

'Theistic' Evolution: An Unnecessary Qualification

Gordon J. Glover, *Beyond the Firmament: Understanding Science and the Theology of Creation* (Chesapeake, VA: Watermark Press, 2007), 190-191.

<http://www.blog.beyondthefirmament.com/book-contents/>

For some Christians, the evidence for evolution is as clear as the evidence that the earth revolves around the sun. We can't observe evolution directly and probably will never be able to, but like the concept of our solar system, the theory of evolution is clearly inferred from those things which can be easily seen, like the fossil record. Some readers may have already concluded that my position can best be described by the term *Theistic Evolution*, but that is not entirely correct.

Actually, I can't stand this term. For me, it ranks right up there with "divine intervention" as one of the most oxymoronic theological phrases ever put together. But I guess there is just too much materialistic philosophical baggage associated with unbridled Darwinian thinking for Christians to allow the term "evolution" to exist all by itself. What better way to sanctify an "inherently" atheistic belief than to slap the *theistic* qualifier in front of it? Rather than just having plain ol' atheistic evolution, we now have a "theistic" version just for Christians.

I'm sure that the term *Theistic Evolution* is meant to imply that God "guides" evolutionary change by His hand of providence, thereby separating the *science* of evolution from the materialistic *philosophy* that often accompanies it. But if we really understand the sovereignty of God, why would any natural process need such a qualifier? This only perpetuates the false notion that the continuous operation of natural forces apart from miracles necessarily implies deism or atheism. Do we do this with any other scientific discipline? Think about this for a minute.

Take the modern science of meteorology for example. The Bible clearly states that God "makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses." [Jeremiah 10:13] Before mankind had the scientific tools to examine the patterns of natural behavior that cause changes in the weather, meteorological phenomena were directly attributed to divine providence without regard to secondary causes (the laws of nature). But the job of an atmospheric scientist is to try his or her best to explain the weather without reference to God. Are these meteorologists guilty of leaving God out of the picture? Does this make the naturalistic science of meteorology a Godless and atheistic discipline? Of course not! Nobody cares about a meteorologist's theology when he's giving a forecast!

Be assured: God's sovereignty over the universe is in no way diminished by the implied naturalism of the meteorological sciences. The doctrine of primary and secondary causes reminds us that God's providential governance of meteorological phenomena is not in competition with the discernable

patterns of material behavior that explain physical change in the weather. And neither does this fact make the science of meteorology inherently atheistic. Understanding the weather in terms of the continuous operation of the laws of nature is a noble vocation, appreciated by both theists and non-theists alike. We don't have to stick the "theistic" qualifier in front of it just to prove that it's acceptable for Christians to believe in or practice religiously neutral meteorology.

Have you ever seen your weatherman acknowledge God's sovereignty over the atmosphere? I have not, but I can just see the "controversy" unfolding—Christians across the country calling their local news channels complaining about the "atheistic bias" propagated by network television and demanding that "theistic meteorology" be given equal time during the nightly weather forecast! Public school textbooks will have to be re-written so that the meteorological sciences rightfully acknowledge God's providential governance over the weather. Teach the controversy!

Of course all of this is just plain silly. But why then do some Christians have to qualify their belief in evolutionary biology this way? If a biblical theology of creation is indeed the basis for the uniformity of nature, then all of the natural sciences already assume that God is working through secondary causes to govern the internal affairs of the cosmos. So when confronted by fellow Christians for the unpardonable sin of believing in naturalistic science, why not instead take the opportunity to explain that of all people, Christians should not fear the outcome of honest scientific inquiry because all of the natural sciences are based on God's sovereignty over creation?

Another problem with Theistic Evolution is that it takes another tentative scientific theory and gives it the status of a religious doctrine. Have we not learned anything from history? What will happen to today's Theistic Evolutionists if common descent gets overturned by new data? If the theory of evolution is wrong, then let it be wrong by the testimony of natural history, not because some Christians mistakenly think that it is inherently deistic or atheistic. On the other hand, if evolution is not inherently deistic or atheistic, then can we please drop the "theistic" qualifier? This only makes Christians sound petty.