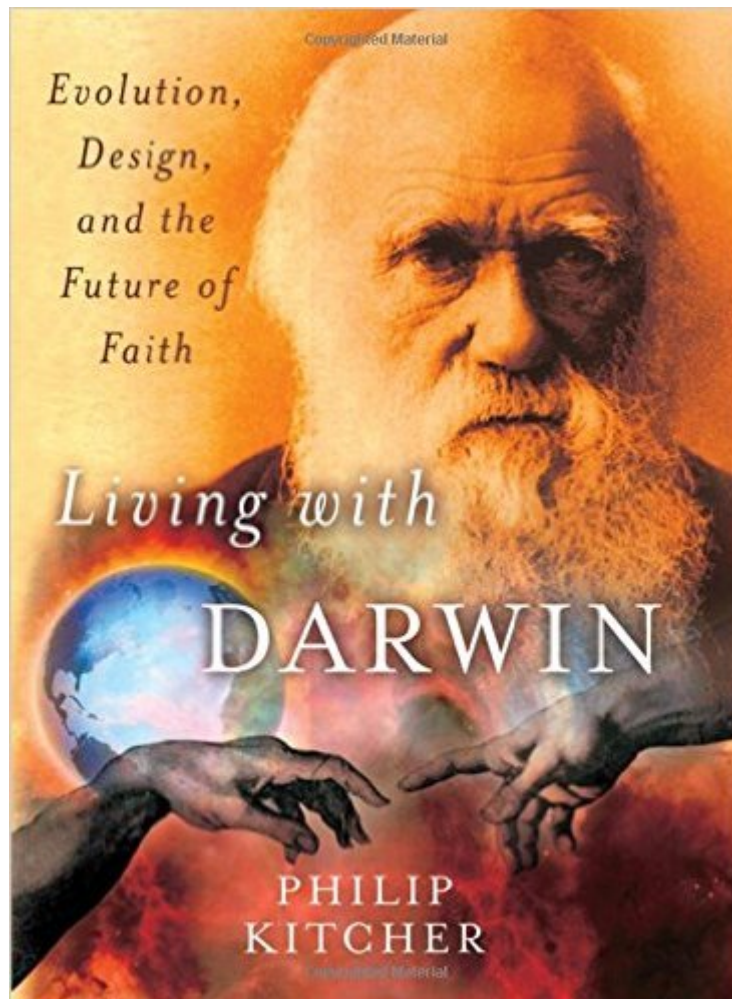


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Living With Darwin: Evolution, Design, And The Future Of Faith (Philosophy In Action)



Synopsis

Charles Darwin has been at the center of white-hot public debate for more than a century. In *Living With Darwin*, Philip Kitcher stokes the flames swirling around Darwin's theory, sifting through the scientific evidence for evolution, Creation Science, and Intelligent Design, and revealing why evolution has been the object of such vehement attack. Kitcher first provides valuable perspective on the present controversy, describing the many puzzles that blocked evolution's acceptance in the early years, and explaining how scientific research eventually found the answers to these conundrums. Interestingly, Kitcher shows that many of these early questions have been resurrected in recent years by proponents of Intelligent Design. In fact, Darwin himself considered the issue of intelligent design, and amassed a mountain of evidence that effectively refuted the idea. Kitcher argues that the problem with Intelligent Design isn't that it's "not science," as many critics say, but that it's "dead science," raising questions long resolved by scientists. But Kitcher points out that it is also important to recognize the cost of Darwin's success--the price of "life with Darwin." Darwinism has a profound effect on our understanding of our place in the universe, on our religious beliefs and aspirations. It is in truth the focal point of a larger clash between religious faith and modern science. Unless we can resolve this larger issue, the war over evolution will go on.

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Customer Reviews

It's a bit depressing, seeing a man of global outlook having to produce a book of such limited audience. Kitcher's philosophical study is an excellent summation of the false ideas forwarded by

anti-Darwin forces in the US. His approach is a needed one, that "creationists" of various stripes there must be addressed in rational terms, and on their own ground. He accomplishes the task with extraordinary skill and reserve. It's a badly-needed book, but it's a pity that this is so. It's to be hoped Kitcher's well-reasoned techniques applied here will reach a significant portion of that targeted readership. His approach is to categorise the themes of creationist writers as regards the value of the "science" they purport to espouse. He puts creationists in three basic forms: "Genesis" - the biblical "literalists"; "novelty" - special acts of creation by some supernatural interference; and the "anti-selectionists" - composed of the newer "Intelligent Design" advocates. "Anti-selectionism" has found a niche by contesting the concept of the Tree of Life, the graphic representation of gradual change in organisms over time to produce new forms. It isn't evolution itself these writers contest, but the details not readily explained by what we know now. Aimless mutations aren't enough to explain the complexity of some elements in certain organisms, they argue. Some undetectable "force" must be involved. The first two forms are adhered to by sincere, if dogmatic followers. The third is one that must be considered on the evidence under study. That consideration must adhere to the rules of scientific investigation to be valid. Kitcher understands that the challenge of the anti-selectionists isn't based on scientific, but on cultural, values.

I just finished this book last evening. It is an easy read being a synoptic treatment of the evidence supporting darwinism and the modern intelligent design criticisms. Kitcher takes us through the historical discoveries that undermined the biblical creation stories. For example, the earth is clearly much older than the bible indicates. There is no evidence for a worldwide Noah's flood. The evidence was so overwhelming that christian scholars, such as the Reverend Adam Sedgewick whom Kitcher quotes, had to admit that the biblical view was wrong. Biblical literalism was untenable after this point. Kitcher takes ID seriously but ultimately finds that it is just the argument from design. ID has much to say against natural selection, but nothing positive to say about an alternative process. It is dead science having been buried long ago. I was suprised by some other reviewers mentioning the 'Jesus Seminar'. Kitcher does not base anything on this group. In fact, they are not even in the index. They are only mentioned in two places. One, were he quotes their opinion on the effect of Mark's Ecce Homo scene where Pilate presents jesus to the mob. Let me quote it. "That scene, although the product of Mark's vivid imagination, has wrought untold and untellable tragedy in the history of the relation of Christians to Jews. There is no black deep enough to symbolize the black mark this fiction has etched in Christian history." (page 100). He quotes this where he is discussing the 'sitz im leben' of the gospels' composition. The other place is when

Kitcher refers back to this quote on page 162. Kitcher makes no use of them for anything. He relies instead on older scholars such as Wellhausen and others who did the early work on figuring out how the bible was written.

Philip Kitcher's *Living with Darwin* is one of the better discussions of the current battle between creationism and evolutionary theory. Much like the on-going feud about sexuality in Christian denominations, the creationism/evolution tussle is about much more than just the front line issues. It involves a bona fide worldview clash between naturalists and supernaturalists. To Kitcher's credit, he seems to recognize the narrow and comprehensive levels of the debate. He addresses the former in the first four chapters of this book. Arguing that creationism/ID has several varieties, he focuses on what he calls "Genesis creationism," which denies the ancient age of the earth; "novelty creationism," which claims that at least certain species are acts of special creation, thereby denying the one tree of life foundation of standard evolutionary theory; and "anti-selectionism," which argues that selection isn't a sufficient explanation for certain transitions, either from one species to the next in the development of "irreducibly complex" organs or organisms. Patiently and logically, these positions are addressed, respectively, in chapters 2-4. What I found most intriguing in Kitcher's book is his effort in the final chapter to reflect on the more comprehensive worldview clash that fuels the more specific ones between ID and evolution. Kitcher argues that evolution destroys the possibility of divine design in the universe, and that textual analysis and comparative religion studies destroys faith in the literal truth of sacred scripture. Supernatural religion, then, is as dead as ID. But the "music of faith" (p. 158) is still something we yearn for.

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