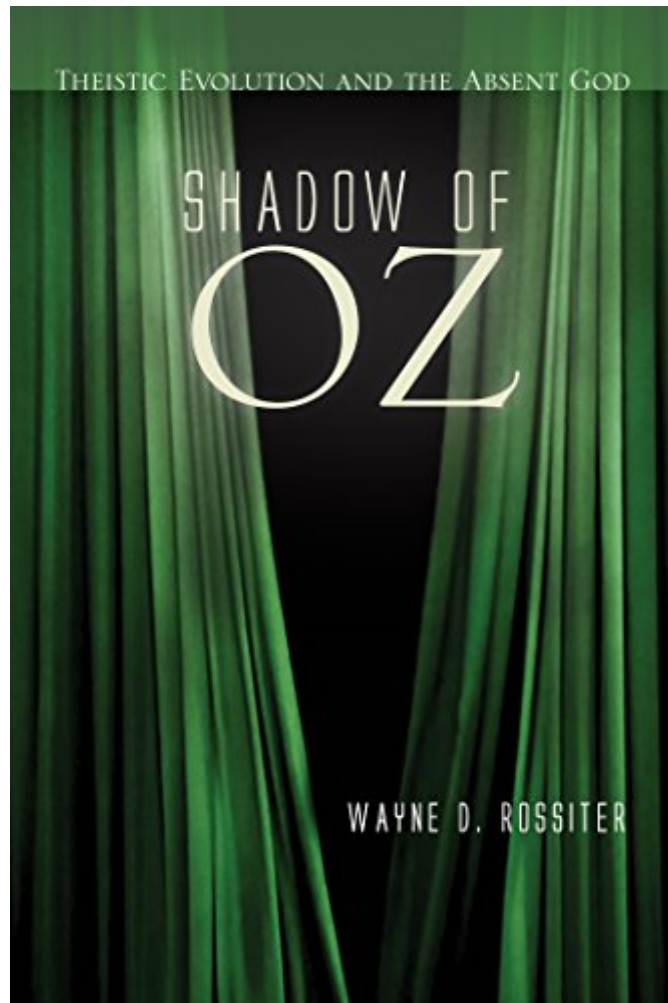




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Shadow Of Oz: Theistic Evolution And The Absent God



Synopsis

In the century and a half since Darwin's *Origin of Species*, there has been an ongoing--and often vociferously argued--conversation about our species' place in creation and its relationship to a Creator. A growing number of academic professionals see no conflict between Darwin's view of life and the Christian faith. Dubbed "theistic evolution," this brand of Christianity holds that God has used processes like Darwinian evolution to achieve his creation. But is that true? Can Darwin's mechanism of natural selection acting on chance mutations be reconciled with God's intentionality in producing particular outcomes? Does humanity represent the apex of his creation, or just an erasable and ephemeral signpost along a path still being revealed? Does theistic evolution permit God to intervene supernaturally in the workings of his creation? Can we as humans be made in the image of God if we are just one of the millions of products of evolution? Can we salvage concepts like freewill, meaning, purpose, or an eternal soul within theistic evolution? In this book, Wayne Rossiter assesses theistic evolution, and whether or not it is consistent with Christianity and secular science. His conclusion is that it bears little resemblance to classical Christianity, and promotes a century-old understanding of evolutionary theory. Theistic evolution renders God a passive player in creation, so far removed and undetectable that he resembles a mere shadow of the Creator described in Christianity. "As if the thorny terrain separating Darwinism from Design were not intimidating enough, Wayne Rossiter has parachuted into the thickest patch, where people of faith are contending with one another for the future of their faith. Loppers in one hand and a machete in the other, he wastes no time. You may not agree with every cut, but you have to admire his courage and you can't ignore his arguments."--Douglas Axe, Director, Biologic Institute "Professors everywhere are pressuring students into accepting the false view that neo-Darwinian evolution is scientifically correct and friendly to Christianity. *Shadow of Oz* will give students--and any other reader--the intellectual arguments to stand up and explain why theistic evolution is poor philosophy, illogical theology, and outdated science."--Casey Luskin, Research Coordinator, Discovery Institute "I highly recommend this book for anyone who is seriously engaged in the question of how God interacts with our world, typically cast as the debate between theistic evolution and intelligent design. Just as C. G. Hunter's book *Darwin's God* examined at length the theology of nineteenth-century evolutionists, Rossiter's book takes a focused and iconoclastic look at the theology of current theistic evolutionists such as Kenneth Miller, Karl Giberson, Francis Collins, and John Polkinghorne. Rossiter approaches the subject as an expert in biology, well aware of the nuances of the arguments. While I may disagree with some of his points, this book deserves to take its place as one of the key review texts of the modern debate."--David Snoke, Professor of Physics,

University of Pittsburgh Wayne Rossiter is Assistant Professor of Biology at Waynesburg University.

Book Information

File Size: 3290 KB

Print Length: 173 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 149822072X

Publisher: Pickwick Publications, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers (December 8, 2015)

Publication Date: December 8, 2015

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B0195NCKD2

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #809,286 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #45

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Christian Science #101 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Christian Science #262722 in Books > Religion & Spirituality

Customer Reviews

Excellent and very thorough coverage of the thorny problems surrounding a world view which is riddled with self contradiction. Rossiter unpacks the attitudes of theistic evolutionists very well. Theistic evolution has become the defacto standard for many sincere Christians who want to "fit in" with the secular world. Unfortunately, as Rossiter points out, this "fitting in" amounts to a wholesale abandonment of much basic Christian dogma. In effect, the views of the typical theistic evolutionist regarding the ability of God to influence the world are indistinguishable from the views of atheists.

Very few books taking the position of the author are written by college professors who teach Biology. It is an excellent work. Dr. Rossiter went out on a limb to write from this position. I admire his courage. Well written.

Shadow of Oz says so many things that need to be said in the task of understanding life as we find it. Dr. Rossiter is a biologist who self identifies as a "Christian professor at a Christian university" (Waynesburg University), who claims he once was "a staunch and cantankerous atheist" converted from his youthful Christianity by the logical consequences of Darwinian evolution he learned in college and university. He had just been published on the evolution of rattlesnake venom in the Journal of Molecular Evolution, in 2008 when illness forced him to face his personal mortality. What had made logical sense of proud atheism when young, bright, learning, and healthy with the pseudo-immortality of youth, suddenly revealed itself to him as an empty, dark, and destructive force of everything that made his personal life good, happy, hopeful, and with any shred of meaning. He reconverts to the Christianity that offered him something instead of nothing. At this point an evangelical atheist like Richard Dawkins would snort, "You see, Christianity is a fairy tale for those afraid of the dark!" (To which John Lennox would retort, "Richard, then Atheism is a fairy tale for those afraid of the Light!") But other Christians from the Bio-Logos camp would rush to comfort him, "No, no, Wayne, you can have your faith and evolution too!" with books like Francis Collins, The Language of God, Karl Giberson, Saving Darwin, John Pokinghorne, Belief, and Keith Miller with Only a Theory, and Finding Darwin's God. They all suggest Darwin and God can be in the same snug bed together, a philosophical stance known as Theistic Evolution, and that only foolish and ignorant would oppose the "dominant position of serious biologists who are also serious believers." Rossiter, a "serious biologist" has written this book to suggest that they are seriously mistaken, for two major reasons. The second reason that should give most traction with "serious believers" is that the Darwinian view eviscerates Christian theology, to a point that "Darwin's God" is absolutely unrecognizable. The atheists are more honest here, for they correctly assume that if naturalism alone is true, there is "no reason to think that God answers our prayers" (or offers that we) will live for eternity with God. The first reason, however, is the main focus of the book. Darwin's theory is no longer true among "serious biologist" who have learned that random point mutations and selection for fitness no longer can explain what we know about life. "There are winds of change in evolutionary biology and they are blowing from

many directions. The foundations of the evolutionary paradigm that has dominated Western views of evolution for the last 60 years are crumbling. These are not quotations from theists, this is the truth secular biologists know but do not openly discuss for fear it would confuse the public! You will have to buy and read this book to see the support given for these two assertions. If you are an atheist who reads this book, you will likely agree that if materialism is true (there is no supernatural, and the design we see in nature is no fingerprint of a designer) then Rossiter is correct: The scientists who promote and the theologians who have accepted an outdated and inaccurate version of Darwinian Evolution are whistling in the dark. The Christian who hopes to synthesize the God of the Bible, with the God seen in Darwinian or neo-Darwinian evolution, you may feel bruised by this book. For it suggests that if you have found comfort in Theistic Evolution you have done so at the expense of understanding the current facts of biology. Or you are not seriously considering what Darwinian Evolution logically does to your Christianity. Frankly, no matter the motives of Christian scientists, or Christian Theologians supposing, "why not just get along with Darwin, what really happens is you sacrifice God at the altar of Darwin, and never the other way around. This book is not for the casual. Rossiter asks us to actually do the hard work of fleshing out how Darwinian evolution works and what the God of theistic evolution looks like. This, when seriously considered, is often frightening ground to tread upon. And so it is, but I don't see how anyone from now on can promote theistic evolution without honestly dealing with this book. Now for what this book does not do. It does not offer guidance to Christian alternatives. It is only 7 chapters long, 177 paperback pages with references. And my only criticism is the lack of advocacy for a positive position. He clearly is too much of a scientist to accept Young Earth Creationism's anti-scientific positions on an impossible chronology of creation. And he criticizes the Theistic Evolution dismissal of Intelligent Design. But says, "I did not write this book so that I might carry water for the ID movement. I am sorry that other than pointing out the logical errors of Theistic Evolutionists who criticize ID, he could have suggested the paths he finds to explaining how he finds the God of the Bible evidenced in the natural world. So I will suggest that a Christian after reading this book, and finding Theistic Evolution a broken staff, not capable of bearing the weight of truth, instead of jumping over the cliff of atheism, or retreating into the comfort of blind Biblical literalism, that they consider a second and more fair look into Intelligent Design. Stephen Myer's seminal, Darwin's Doubt: The Explosive Origin of Animal Life and the Case for Intelligent Design, is a good place for

those interested into the impeccable science behind ID in paleontology. And then you can read David Klinghoffer's supporting volume, *Debating Darwin's Doubt: A Scientific Controversy That Can No Longer Be Denied*, about the scientific controversy it has created. Jay W. Richards edited, *God and Evolution* is a resource any Christian theologian should explore before a partly informed endorsement of Darwin. And ordinary Christians including students wanting to become extraordinarily informed about Intelligent Design and how it could bridge the gap between the God of Scripture with the God of Science, can read Gary Kemper's *Discovering Intelligent Design: A Journey Into the Scientific Evidence*. We hope that Dr. Rossiter will give us a subsequent book with the positive positions that he shares with his students after he has so effectively exposed the inadequacy of theistic evolution.

Wayne Rossiter followed an interesting path - from Christianity to Darwinism to a vocal atheism, to crisis and back to Christianity. While he remains a practicing scientist, he found himself troubled by the path chosen by many Christian intellectuals in attempting to maintain a purely Darwinian view of origins while claiming to hold to Christian beliefs. He begins the book with the troubling tale of a young college student who was so devastated by the destruction of his faith through Darwinism that he committed suicide. While extreme, this brief story sets the stage for the discussion of the uneasy marriage of two contradictory worldviews. Rossiter is clear from the beginning that the primary concern he has with Theistic Evolution is that it is an entire worldview that ultimately risks negating its own claims to being Christian or even theistic. In essence the theistic evolutionist adopts the posture of the non-theist, pure naturalism in the laboratory - an approach that enthrones the natural processes of cause and effect, pure unguided random processes acted upon by natural law and natural selection with no activity from outside the sphere of nature. Then in a sweeping sleight of hand, God is asserted back into the picture in a contradictory fashion where before it all began, God's purpose was to use this very purposeless chain of events to produce human beings with a spiritual nature. What is troubling to Rossiter is that when push comes to shove in the inevitable conflict of two opposite sets of ideas, the theistic Evolutionists virtually always choose to maintain the views of evolutionary naturalism and mold their theism to fit around it. Darwin always wins, Christianity always loses. He quotes William Provine to point out the difficulty of marrying theism with random and purposeless naturalism. "It starts by giving up an active Deity, then it gives up the hope that there's any life after death. When you give those two up, the rest of it follows fairly easily. You give up the hope that there's an immanent morality. And finally, there's no human free

will. If you believe in evolution, you can't hope for there being any free will. There's no hope whatsoever of there being any deep meaning in life: We live, we die, we're absolutely gone when we die. This is the worldview that theistic evolution attempts to marry with belief in God somehow. And predictably it leads to contradictions and irrational trains of thought. Rossiter identifies three key intellectual moves that theistic evolutionist typically make: 1) they adjust Christian claims so that they fit snugly around an unharmed evolutionary core, 2) they create artificial firewalls between their scientific and theological beliefs, or 3) they push God into the distant and undetectable cosmic background so that the universe only looks random (but isn't). Naturalistic evolution claims that all events in the history of the cosmos can be explained as the result of purely natural processes of cause and effect. In fact, non-theistic origins demands that this be so. Rossiter finds that theistic evolution is schizophrenic in that it accepts that everything can be explained by natural processes, but still asserts that somehow God is working behind it all, in a way that is entirely undetectable to observation. The contradiction is that if God is working or has preloaded a purpose into the scheme, then the processes are by definition not purely natural and not unguided and therefore not purely naturalistic. They cannot have it both ways. A process cannot be unguided and intended at the same time. And the claim that God is somehow "purposeful" in His use of natural processes is a pure blind assertion that has the flaw of not needing proof and the benefit of being beyond falsification. By pushing God to the realms of the undetectable, the theistic evolutionist shields himself from critique. While routinely throwing broadsides at Intelligent Design and Creationism for being contrary to the "scientific consensus", the theistic evolutionist hides his God behind a curtain where He cannot be seen, heard, touched or subjected to scrutiny. While repeatedly claiming ID and Creationism resort to a "god of the gaps" argument, TE resorts to that very type of argument when trying to explain free will in a purely cause and effect universe. The contradictions are many. Naming names such as John Polkinghorne, Francis Collins, Kenneth Miller and others, Rossiter identifies a number of irrational intellectual moves. How does one go from insisting God is outside of the processes of nature altogether and still hold to miraculous events at the center of Christianity such as the virgin birth and the resurrection? Questions about the historicity of Adam, and the possibility of the virgin birth come to the fore, the "universal acid" of Darwinism eating away at central Christian doctrines. Beyond doctrinal concerns, Rossiter cites problems with the concept of pure naturalism and the inevitable denial of free will. He discusses the problem of finding meaning and purpose in a universe that the naturalistic consensus says can have no guiding

purpose and must be purely random. In every case, the theistic evolutionist merely asserts an invisible, undetectable God to the background of a purely naturalistic worldview and claims victory while being blind to the leaps of logic and contradictions required to get there. Rossiter is a scientist and he also takes issue with the science behind theistic evolution, arguing that the theistic evolutionists are defending ideas that the cutting edge of science has been slowly abandoning. His chapter on the recent advances in Evolutionary biology is tough sledding for the non-scientist, but makes the point that the usual "random change plus natural selection leads to an undisputed tree of life" narrative is increasingly untenable. Advances in genetics question the tree of life, epigenetics complicates previously held mechanisms for evolutionary advancement. Population statistics question previously held views of lineages. In short, the Theistic Evolutionist is marrying theism to views that are far from current all the while claiming to be on secure intellectual footing far above their counterparts in ID or Creationism. Rossiter briefly mentions that he is not a young-earth creationist, though he seems to sympathize with those who are for the mistreatment heaped on them over the years. He seems to have strong leanings toward intelligent design but does not specifically discuss his own views on origins. For this book, his purpose is purely to discuss the problems with theistic evolution. In the end, while holding a fairly nebulous Christianity in one hand and a commitment to naturalism in the other, the theistic evolutionist eventually finds that naturalism gobbles up the theism and nothing distinctly Christian is left.

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