

## Evolutionary Darwinism – Neuhaus

Richard John Neuhaus, “The Public Square,” *First Things*, March 2002, 81–82.

In science, as in every other purely human endeavor, new insights take a battering from the established orthodoxies that they threaten. Certainly that is true of Darwinism as it is challenged by alternative explanations that go under the general heading of Intelligent Design. The December 21 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* provides a balanced report from the front, “Darwinism Under Attack.” The Darwinist establishment is increasingly on the defensive, as is also evident in a series of near-hysterical attacks on Intelligent Design theory in the *New York Review of Books*. A hero in all this is Phillip E. Johnson, who is not a scientist but a law professor with a razor-sharp ability to expose logical and philosophical sleight of hand. We are pleased to have published his arguments in these pages, along with those of mathematician William Dembski and biochemist Michael Behe. These are the three names most prominently associated with Intelligent Design, although others are coming over to their side and, as *Chronicle* reports, many others are acknowledging the inadequacies of Darwinist explanations. Recently, in response to a PBS series that toes the conventional Darwinist line, more than a hundred scientists signed a full-page advertisement, published in the *New Republic* and elsewhere, declaring that they are “skeptical of claims for the ability of random mutation and natural selection to account for the complexity of life.” We will continue to publish Johnson, Behe, Dembski, et alia, although I know it makes some readers nervous. In the minds of many, the brightest of bright lines that distinguish the intellectually sophisticated from the great unwashed was drawn at the Scopes trial in Tennessee in 1925. When it comes to culture and academic respectability, Christians who are insecure about what they view as their newly won “place at the table” are terrified that they might be suspected of harboring “creationist” sympathies. They should get over it. The long overdue scientific and philosophical challenge to Darwinism is not in the defense of a literal reading of Genesis; it is in the service of clear thinking. With respect to the origin and complex development of life forms, clear thinking begins with recognizing what we do not know. Dembski puts it nicely: “An argument from ignorance is still better than a pipe dream in which you’re deluding yourself. I’m at least admitting to ignorance as opposed to pretending that you’ve solved the problem when you haven’t.” The Darwinist theory of the survival of the

fittest is sheer tautology. Why did a life form survive? Because it was the fittest. And how do we know it was the fittest? Because it survived. It is after-the-fact rationalization. Any theory claiming that both rape and kindness, both genocide and generosity, are survival techniques is somewhat lacking in explanatory power. Then there is [82] the not so little matter of philosophical materialism and its attendant atheism. Some Darwinists say they are only methodologically materialist and atheist, but the method is the message. In asking how the complexity of life came about, why would one begin from a philosophical premise of materialism and atheism that, on the basis of clear reason, one believes is false? Unless, of course, one believes the premise is true, in which case the premise and any possible conclusion are neatly conflated. In the name of science, a good many Darwinists have for a long time been promoting a particular philosophy, and a depressingly third-rate philosophy at that. The *Chronicle* article quotes Scott Minnich, a professor of microbiology and biochemistry at the University of Idaho: “Is it wrong to ask students to stop and think, given time and what we know of biochemistry and molecular genetics, whether blind chance and necessity can build machines that dwarf our creative ability? Is that a legitimate question? I think it is.” Exactly. It’s among the questions to which these pages will continue to be open. Evolutionary dogmatists and those intimidated by them can read the *New York Review of Books*.