

William E. Carroll

After Darwin, Aquinas: A Universe Created and Evolving

Theological implications of evolutionary biology seem to run the gamut from various forms of a "new atheism," according to which the acceptance of contemporary science requires a denial of the existence of God, to radical revisions of divine omnipotence, immutability, and of what it means for God to be Creator. John Haught famously remarked: after Darwin "any thoughts we may have about God can hardly remain the same as before." The novelty, dynamism, chance, and self-organizing principles in nature may well challenge some notions of God as orderer and designer, but they do not challenge the conception of God, especially a transcendent God who is Creator of all that is, in whatever way things are, set forth by Thomas Aquinas. Nor must one limit divine omnipotence to make room, so to speak, for a vibrant natural order discovered by science. In fact, developments in evolutionary biology after Darwin encourage a reaffirmation of Thomas' understanding of both God's creative act and the relative self-sufficiency of nature. Thomas helps us see that we need not choose between a robust understanding of divine causality and the appropriate autonomy and dynamism of the created order. God is not a cause among other causes in the world such that the more one attributes causal efficacy to God, for example, the less one would have to attribute causality to nature. Creation, as Thomas understands it, makes evolutionary processes possible and intelligible.

After discussing some key issues of substance metaphysics in its encounter with the theory of evolution (hylomorphism, transformism of species, teleology, chance, the principle of proportionate causation), I present a Thomistic response to its major hypotheses. Concerning the philosophy of Aquinas I trace what might be seen as a preliminary description of natural selection in his commentary on Aristotle's Physics. Turning toward theology, besides addressing the topics that were referred to in the past—such... 12. After Darwin, Aquinas: A Universe Created and Evolving William E. Carroll pp. 299-337 At the 2000 Jubilee Session for scientists, held at the Vatican in May of that year, Archbishop Józef Świątek offered an eloquent assessment of contemporary discourse on the relationship between the natural sciences and theology. He ended his address with the comment that what is needed today is a new Thomas Aquinas. I remember 13. Evolutionary Theism and the Emergent Universe Józef Świątek pp. 338-354 The 150th anniversary of the publication of Charles Darwin's The... We might even say: After Darwin, Marx. Evolution and the Metaphysics of Creation: The Insights of Thomas Aquinas. The fascination with Darwin, and the use of him to support a Marxist view of reality, ought not to be surprising. Thomas Aquinas offers a powerful antidote to the confusion between developments in the natural sciences and in metaphysics, the science of being as being. For Aquinas, metaphysics transcends (but does not contradict) natural science. To create is to cause existence itself, and all things are totally dependent on the Creator for the very fact that they are. It is an error to think that God's causal agency differs only in degree from the causes that operate in the natural order.