATURES more than usually extravagant blurbs on the covers of its paperback edition, not only from professional biologists who might be expected to know about Charles Darwin and theoretical biology, but also from figures such as Richard Rorty and Joyce Carol Oates. This is all the more remarkable for the book does not fulfill its promise to utilize Darwinian theory to explain virtually every important aspect of human life, well beyond Darwin's original purpose to explain the origin of species. There is no patience or modesty in Daniel

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C. Dennett's book, which contains 521 large pages. Dennett relies on a number of different types of arguments and evidence, but also on a number of rhetorical tricks, some of which frankly are not worthy of a professional philosopher. (Dennett is a professor of Philosophy at Tufts University with a large number of books, papers, and presentations to his credit.)

In general, evolutionary theory today has expanded tremendously, taking over new areas of scientific phenomena; at the same time its general theory has become attenuated. These two aspects are not unrelated, for as evolutionary theory has recently been applied with some success in one direction to genetics, and in another to animal behavior, the notion promoted by Darwin of natural selection operating on a sufficiently diverse number of slightly differentiated organisms has necessarily become inadequate to accommodate more than a century's increased knowledge of biological phenomena. The inclusion of genetic theory especially has changed Darwinism from a typically nineteenth-century deterministic theory to one that is probabilistic and chaotic, more in line with twentieth-century cultural ideas and ideals. The inclusion of behavior adds another level of explanation between the organism and its immediate physical environment to include the social relations with members of its own species. To this added complexity, Dennett adds further levels, for it is not enough for evolution to expand to genetic and behavioral levels; through the addition of computer modeling, cognitive psychology, and artificial intelligence (computer chess machines, for example), Dennett expands evolutionary theory to include the origins of mind, of human civilization and ethics.

It might seem that in proposing such an ambitious theory, necessarily incomplete at our present level of knowledge,

yet all encompassing in its explanatory range, and in opposition to the thinking of some of the major secular intellectuals of our time, Dennett would be tentative in his presentation, but the opposite is true. He frequently blusters and even gloats over the assumed power of his version of Darwinism, calling it a "universal solvent" which, with pretended concern, he claims is destroying the currency of revealed religion. He even discusses what we are to do with the churches and culture of the Baptists once that hardy representative of Protestantism dies away! What Dennett is defending in an off-putting way is what can be called "hyper-Darwinism."

Dennett's philosophical perspective is that of Analytic Philosophy (he studied with the logician Quine as an undergraduate at Harvard), and he relies frequently on the intellectual apparatus of that tradition including a reliance on structures of formal logic, thought experiments of the "what-if" variety, and intricate argumentation proving contradictions in opponents' arguments or reducing them to absurdity. His style assumes the "cuteness" sometimes apparent in Analytic writing, relying on puns, coy descriptives ("delicious" is a favorite adjective), and inventive terminology (including an overworked distinction between "skyhooks" and "cranes") typical of the English tradition of philosophical writing at its worst. In Dennett's hands, it is a style ripe for satire and ridicule, a point which escapes him even as he proceeds to assume that all his points are securely made and all his intellectual enemies scattered. The reader has the frequent experience of being led by Dennett to expect something truly ground-breaking as he reaches the climax of some critical debate, only to be presented with yet another what-if story, and an admission by Dennett that, in fact, his argument is speculative. Afterwards, however, as he

proceeds with his presentation, Dennett never refers to the fragility of his argument, but assumes it as proved. After so many attempts to run his hyper-Darwinian motorcycle across an intellectual chasm only to see it crash, the book becomes like one of those children's cartoons in which some forlorn creature of the animator's art endures catastrophe after catastrophe, blithely unaware of his next peril and completely unaffected by the series of calamities he has left behind.

For example, a principle of explanation which must take in a range of phenomena that includes organic nature, the mind, social organization and ethics, and the origin of the universe itself must perforce be very general, operating at several levels of abstraction above the merely biological. Dennett, following some recent evolutionary philosophers, refers no longer to the principle of natural selection or adaptation as formulated by Darwin, but to a universal "algorithm," a repetitive mathematical rule, which itself is an abstraction which Dennett describes as existing in some "DesignSpace" or "Platonic hyperspace." It is never clear what Dennett means by these terms. Does he mean that the universal Darwinian algorithm is in reality a Platonic Idea which guides the development of all physical, biological, mental and social reality, or are these designations merely rhetorical devices? The question is of critical importance since it would seem contradictory to base a physicalist and reductive theory such as Dennett's on an abstract mathematical principle. It is also worth noticing that Dennett nowhere attempts to say what the algorithm is; presumably mathematical in expression, he never presents a rigorous formulation of it but settles instead for general characterizations and grandiose and unprovable assertions of its power and importance. This leaves a metaphysical hole at the very heart of

Dennett's intellectual enterprise, for it functions as both a materialistic and an Idealistic philosophy. Like many current intellectuals, he has no patience with metaphysical or "essentialist" thinking; he is unaware that his hyper-Darwinian enterprise is in imminent danger of collapsing into incoherence.

Dennett spends an entire chapter on the errors of the well-known evolutionary writer Stephen Jay Gould, attempting, as he says, to analyze and diminish him psychologically in a way that Gould has sometimes done to those with whom he disagrees, often right-wing figures. Unfortunately for Dennett, psychological penetration is not a gift of his, and he tends to miss the true reason for Gould's main heretical detachment from Darwinian "orthodoxy." Dennett's chief argument with Gould is on the important matter of *gradualism* which Gould thinks is not a necessary part of Darwinian orthodoxy, but which Dennett thinks is impossible to detach from evolutionary thought without destroying it. The issue is whether Darwin was correct when he said that evolutionary change must be by "slow and insensible degrees" and then stipulated that the fossil record would either suffice to prove or disprove his theory. In fact, as Gould is acutely aware, the fossil record does not show gradualism in the sense that there is no gradation of fossilized species that show a slow and gradual transition of one form from another. Rather the fossil record indicates that species change occurs in jumps and leaps, and much attention is being currently paid to the issue by evolutionary biologists as a result.

Dennett is not a biologist but a philosopher and he has more at stake than Gould in the fixity of gradualism as a part of Darwinian orthodoxy. He counters Gould by arguing that the fossil record only *appears* to show a "punctuated" type of species change rather than a

gradual one. His solution argues in effect that the fossil evidence is irrelevant, for if it had shown gradualism in species change, then Darwinism would be validated. By arguing that the lack of gradualism in the fossil record is no counter to Darwinism, Dennett implies that the validity of the doctrine of gradualism (and all of Darwinism) is unaffected by what the fossil record shows. This is a self-defeating defense, for in Popper's terminology, if Darwinian gradualism is not falsifiable, it is not a scientific theory. This is not merely a point of scientific logic, for on many other fronts, it is apparent that what Dennett is promoting is not Darwinism as a scientific theory but as something else entirely.

For Dennett gradualism is more than a possibly detachable part of a scientific theory, but rather a first principle of his evolutionary philosophy. For him, as implicitly, for evolutionary theory since its first formulation by Darwin, time acts as a creative principle. Problems of how the eye or other complex organs could arrive in gradual stages, as well as the arrival of whole organisms and species themselves, are answered by the assertion that given enough time for accidental forms to occur and then be culled by the operation of natural selection, literally anything is possible. This explanation is questionable enough when Darwinism is applied to life forms, *i.e.*, to its proper sphere in biology, but it becomes even more problematic when applied to areas outside of biology, where Dennett applies it to explain the origins of mind, culture, and ethics. Here we see the reason for his emphasis on gradualism, for each transition point in the time-line of universal development, the arrival of mind for example, is accomplished according to Dennett, simply and perfectly by the fact that the development took place gradually. Again, slow development by insensible degrees is not a falsifiable scientific theory for Dennett

but a creative metaphysical principle, and thus his disdainful accusations against those intellectuals who deny gradualism: Gould in the origin of species, Chomsky in the origin of language, Searle and Penrose in the origin of mind.

Why the excessive praise for this book, at least as exemplified by the blurb quotes? The answer is not that Dennett has presented Darwinism as a coherent philosophy, but rather that he has given a scientific veneer to a cultural moment, namely that point we have now reached when Enlightenment thought has reached its limits. Modern liberalism has now reached the point of exhaustion where it no longer has the epistemological confidence that it can prove its basic assumptions about progress, toleration, and human rights, and where it detects that the intellectual basis of its underlying philosophy has been sapped by the cultural forces of relativism, both moral and intellectual. Faced with the need to express its traditional Enlightenment values, yet unable to prove them, current modernism relies on a philosophy of "Liberal ironism," to use Richard Rorty's phrase. Dennett's book is an expression of liberal ironism, a form not of "post-modernism" which accepts the relativity of cultures and scientific theories, but of "late-modernism," which accepts somehow that it cannot prove what it holds most dear. The contradictions and manifest lapses in Dennett's presentation are inherently part of the ironism of late-modernism, for if we cannot even hope for intellectual coherence, why try to attain it? Dennett argues at the end of his book that "meaning" can exist in a universe which has evolved completely by accident and his one point of humility comes when he recognizes that hyper-Darwinism cannot provide a rational basis for ethics and settles for the hope that it may come one day soon. He argues against the "greedy reductionism" of B.F. Skinner and of sociobiologists,

and yet he cannot provide a stopping point on the slippery slope of reduction where meaning becomes intrinsic.

What Dennett is arguing is not that his hyper-Darwinism is true, but that we ought to have faith in it, for evolutionism is not simply an important scientific theory, but functions, as philosopher Mary Midgley has said, as a religion. Dennett's book makes it clear, whatever his own thought or intention, that while his hyper-Darwinism does not make revealed religion less credible in some way, but is nevertheless itself functionally a religion. Indeed, Dennett writes often in the middle sections of the book of Darwinian "orthodoxy," which he willingly and explicitly defends against the attacks of its critics, whom he treats not as fellow intellectuals in pursuit of academic truths, but literally as if they are heretics. Remarkably, he treats not religious writers or Idealist philosophers in this way (they are apparently beneath Dennett's notice), but many of the leading scientists and intellectuals of the day, which is in keeping with traditional theological controversy which treats heretics more harshly than those outside the pale altogether. The internal contradictions of hyper-Darwinism make it an incoherent alternative to revealed religion. Which is it easier to say: "I believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth"? or "I believe in an ineffable algorithm which exists in Platonic Design Space, on which the universe, all creatures living and dead, and man's thought depend"? As Dennett says at the very end of this book: "You be the judge."

The Godless Constitution

THOMAS E. WOODS, JR.

The Godless Constitution: The Case Against Religious Correctness, by Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *New York: Norton, 1996.*
\$22.00.

CONTROVERSY CONTINUES to surround issues of religion and government because so few Americans understand what the Framers meant by "the separation of church and state." They can scarcely be blamed for their ignorance, for the testimony of the early republic regarding both the role of religion and the proper jurisdictions to which such matters should be referred has been swept away by an imperial Supreme Court, whose antagonism toward religious expression and local control allows for scant deference to traditional constitutional interpretation and historical precedent. In *The Godless Constitution*, Cornell Professors Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore claim to sort out these issues for the layman, but their book is so rife with serious omissions and partisan attacks that its fruits for the average reader can only be confusion and error.

To their credit, Kramnick and Moore admit that six states in the early republic had established churches: New Hampshire, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Georgia, Maryland, and South Carolina; Massachusetts retained its own religious establishment until 1833. They concede that the "religious clauses of the First Amendment to the constitution placed

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