

***Darwin and Evolution – Interfaith Perspectives:  
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My copy of the quarterly *Interface: A Forum for Theology in the World* arrived a couple of weeks back, and stayed in my 'read in the train' satchel until I was indeed on VLine three days ago. A theme issue on 'Darwin and Evolution – Interfaith Perspectives', my first thought was 'OK, but I'm getting tired of Darwin analyses'. I should have read this issue as soon as it arrived!

An Introduction (translated from Jacques Arnould OP's French original) notes that the controversial volume *Essays and Reviews* by seven Anglican theologians, issued in the same year as *The Origin of Species*, outsold it ten to one and in a fifth of the time. Which — knowing the former better than the latter volume — made me think, and keep reading. It is followed by an excellent opening chapter by Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlette, reviewing the 'long, strange trip' of Darwin's work in the 150 years since, notable for setting 'anti-theism' within their scale of religious responses. This essay would be an excellent introduction to debates over evolutionary ideas for undergraduates struggling with creation, 'creationism', ID and the like.

The three chapters which follow, however, broke new ground for me. Chapters 2 and 3 offer complementary Muslim responses to Darwin: the first, by two Indonesian Islamic scholars, focusses on issues of identity in the Muslim world in relation to evolution, in particular analysing the recent rise of polemical opposition to it from Harun Yahya (a name which I will now look out for), and with a very useful bibliography. The other, by Muhammad Kamal of the Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne, carefully catalogues 'Islamic Response to Darwin's Theory of Evolution' from the Qur'an onwards. Both contain very useful insights for non-Muslim readers.

Chapter 4 is by Rachel Kohn, well-known scholar and ABC religion journalist. She gives a readable sweep of Jewish responses, from Genesis through midrash, Kabbalism, Maimonides to contemporary Jewish perspectives from ultra-Orthodox to Reform. One interesting point she makes is that, unlike Christianity, Judaism has no central point of authority, so the notion that one might be denying what is 'orthodox' is less problematic for Jewish believers.

All these are good and instructive reading, extending usual Christian approaches. But the high-point of the volume to my mind is the essay by Stephen Ames, Melbourne Anglican theologian of acutely interesting orthodoxy. His chapter entitled 'Why would God use evolution?' outlines quite brilliantly a theologically-informed philosophical response to the

deep moral challenge posed by his question: 'Why would a loving God be so seemingly wasteful in divine creativity?' Ames' essay arises from years of teaching 'God and the Natural Sciences' at the University of Melbourne to ideologically mixed classes, and this experience shows through. It is a first-rate piece, alert to the possible introduction of assumptions that disguise the conclusions reached, and beautifully alive to the life-giving nature of trinitarian faith. It shows promise of being developed into a full-scale monograph.

Chapter 6 surveys approaches to Genesis before Darwin, reaching a nuancedly clarified conclusion that 'scripture needs liberating from science' – the vice versa is the 'usual' case. The volume concludes with a sparkling final chapter from Jacques Arnould again, this time seeking to speculate on how Christian theology might react to a new scientific discovery of intelligent life on other planets (but missing the well-known insights of CS Lewis of half a century back).

This is not a long *Interface*, and it is noteworthy for being eminently readable. I commend it highly to all interested in the way faith, observation and experiment contribute to all areas of knowledge, not least the empirical sciences and theology, *scientiarum regina*.

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