

## SHAKING THE DARWINIAN FOUNDATIONS

“[W]hatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence, as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end...”

St Thomas Aquinas<sup>1</sup>

New Zealand molecular biologist, Dr Michael Denton, was the first secular scientist to provide a comprehensive attack on the scientific community’s faith in Darwin’s theory of evolution with his book *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* published in 1985<sup>2</sup>. This was his conclusion:

“Neither of the two fundamental axioms of Darwin’s macroevolutionary theory—the concept of the continuity of nature, that is, the idea of a functional continuum of all life forms linking all species together and ultimately leading back to a primaeval cell, and the belief that all the adaptive design of life has resulted from a blind random process—have been validated by one single empirical discovery or scientific advance since 1859. Despite more than a century of intensive effort on the part of evolutionary biologists, the major objections raised by Darwin’s critics such as Agassiz, Pictet, Bronn and Richard Owen have not been met.”<sup>3</sup>

For reasons connected with his commitment to materialism, however, Dr Denton continued to hold to the Darwinian theory. He remarked: “Reject Darwinism and there is, in effect, no scientific theory of evolution.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet his pursuit of the truth would not let him rest, and thirteen years later he produced another book, *Nature’s Destiny: How the Laws of Biology reveal Purpose in the Universe*<sup>5</sup>, in which he exposes the evidence for design and finality in the natural world. He says in the prologue:

“I believe the evidence [produced here] strongly suggests that the cosmos is uniquely fit for only one type of biology—that which exists on earth—and that the phenomenon of life cannot be instantiated (sic) in any other exotic chemistry or class of material forms. Even, more radically, I believe that there is a considerable amount of evidence for believing that the cosmos is uniquely fit for only one type of advanced intelligent life—beings of design and biology very similar to our own species...”<sup>6</sup>

He goes further—

“[T]his ‘unique fitness’ of the laws of nature for life is entirely consistent with the older teleological religious concept of the cosmos as a specially designed whole and mankind as its primary goal and purpose.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Summa Theologiae.*, 1, q. 2, a. 3

<sup>2</sup> *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, London, 1985

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.355.

<sup>5</sup> The Free Press, New York, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> *Nature’s Destiny: How the Laws of Biology reveal Purpose in the Universe*, The Free Press, New York, 1998, Note to the Reader, p. xiii

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi. Teleology is the study of the evidences for design, or purpose, in nature.

In his review of *Nature's Destiny*, Monsignor John F. McCarthy of the Roman Theological Forum, remarks that the book is "a pathfinder for the sincere Darwinian who is striving to find his way out of the purposeless world of 'evolution by chance alone'." A student of the issues could not do better than to read Monsignor McCarthy's reviews of this book and its predecessor.<sup>8</sup> Both books can be obtained via booksellers on the internet.

### **Dr Denton's Materialism**

There is a long passage in the prologue to *Nature's Destiny* in which Dr Denton defends his position against suggestions that he has, perhaps unwittingly, provided grist for the theological mill.

"Because this book presents a teleological interpretation of the cosmos which has obvious theological implications, it is important to emphasize at the outset that the argument presented here is entirely consistent with the basic naturalistic assumption of modern science—that the cosmos is a *seamless unity which can be comprehended ultimately in its entirety by human reason and in which all phenomena, including life and evolution and the origin of man, are ultimately explicable in terms of natural processes*. This is an assumption which is entirely opposed to that of the so-called 'special creationist school'. According to special creationism, living organisms are not natural forms, whose origin and design were built into the laws of nature from the beginning, but rather contingent forms analogous in essence to human artifices, the result of a series of supernatural acts, involving God's direct intervention in the course of nature, each of which involved the suspension of natural law. Contrary to the creationist position, the whole argument presented here is critically dependent on the presumption of the unbroken continuity of the organic world—that is, on the reality of organic evolution and on the presumption that all living organisms on earth are natural forms in the profoundest sense of the word, no less natural than salt crystals, atoms, waterfalls, or galaxies.

"In large measure, therefore, the teleological argument presented here and the special creationist worldview are mutually exclusive accounts of the world. In the last analysis, evidence for one is evidence against the other..."<sup>9</sup>

Dr Denton shares with the overwhelming majority of scientists adherence to the philosophy of materialism. When he says that his argument "is entirely consistent with the basic naturalistic assumption of modern science", he is referring to this philosophical position.

His materialism inclines him to regard the evidence of experience as determinative of what must be. Science observes in the world a process—*favourable conditions; inanimate being; living being*. According to the presuppositions of materialism there is no other influence in the world but matter, matter evolving in accordance with the process science claims to observe. This process, then, is an inevitable part of the laws

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<sup>8</sup> "The Failure of Darwinism and its fuller implications", at <http://www.rtforum.org/lt/lt26.html> and "Dr Michael Denton's *Nature's Destiny*", at <http://www.rtforum.org/lt/lt117.html>

<sup>9</sup> *Nature's Destiny*, op. cit., Note to the Reader, pp. xvii-xviii; emphasis in original.

of nature. So “[the] origin and design [of natural forms] were built into the laws of nature from the beginning...” and “the unbroken continuity of the organic world [grounds] the presumption that all living organisms on earth are natural forms... no less natural than salt crystals, atoms, waterfalls, or galaxies.”

By ‘natural forms’ Dr Denton does not mean what is implicit in Aristotle and explicit in the teaching of St Thomas—the exemplary forms in the mind of the author of nature realised (ie, made real) in the material instances which fall under our senses. He means the categories of things observed by science, inanimate and animate, into which matter is (allegedly) observed to evolve in an inevitable continuum. In the same way, when he uses the word ‘law’ in the expression ‘the laws of nature’ he does not mean what the metaphysician means by it—an ordinance of intellect imposed on nature by its author and manifested in the behaviour of its elements<sup>10</sup>. He uses the term analogously: the scientist observes the rigour with which behaviour of a certain sort occurs in nature and, so constant is this behaviour, he regards himself as entitled to call it a law.

Nor, when he uses the term ‘contingent’ does he use it in the way the metaphysician uses it. When he says that creationists regard “living organisms [not as] natural forms, whose origin and design were built into the laws of nature from the beginning but rather contingent forms” he charges creationists with an unnecessary interruption of the inevitable progression of nature allegedly observed by science. For the metaphysician the material instances of natural forms are contingent; they can both be and be-not: though the forms themselves are fixed. The materialist (following Dr Denton) does not distinguish the natural forms from the matter in which they are observed. He regards the natural forms as *necessary* manifestations of matter in the evolutionary process.

He is right when he says that creationists regard these forms as “analogous in essence to human artifices”, though creationists would put it more appropriately (and elegantly) that the works of man (‘the artificial’) are analogous to the forms that the creator has first placed in nature (‘the natural’). He is right, too, when he says that these forms are the result of ‘supernatural acts’.<sup>11</sup> But it is questionable whether he means what the creationists mean by that term. For the materialist the creation of natural things is supernatural because beyond the scope of *his* idea of the natural order, the inevitable appearance of species in the asserted evolutionary march. This is what he is referring to when he says “God’s direct intervention in the course of nature [involves] the suspension of natural law”. It is a suspension of what *he thinks is* a law. One gets the impression that Dr Denton regards the creationists’ God as an interloper instead of the one on whom, for good reasons, they hold the world is utterly dependent; he who not only gives the world its nature (and the natural law)

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 91, a. 1: “[A] law is nothing else but a dictate of practical reason emanating from the ruler who governs a perfect community. It being accepted that the world is ruled by Divine providence, it is evident... that the whole community of the universe is governed by the Divine reason. Hence, the very idea of the government of things in God the ruler of the universe has the nature of a law...”

<sup>11</sup> More precisely, *miraculous* acts; cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 113, a. 10

but its very existence. But according to his lights, 'God' is an interloper, something unnecessary, since evolutionary theory explains all.

In *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* he mentions in passing the view of Plato, from which the metaphysical view is derived, that—

“all individual entities were physical expressions of a finite number of ideal unchanging forms. Applied to the biological sphere, it followed that there were fixed bounds determined by the form of the underlying type beyond which biological variation could not go: nature was, therefore, fundamentally discontinuous.”<sup>12</sup>

In the eyes of the materialist continuity is everything. Once break the material chain and you allow the need for an explanation for phenomena other than a material explanation.

Dr Denton asserts the superiority of the modern scientific view over the creationist view because science holds that the cosmos can be comprehended in its entirety by human reason. What he means by this is that the whole of reality is adequately explained by an unfolding flow in a material continuum. Given the effort he has put into *Nature's Destiny*, he can hardly be satisfied with this assertion. It is unconvincing, in any event, given his concession that scientists have not the slightest understanding of the constitutive of living things, nor of how they came to exist in the first place.<sup>13</sup>

He asserts the existence of the laws of nature as a materialist must, something accidental, something established by blind chance. His materialism prevents him making the obvious induction that laws (even those imposed on blind natural things) presuppose a lawgiver. The remark of St Thomas quoted at the head of this article is to the point: no being can aim towards some end unless directed by intelligence. The presence of living creatures on earth is not the result of the laws of nature. Rather, the laws of nature are necessary corollaries of the presence of living creatures—manifestations of the order placed in their being by an intelligent creator.

Dr Denton has progressed in *Nature's Destiny* from the position he held in *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*. He has passed from the negative position of showing the defects in evolutionary theory to the positive one of demonstrating the manifold evidences of design and finality in nature. However, in another sense he has regressed, retreated further into materialism. In his first book, in a chapter entitled *The Enigma of Life's Origin*, he reported on the effects in the scientific community of the failure of the 1976 *Viking* probe to find evidence of life on Mars:

“Science can only deal with repeatable or recurrent events... If life is unique to Earth then this means that it has only arisen once in all cosmic history, which would essentially exclude any sort of scientific approach to the problem of its origin... If *Viking* had found evidence of life on Mars it would have put paid once and for all to the possibility of life being unique to Earth... A very serious

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<sup>12</sup> *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, op. cit., p. 19

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Nature's Destiny*, op. cit., pp. 292-3.

philosophical shadow clouding the whole issue of the origin of life would have been removed.”<sup>14</sup>

He concluded:

“At present, if we are to exclude UFOs and the claims of Von Däniken and his fellow travellers, there is not one shred of evidence for extraterrestrial life, and there is no way of excluding the possibility of life being unique to Earth with all the philosophical consequences this entails.”<sup>15</sup>

In *Nature's Destiny*, however, he seems to have forgotten these conclusions in his enthusiasm over “the growing consensus that the origin of life is built into the laws of nature and... [is] therefore inevitable on any planetary surface where conditions permit it.”<sup>16</sup> In the first book he demonstrated the utter lack of logic in the evolutionists' position. In the second he has demonstrated his own lack of logic by ignoring his own arguments against their position.

### **Reluctance among Catholics to abandon the Evolutionary Thesis**

In the course of setting out the history of the alteration in scientific attitude towards nature in *Nature's Destiny*, Dr Denton quotes the following passage from Robert Chambers, author of the 1840 publication, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, in support of the quasi-religious view that “evolution had been written into the cosmic script from the beginning”.

“How can we suppose an immediate exertion of [the]creative power at one time to produce zoophytes, another to add a few marine molluscs, another to bring in one or two conchifers again to produce crustaceous fishes... This would surely be to take a very mean view of the creative power... Some other idea must then be come to with regard to the mode in which the Divine Author proceeded in the organic creation... We have seen powerful evidence that the construction of this globe and its associates, and inferentially of all the other globes of space, was the result not of any immediate or personal exertion on the part of the Deity, but of natural laws which are expressions of his will... [T]he fact of the cosmical arrangements being an effect of natural law is a powerful argument for the organic arrangements being so likewise, for how can we suppose that the august Being who brought all these countless worlds into form by the simple establishment of a natural principle flowing from his mind, was to interfere personally and specially on every occasion when a new shell-fish or reptile was to be ushered into existence on *one* of these worlds? Surely the idea is too ridiculous to be for a moment entertained.”<sup>17</sup>

This ‘religious’ view shows the influence on Chambers of the subjectivist mood, and an incipient materialism. To Almighty God’s revelation of how he went about the work of creation, Chambers preferred his own idiosyncratic analysis which, be it noted, relied on nothing more than a perception that the development of natural forms must follow what the scientists of his time had induced (not *deduced*) to be the result “of natural laws which are the expressions of [God’s] will.” His conclusion was gratuitous.

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<sup>14</sup> *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, op. cit., p. 255

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260

<sup>16</sup> *Nature's Destiny*, op. cit., p. 265 et seq.

<sup>17</sup> *Nature's Destiny*, op. cit., pp. 269-70

Formed in the one religion on earth which is rooted in realism, Catholics ought to be free of the influence of materialism and resistant to the clamour for some sort of evolutionist explanation for creation, but they are not. Like Robert Chambers, modern Catholic philosophers and theologians are prepared to ignore sacred scripture in their insistence that the forms of natural things must somehow bear within them the seeds of change—a sort of God-directed evolution. This attitude panders to the spirit of the age; it is fashionable, driven by the fear of ridicule. It is unnecessary. The categories of metaphysics militate against any form of evolutionism.

Each living creature is comprised of prime matter and substantial form. Its substantial form (its soul) is an instance of an essence, fixed and determinate, which makes it both to live and to be what it is. The alleged seeds of change could not be in the prime matter from which the natural thing is formed, for prime matter is of itself utterly formless. They could only be in the natural thing as a second (or third, or fourth...) substantial form—for the assertion of evolutionists is that evolution effects a *substantial* change in the thing. But St Thomas teaches that it is impossible for more than one substantial form to be in one body. Among his reasons is the following:

“[A]n animal would not be absolutely one in which there were several souls. For nothing is absolutely one except by the one form by which a thing has existence: because a thing has from the same source both its existence and its unity... If, therefore, man were living by one form—the vegetative soul, and animal by another form—the sensitive soul, and man by another form—the intellectual soul, it would follow that man is not absolutely one. Thus Aristotle... against those who hold that there are several souls in the body... asks, *what contains them?*—that is, what makes them be one? It cannot be said that they are united by the one body; because it is the soul that contains the body, rather than the reverse.”<sup>18</sup>

It follows that there is no possible repository for the alleged evolutionary principle in the living thing.

### **Sacred Scripture and the Church’s Consideration**

There is nothing in sacred scripture to support a concession to any sort of evolutionism. The Book of Genesis offers two descriptions of creation, on their face contradictory. Almighty God is said to create everything at once (*simul*), and yet to do so over six days. St Thomas solves the dilemma.

“God created all things together so far as regards their substance in some measure formless. But He did not create all things together, so far as regards that formation of things which lies in distinction and adornment.” (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 74, a. 2, ad 2).<sup>19</sup>

In his answer to the previous objection in the same article of the *Summa Theologiae*, he explains what he means—

“On the day God created heaven and earth, he created also every plant of the field, not indeed in act, but before it sprung up in the earth, that is, in potency.” (I, q. 74, a. 2, ad 1).

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<sup>18</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.76, a. 3

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *St Augustine & St Thomas on Creation*, at

[http://www.superflumina.org/creation\\_sts\\_augustine\\_&\\_thomas.html](http://www.superflumina.org/creation_sts_augustine_&_thomas.html)

And in answer to the fourth objection he says—

“All things were not distinguished and adorned together, not from a want of power on God’s part, as requiring time in which to work, but that due order might be observed in the instituting of the world. Hence it was fitting that different days should be assigned to the different states of the world, as each succeeding work added to the world a fresh state of perfection.” (I, q. 74, a. 2, ad 4).

Almighty God brought the various elements in his creation from potency to act as and when he willed. Catholics are not bound by a strict literalism to say that he did this in six calendar days.<sup>20</sup> Scientific studies do not harm, they assist, our faith by showing when he appears to have done so in respect of a great number of the immense variety of the species of living things. The Church allows an interpretation of sacred scripture that agrees generally with what natural history shows. Even using their best endeavours there is much the natural historians cannot tell us. Of one thing however, we can be certain: the form of every creature that has ever existed on the face of the earth emanates from, *and endures in*, the mind of God, who gave them both existence and life.

In his 1950 encyclical *Humani Generis*<sup>21</sup>, Pope Pius XII insisted on the soundness of the Church’s philosophy grounded in the metaphysics of St Thomas. He condemned those who assert that any kind of philosophy or theory with a few additions or corrections could be reconciled with Catholic dogma. He condemned also (amongst other philosophies) what he described as “the fictitious theories” of materialism [ibid., n. 32]. He urged caution in dealing with hypotheses with some sort of scientific foundation that impinge upon the Church’s doctrine:

“If such conjectural opinions are directly or indirectly opposed to the doctrine revealed by God, then the demand that they be recognised can in no way be admitted.” [n. 35]

Earlier in the encyclical, while noting that the hypothesis of evolution had not been fully proven even in the domain of the natural sciences [n. 5], he allowed that it was appropriate to study it. However, he remarked how—

“[s]ome imprudently and indiscreetly hold that evolution... explains the origin of all things, and audaciously support the monistic and pantheistic opinion that the world is in continual flux.” [n.5]

He referred to these tenets as “fictitious” and observed that they “repudiate all that is absolute, firm and immutable” [n.6].

*Humani Generis* was issued 57 years ago at a time when the investigations of science into the evolutionary claims were, so to speak, in their infancy. An immense amount of work has been done since then, with what absence of effect to secure the credibility of evolutionary theory Dr Denton’s two books have demonstrated.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Creation Rediscovered* at [http://www.superflumina.org/creation\\_rediscovered.html](http://www.superflumina.org/creation_rediscovered.html); *The Schismatic Tendency in Creation Science* at [http://www.superflumina.org/creation\\_schismatic\\_tendency.html](http://www.superflumina.org/creation_schismatic_tendency.html)

<sup>21</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> August 1950

Dr Denton's conclusion quoted above that there is no evidence whatsoever to justify Darwin's macro-evolutionary theory confirms at the scientific level what theology and sound philosophy have ever maintained. There is no need to make any concession to a philosophy which pays not the slightest respect to the doctrine of causality.

Michael Baker

25<sup>th</sup> July 2007—*Feast of St James, the Apostle*