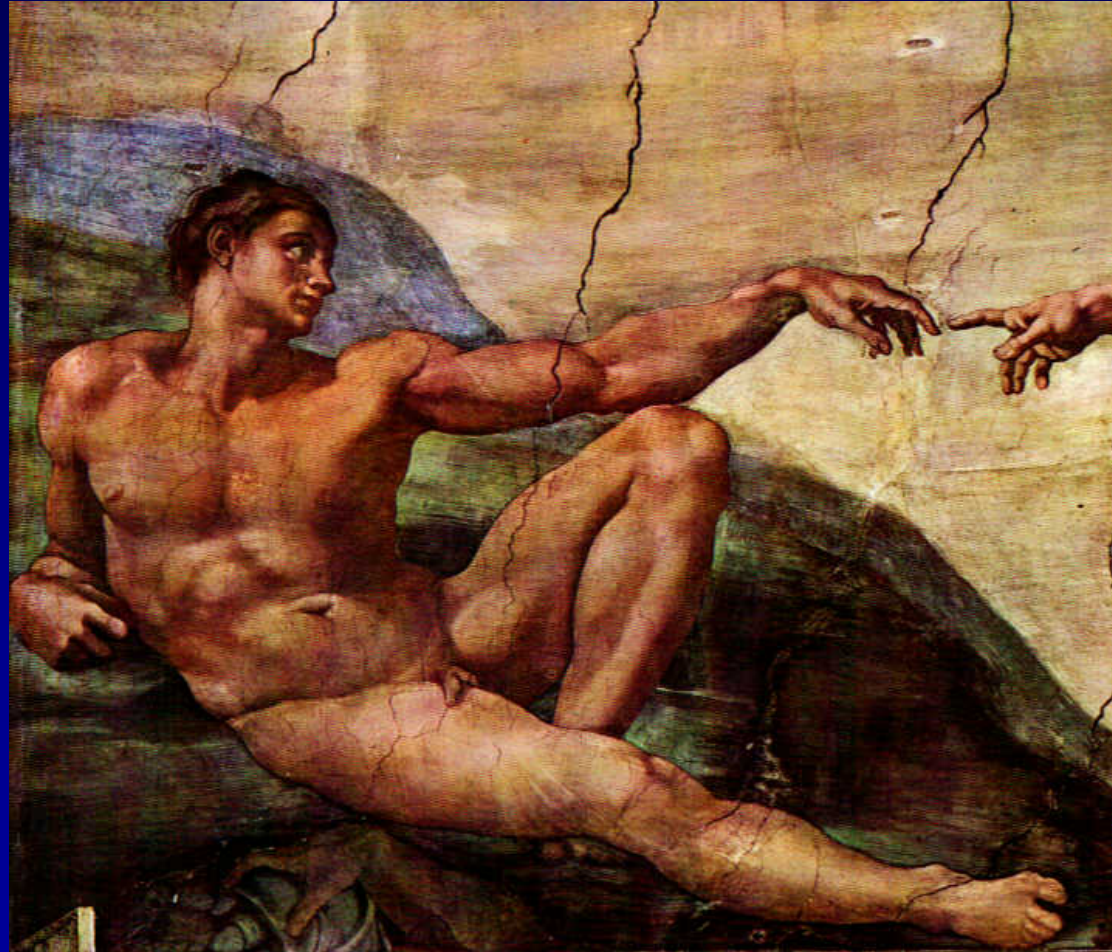


Evolution and the Image of God: Historical Reflections on Science, Morality, and Human Nature



Evolution claims that humans are descended from lower animals

- Why have some Christians rejected such claims as irreligious?
- Why have other Christians accepted them?
- What have been the most important issues?

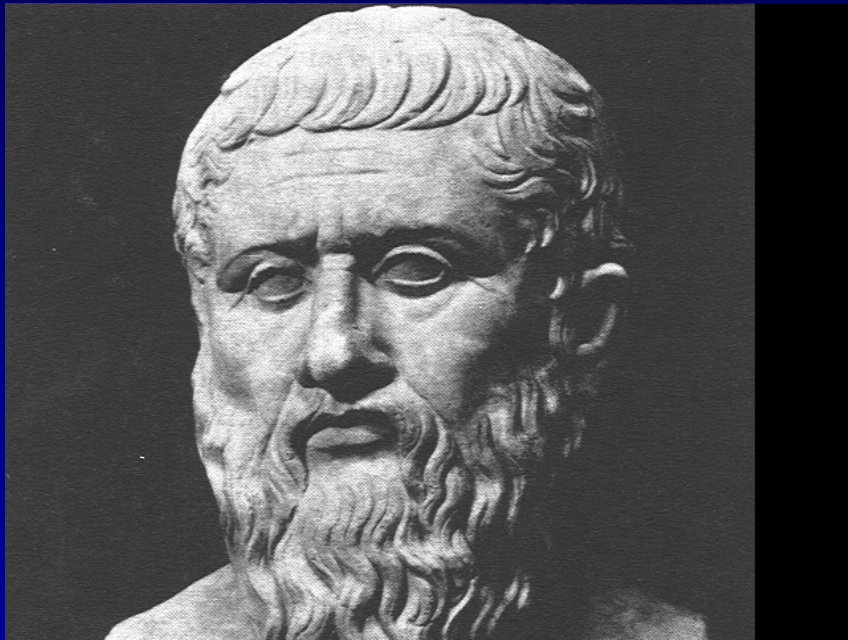
How I will proceed

- To answer these questions, I will survey 150 years of the conversation about evolution, morality, and human nature.
- I will also look to pre-modern answers from biblical and secular sources, pointing to some significant historical examples that might help illuminate *both* the larger history *and* the contemporary situation.

How I will proceed

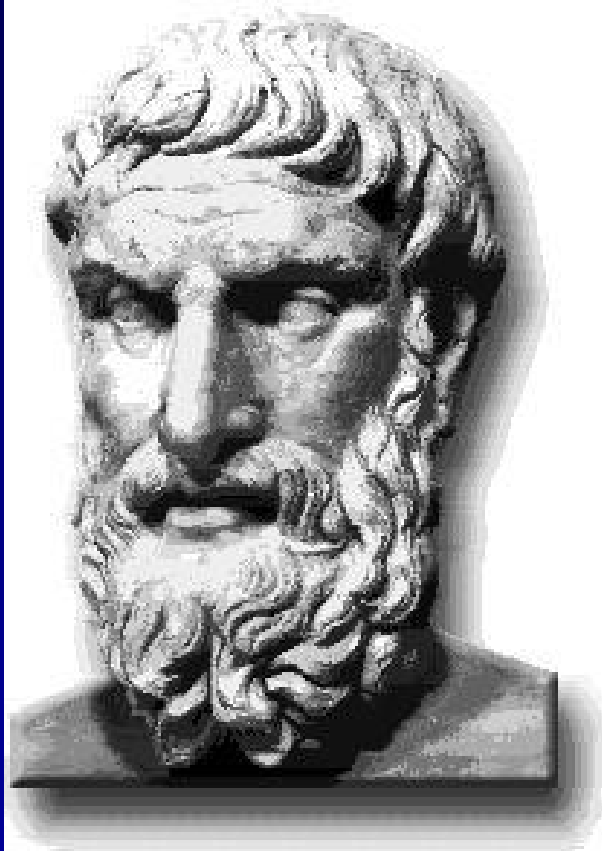
- I will raise additional questions about the relationship of science and Christian faith today
- At the end, I will offer some suggestions about how Christian thinkers might constructively engage modern science on these issues.

Plato on creation (*Timeaus*)



- The Creator fashioned the universe and gave it a “soul”
- The Creator made the stars “to be divine and eternal animals”
- The lesser gods came from other gods by procreation
- The Creator makes the “souls” of humans, but the lesser gods make their bodies

Lucretius on creation (*De rerum natura*)



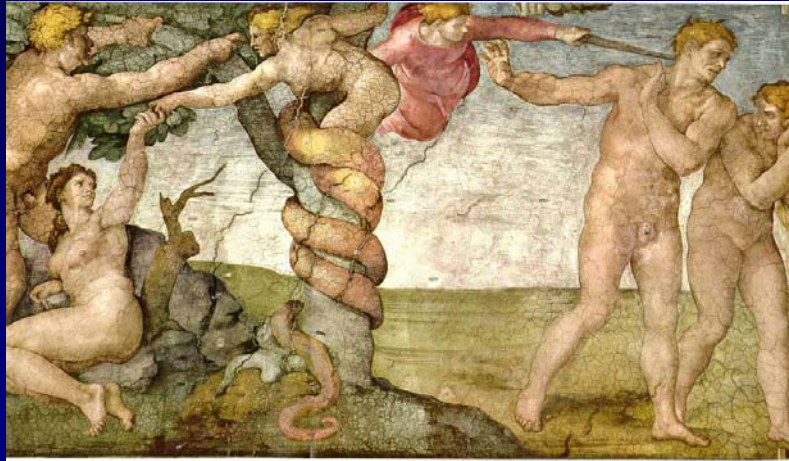
- The gods, if they exist, are irrelevant to the universe and to humans
- “No thing is ever produced from nothing by divine power,” thus matter and motion are eternal
- Atoms move eternally through an infinite void, colliding by chance with other atoms to form objects, including living things

The Hebrews on creation (Genesis)



- “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”
- God made plants & animals
- “God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them”
- “God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul”

The fall of Adam and Eve



“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

The Big Questions

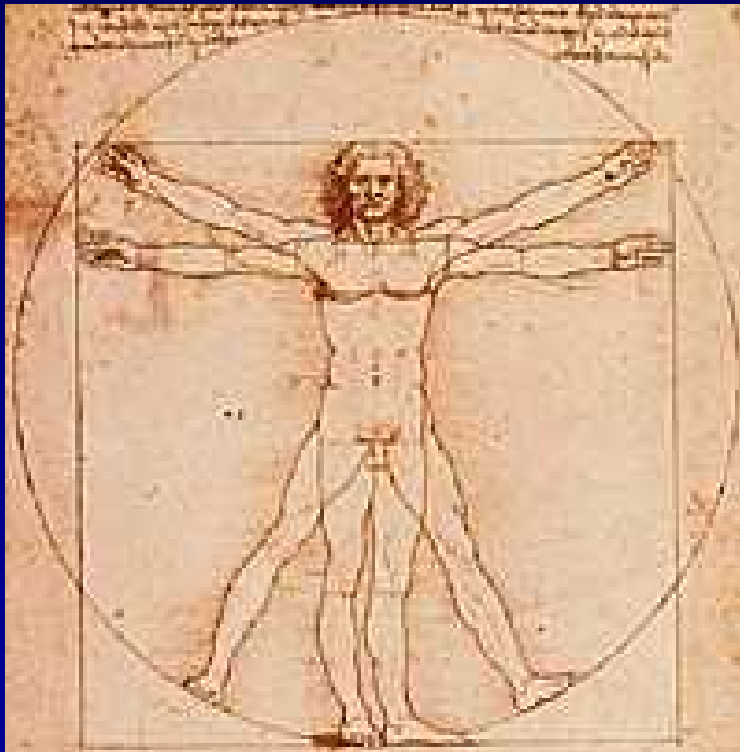
- What does it mean to be human?
- What is the “image of God” (imago dei)?
- How has the fall affected this?
- Christian thinkers have reflected on these questions for most of church history. Only the briefest glimpse of their views can be given here.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (*Oration on the Dignity of Man*)



“... man is the intermediary between creatures, the intimate of the gods, the king of the lower beings, by the acuteness of his senses, by the discernment of his reason, and by the light of his intelligence the interpreter of nature, ... on David’s testimony but little lower than the angels.”

Pico's humanism—"man" as the "measure of all things"



God tells Adam: "Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand we have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature."

Jean Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*



- “*In our image, etc.* Interpreters do not agree concerning the meaning of these words.”
- It is not the human body itself, although “God’s admirable workmanship there shines through.”
- A “small portion” of the image is “the dominion which was given to man ... as God’s vicegerent in the government of the world.”

Calvin on the fall

- “Since the image of God has been destroyed in us by the fall, we may judge from its restoration [in spiritual regeneration through Christ] what it originally had been.”
- But even this “righteousness and true holiness” is “not the whole of God’s image.”
- The “mind and heart” were “the chief seat of the Divine image” in Adam ...
- “But now, although some obscure lineaments of that image are found remaining in us; yet are they so vitiated and maimed, that they may truly be said to be destroyed.”

Calvin's overall view of the *imago dei*

- “So God created man [in his own image]. The reiterated mention of the image of God is not a vain repetition. For it is a remarkable instance of the Divine goodness which can never be sufficiently proclaimed. And, at the same time, he admonishes us from what excellence we have fallen, that he may excite in us the desire of its recovery.”
- “The blessing of God may be regarded as the source from which the human race has flowed. ... Adam with his wife was formed for the production of offspring, in order that men might replenish the earth.”

Francis Bacon, *Valerius Terminus*



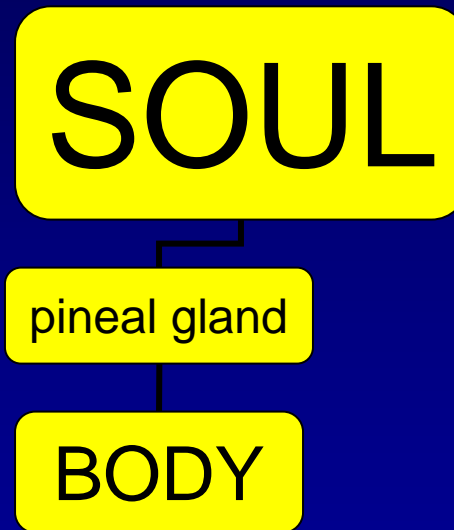
Through science, we might even have “a restitution and reinvesting (in great part) of man to the sovereignty and power ... which he had in his first state of creation. And to speak plainly and clearly, it is a discovery of all operations and possibilities of operations from immortality (if it were possible) to the meanest mechanical practice.”

René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637)



“The rational soul cannot in any way be derived from the potentiality of matter, ... but it must have been expressly created; and it is not enough that it be located in the human body like a pilot in his ship, except perhaps to move its limbs, but it must also be joined and united more closely with the body in order to have, beyond that, sensations and appetites similar to ours, and thus to compose a true man.”

Cartesian “dualism”



Descartes on the soul and immortality

- “This ego, that is, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body, and it is even easier to know than the body, and even if the body did not exist, the soul would not cease to be what it is.” *Discourse on Method*
- “The human body can easily perish, but the mind or the soul of man (I do not distinguish between them), is immortal by its very nature.” *Meditations on First Philosophy*

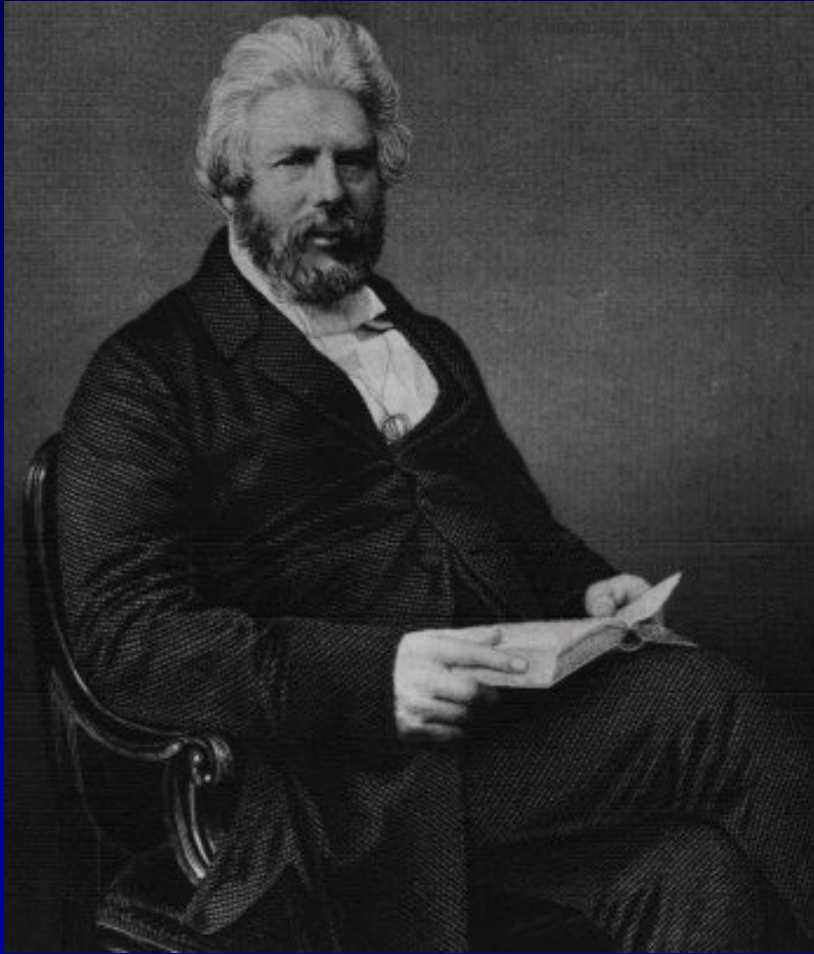
Views of human nature and morality in the 19th Century—the impact of naturalism

- Naturalistic theories of the origin of living things, including humans, strained traditional religious understandings
- Two aspects of this will be considered here:
 - (1) Human antiquity and the age of the earth—what about the historicity of Adam and Eve?
 - (2) Continuity between humans and other animals—what about the soul and the origin of human values?

The discovery of deep time

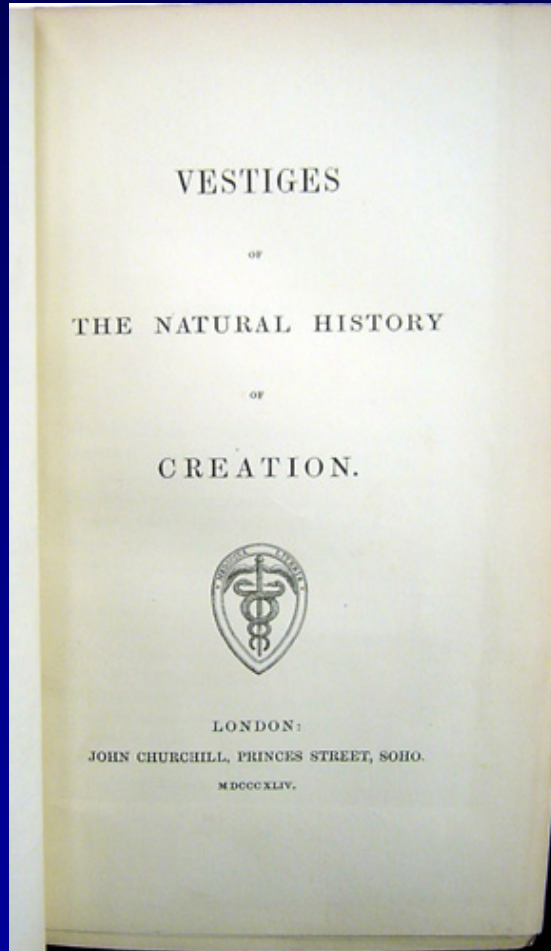


Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844)



- Published anonymously by his own publishing company
- Extraordinarily popular book
- Inspired by ideas of the French evolutionist, Lamarck
- Argued for the continuous “development” of the solar system and living things
- Seen by scientists and theologians alike as unpersuasive and highly speculative

Chambers on humans



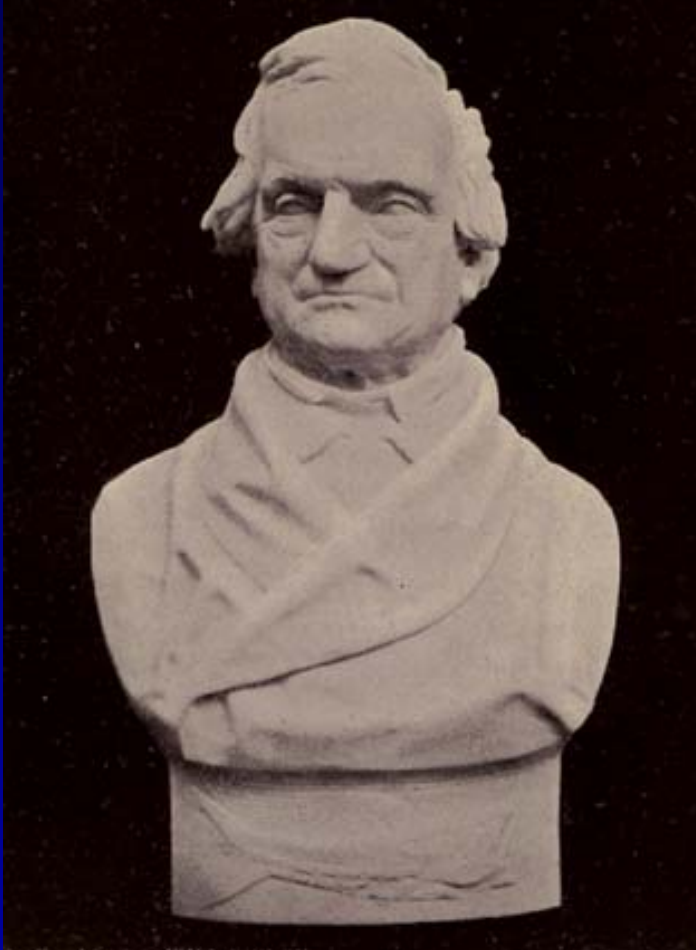
- “But the idea that any of the lower animals have been concerned in any way with the origin of man—is not this degrading?”
- NO—it is no more degrading than “the circumstances attending the production of an individual of our race,” i.e., sexual intercourse.

Chambers on humans

- “Now the idea as to the progress of organic creation, if we become satisfied of its truth, ought to be received precisely in this spirit. If it has pleased Providence to arrange that one species should give birth to another, until the second highest gave birth to man, who is the very highest; be it so; it is our part to admire and to submit.”
- “These creatures [the lower animals] are all of them part products of the Almighty Conception, as well as ourselves. All of them display wondrous evidences of his wisdom and benevolence.”

*How did Christian thinkers
respond to Chambers' vision of a
goal-directed evolutionary
process, culminating in humans?
What issues concerned them?*

Adam Sedgwick



“If the book be true, the labours of sober induction are in vain; religion is a lie; human law is a mass of folly, and a base injustice; morality is moonshine; our labours for the black people of Africa were works of madmen; and man and woman are only better beasts.”

Hugh Miller



- Influential writer from Scottish “Free Kirk” tradition
- Miller well known for his own “old earth” approach to fossil record; he saw “days” in Genesis as symbolical, metaphorical

Hugh Miller

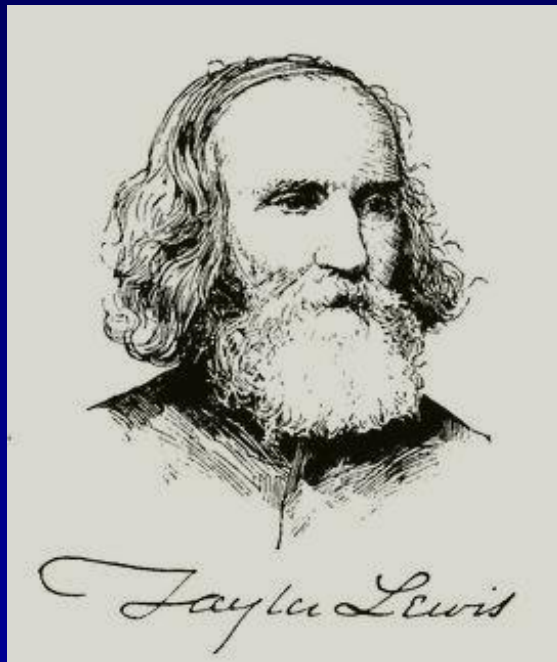


- Miller rejected Chambers on geological grounds, from discontinuities in the fossil record.
- “There is no progression. If fish rose into reptiles, it must have been by sudden transmutation. ... There is no getting rid of miracle in the case—there is no alternative between creation and metamorphosis. The infidel substitutes progression for Deity; Geology robs him of his god.”

Miller on humans

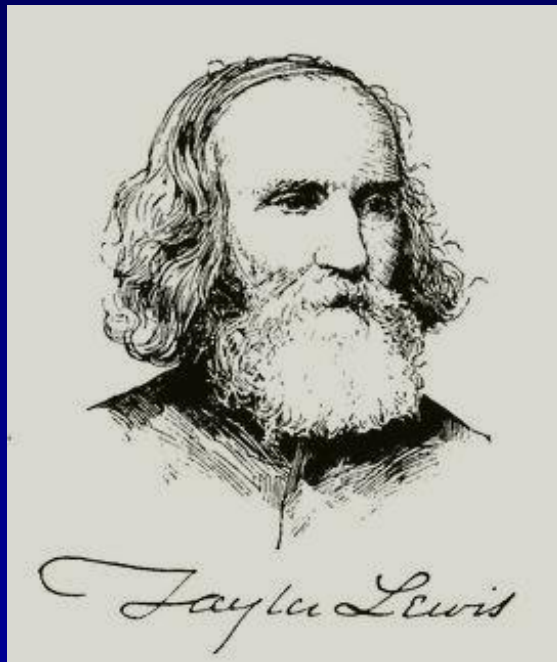
“If, during a period so vast as to be scarce expressible by figures, the creatures now human have been rising, by *almost* infinitesimals, from compound microscopic cells ... until they have at length become the men and women whom we see around us, we must **either** hold the monstrous belief, that all the vitalities, whether those of monads or of mites, of fishes or of reptiles, of birds or of beasts, are individually and inherently immortal and undying, **or** that human souls are *not* so. The difference between the dying and the undying—between the spirit of the brute that goeth downward, and the spirit of the man that goeth upward—is not a difference infinitesimally, or even atomically, *small*. It possesses all the breadth of eternity to come, and is an *infinitely great* distance.

Taylor Lewis (1802-1877) of Union College



- “The doctrine of the book is atheism,—blank atheism, cold, cheerless, heartless, atheism.”
- Chambers’ God, he pointed out, hears no prayers, administers no particular providence, has no love for what is right and no hatred for what is wrong, and exercises no moral government.

Taylor Lewis (1802-1877) of Union College



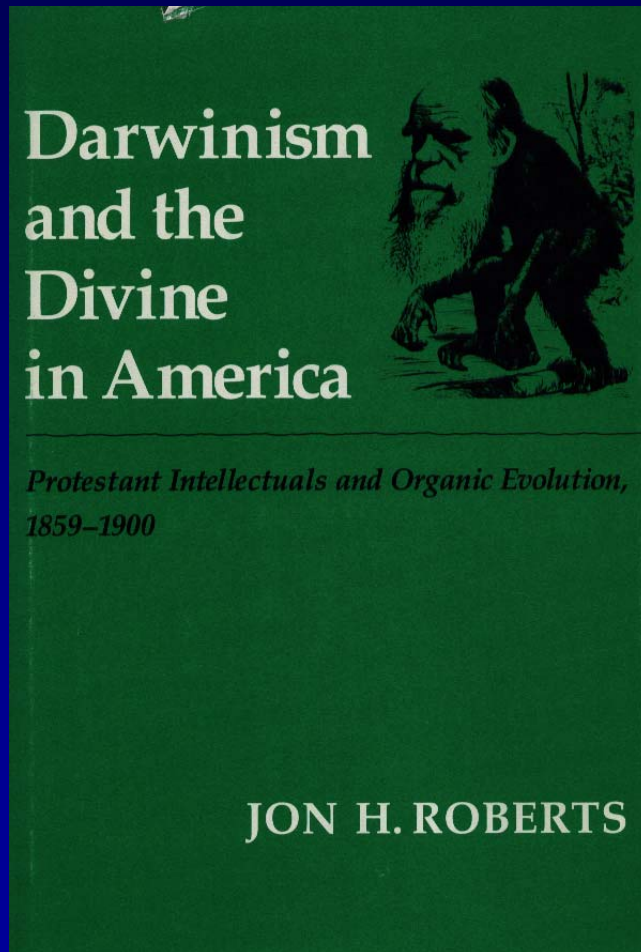
- “This deity never wrought a miracle, never created a world in time by any special act aside from necessarily eternal influences, never was the author of any new state of things, or ever brought to a special end any old dispensation...”

Edward Hitchcock (1793-1864) on special creation, responding to Charles Lyell (1835)



- “... the production of new forms of animal and vegetable life must be regarded, as it ever has been, as the highest and most astonishing exercise of creative power: and if that power can be supposed to reside in the laws of nature, it seems to us that there is no phenomenon in the universe that will require a higher power: and we are reduced at once to materialism and atheism.”
- There is no evidence that “the vital principle is ever communicated by any other power than that of Almighty God.”

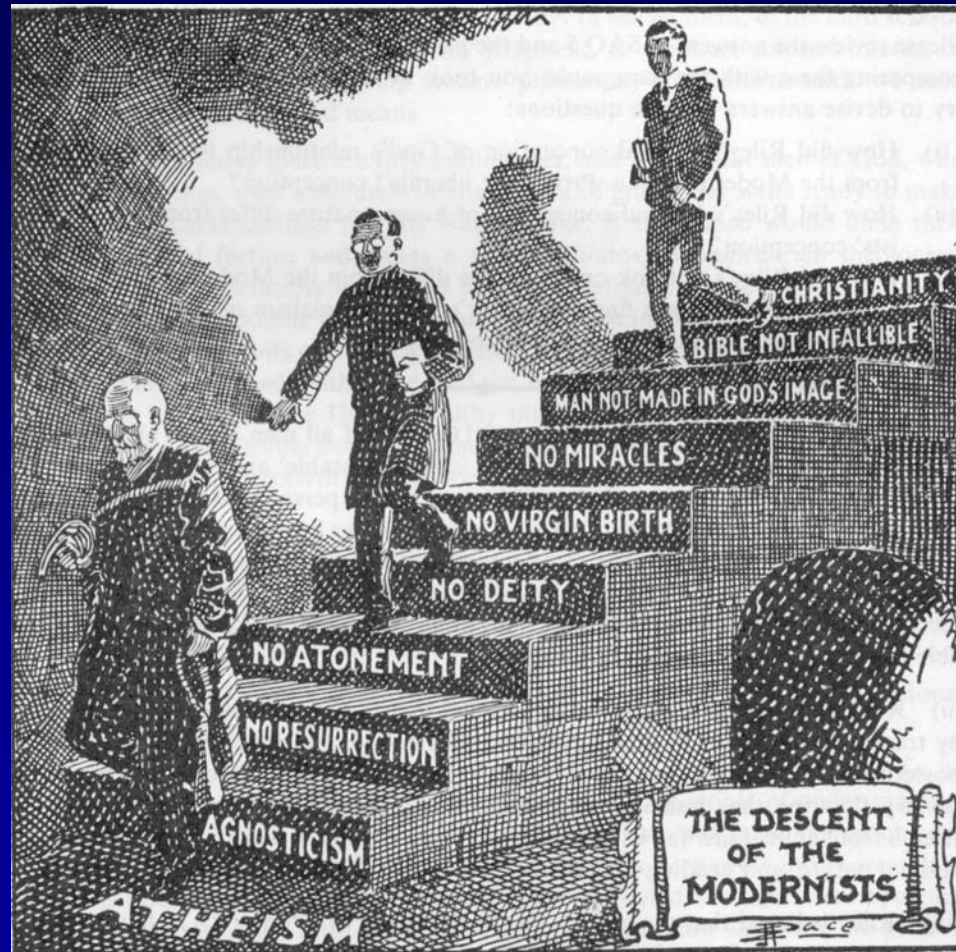
Special creation and apologetics in 19th century



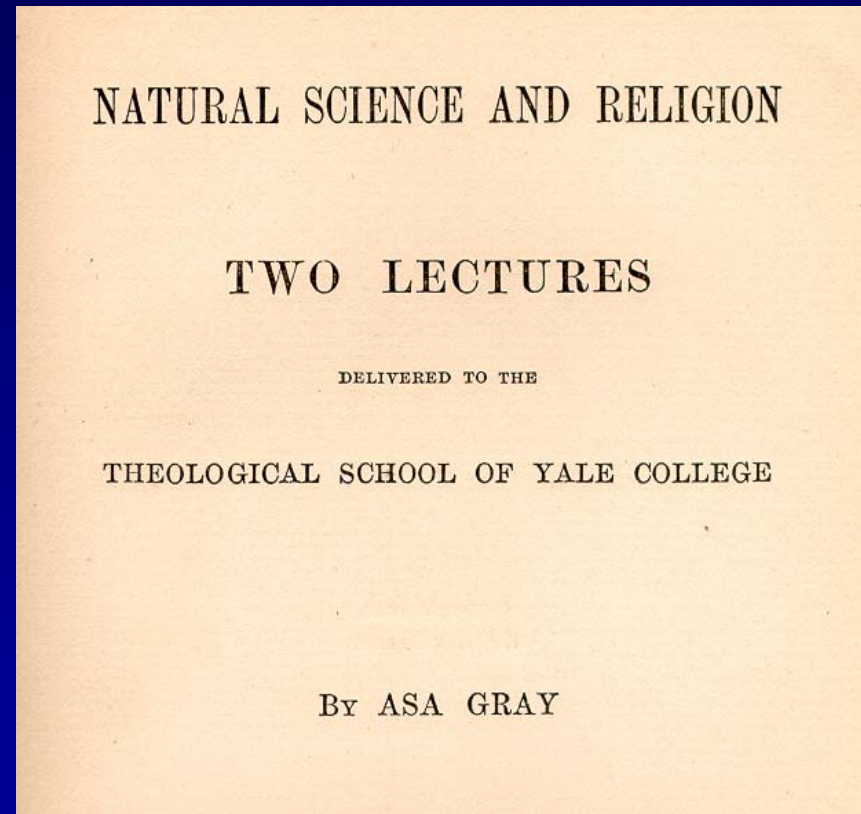
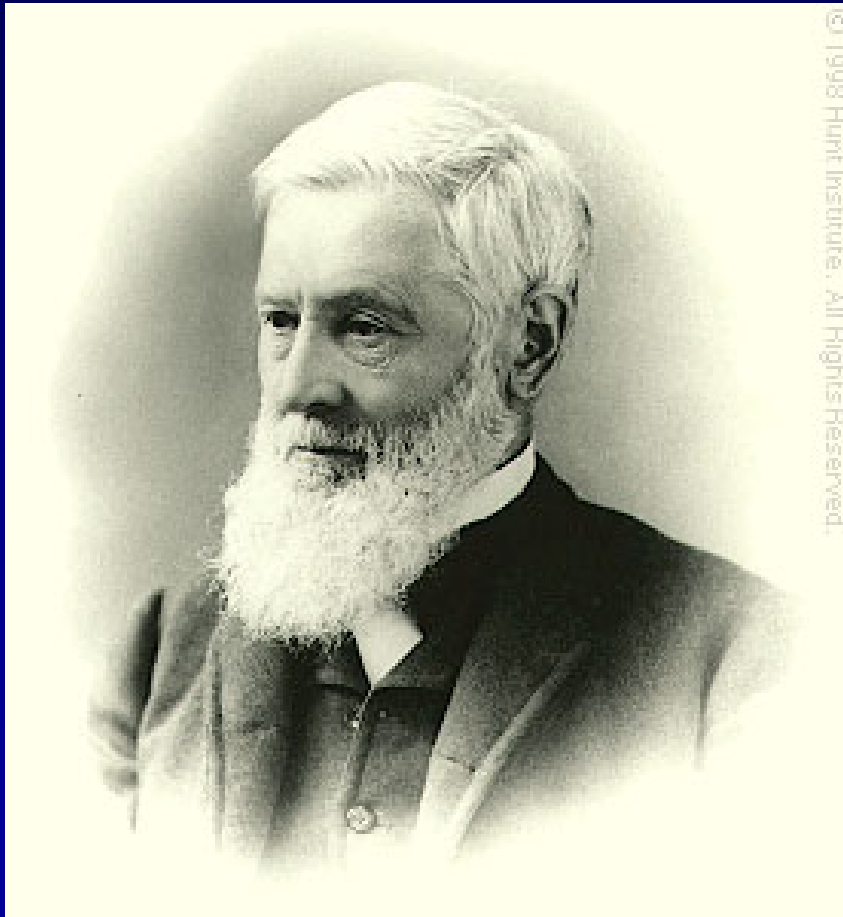
Historian Jon Roberts :
For most of the 19th century,
it was “the consensus
among apologists that the
doctrine of special
creation was central to
the defense of the
Christian world view”

This “ensured that the
Darwinian hypothesis
would be widely
perceived as a challenge
to the structure of natural
theology.”

Is evolution atheistic?



Evolution and orthodox Christianity: Harvard botanist Asa Gray (1810-1888)



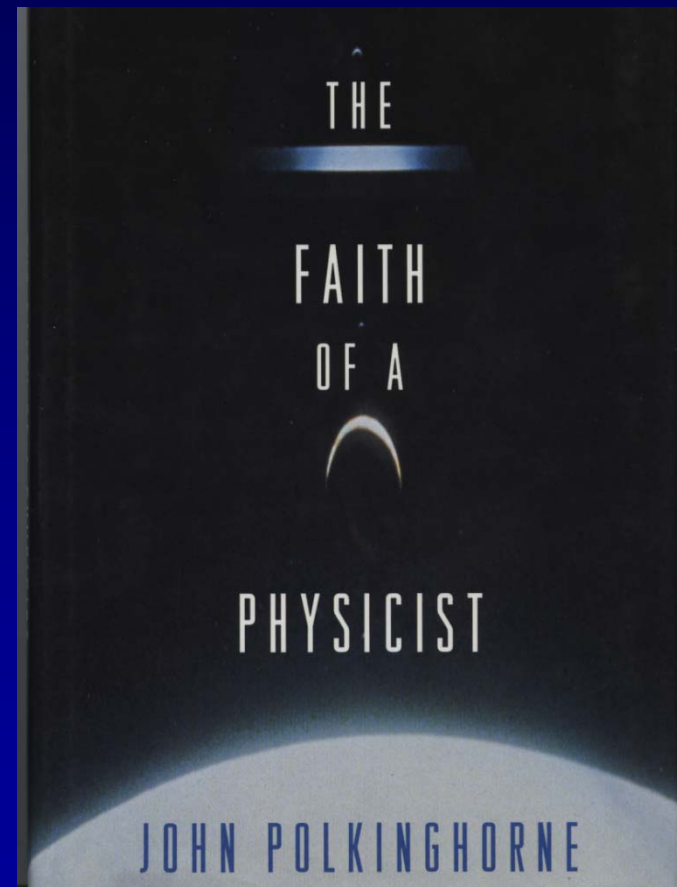
Asa Gray on “compatibility”

- Gray defended the “compatibility” of evolution and traditional Christian theism.
- He identified “the essential contents” of Christianity as being “briefly summed up” in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.
- In his view, evolution presented no *new* challenges to theism, although it did soften the impact of natural theology.

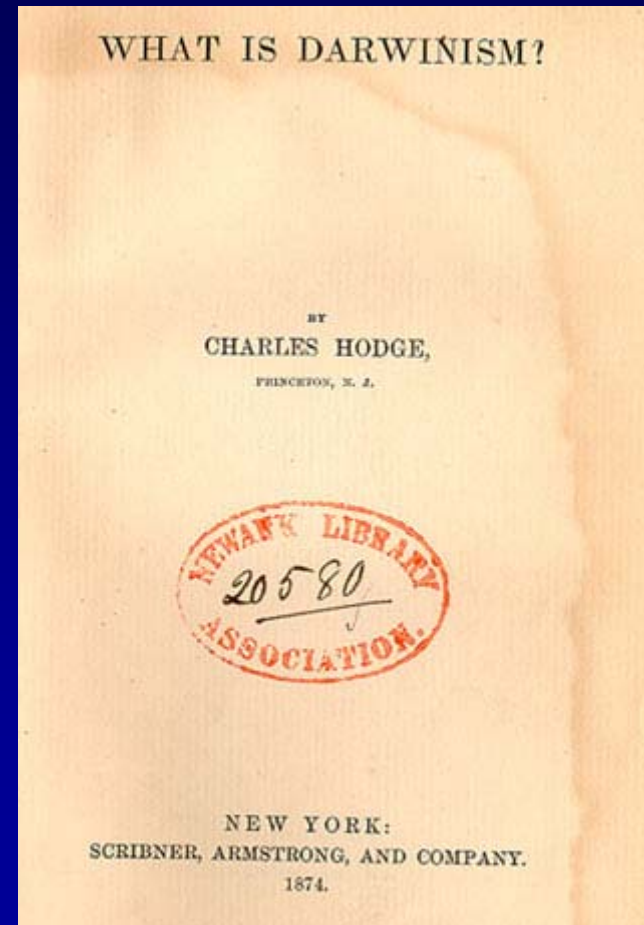
Gray's incarnational theology

- “I accept Christianity on its own evidence ... and I am yet to learn how physical or any other science conflicts with it any more than it conflicts with simple theism. I take it that religion is based on the idea of a Divine Mind revealing himself to intelligent creatures for moral ends.”

A modern orthodox theistic evolutionist:
Cambridge physicist John Polkinghorne (b. 1930)



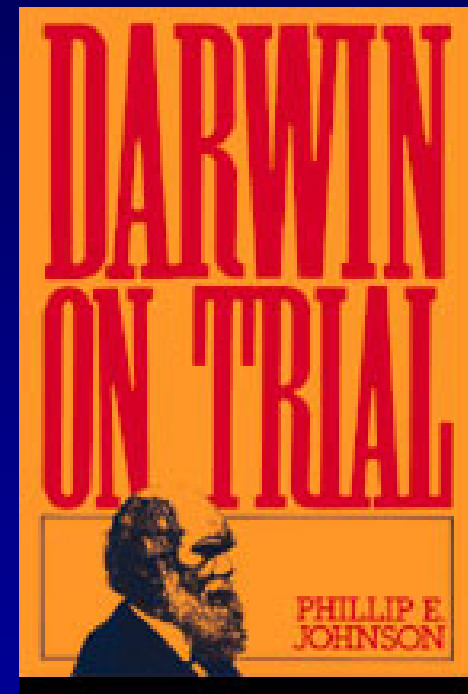
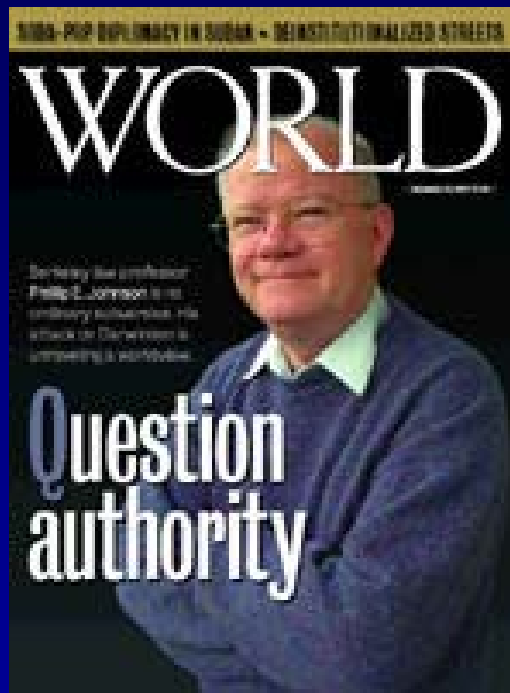
Evolution is atheism:
Princeton theologian Charles Hodge (1797-1878)



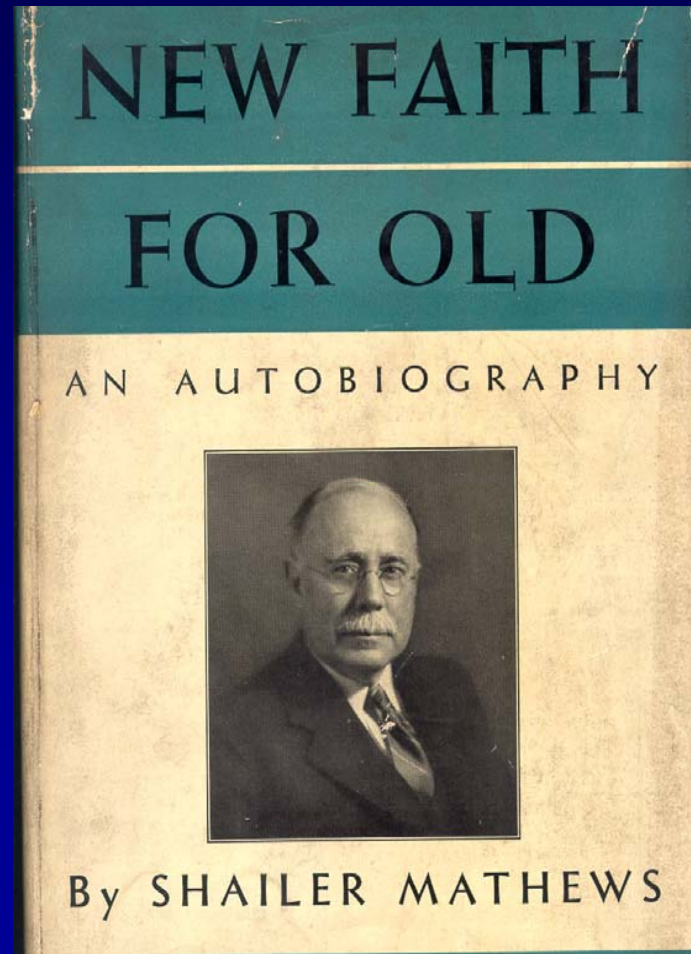
Hodge, *What is Darwinism?* (1874)

- “The conclusion of the whole matter is that the denial of design in nature is virtually the denial of God. Mr. Darwin’s theory does deny all design in nature; therefore, his theory is virtually atheistical—his theory, not he himself. He believes in a Creator. But when that Creator, millions on millions of ages ago, did something—called matter and a living germ into existence—and then abandoned the universe to itself to be controlled by chance and necessity, without any purpose on his part as to the result, or any intervention or guidance, then He is virtually consigned, so far as we are concerned, to non-existence.”
- “We have thus arrived at the answer to our question, What is Darwinism? It is Atheism.”

A modern opponent of evolution: California attorney Phillip Johnson



Evolution and “Modernist” Christianity:
Shailer Mathews (1863-1941)



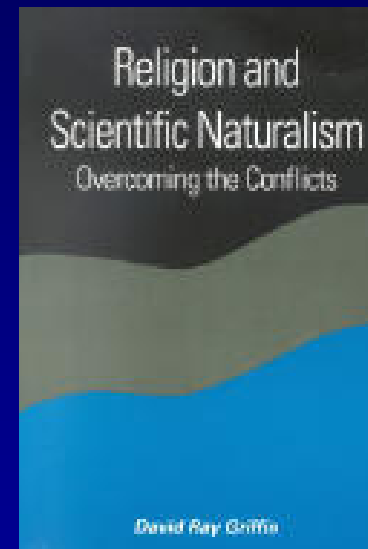
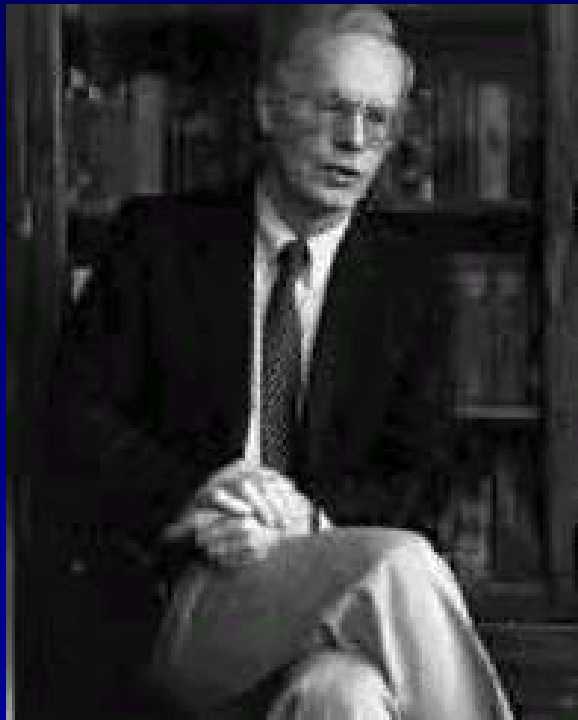
Mathews' view of "science"

- "Laboratory science did something more than lead to research. It undermined habits of thought and substituted the tentativeness of experiment for authoritative formulas."
- "True, there were some scientists like Asa Gray who championed Darwinian evolution while holding to the Nicene Creed..." But Mathews rejects this approach!

Mathews' view of "science"

- “Scientific method had not touched religious thought. It was only when educational processes had ceased to be controlled by the study of classical literature and grew more contemporary, that **orthodox theology was felt to be incompatible with intellectual integrity.**”
- Mathews' theology, like that of some other modernists, was based on a radical understanding of divine immanence that essentially stripped God utterly of transcendence—that is, if it is even appropriate to speak of “God” as anything more than a social construction.

A modern “modernist” theistic evolutionist: Claremont theologian David Griffin (b. 1939)



Mathews' view of God and purpose

- What distinguished Mathews' religion from that of the true materialists?
- His unshakable belief in human freedom.
- “As long as there are personalities resulting from evolution, there must be that within the process itself which is capable of producing it. It is quite impossible for any man to think that personality comes out from impersonality. The thorough-going mechanistic interpretation of evolution and nature itself simply denies the presence of anything approaching free will.” (1923)

A modern materialist: Cornell biologist Will Provine



- “Modern science directly implies that the world is organized strictly in accordance with mechanistic principles. There are no purposive principles whatsoever in nature. There are no gods and no designing forces that are rationally detectable.”
- “Human beings are marvelously complex machines.” Heredity and environment “is all there is.”
- “There is no way that the evolutionary process as currently conceived can produce a being that is truly free to make choices.”

Does Evolution Lead to Immorality?

*Or, can it lead to moral perfection
through eugenics?*

William Jennings Bryan, *The Menace of Evolution* (1921 and 1923)



- Bryan's "chief concern" lay "in protecting man from the demoralization involved in accepting a brute ancestry."
- Darwinism is "the basis of the gigantic class struggle that is now shaking society throughout the world," as "the brute doctrine of the 'survival of the fittest'" is "transforming the industrial world into a slaughter-house."

William Jennings Bryan, *The Menace of Evolution* (1921 and 1923)



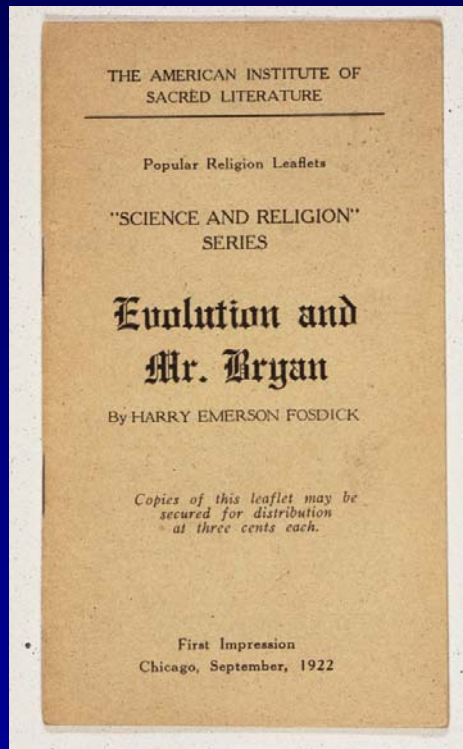
- “Darwinism robs the reformer of hope. Its plan of operation is to improve the race by ‘scientific breeding’ on a purely physical basis,” which could take thousands of years, whereas in “Christ’s plan ... [a] man can be born again; the springs of life can be cleansed instantly so that the heart loves the things that it formerly hated and hates the things that it once loved.”

Harry Emerson Fosdick replies to Bryan (1922)



- “The fundamental interest” motivating Bryan to “hate evolution, is the fear that it will depreciate the dignity of man.”

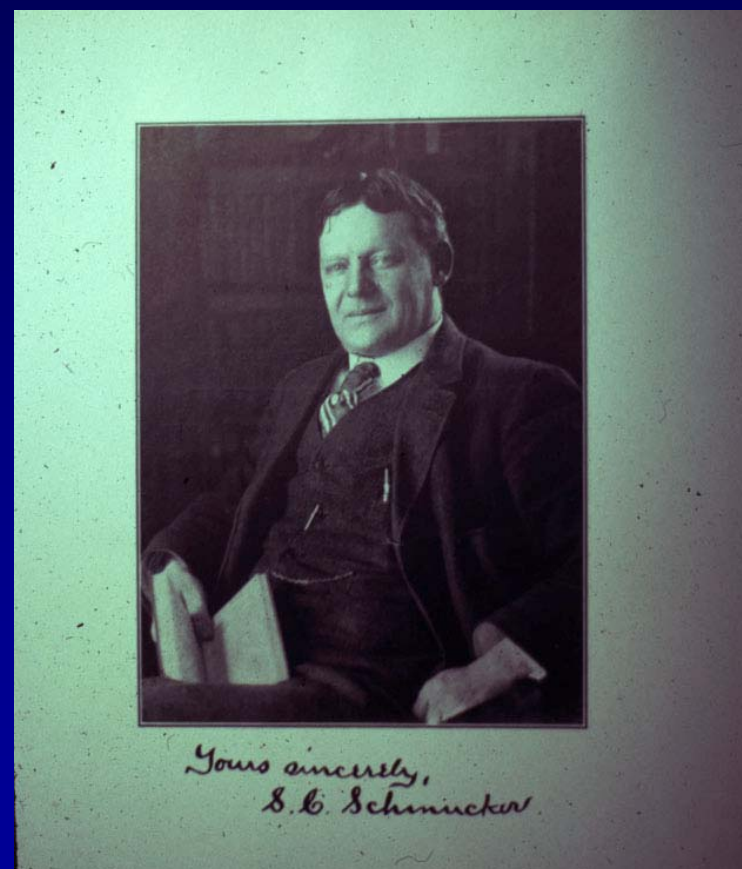
Harry Emerson Fosdick replies to Bryan (1922)



- It matters not whether God made humans “out of the dust by sudden fiat or by gradual process.” The details may interest science, “but it is not a crucially important religious problem.”
- “Origins prove nothing in the realm of values.”

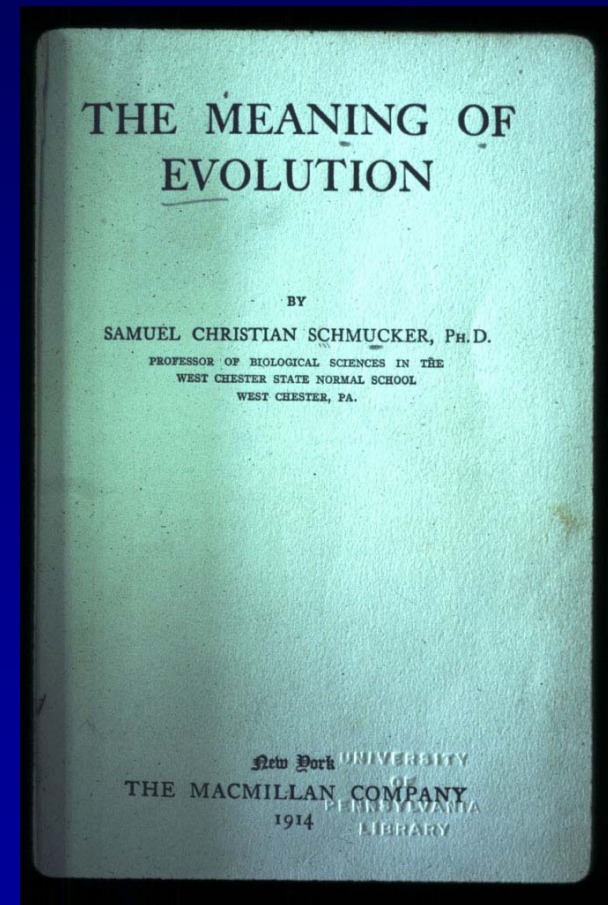
Samuel Christian Schmucker (1860-1943) on eugenics, God, and the perfectibility of humans:

- If “the guiding hand of an Almighty God” has made men from apes, “then this is only an earnest and foretaste of that which may be expected in the future. A time will come, when man shall have risen to heights as far above anything he now is as to-day he stands above the ape.”

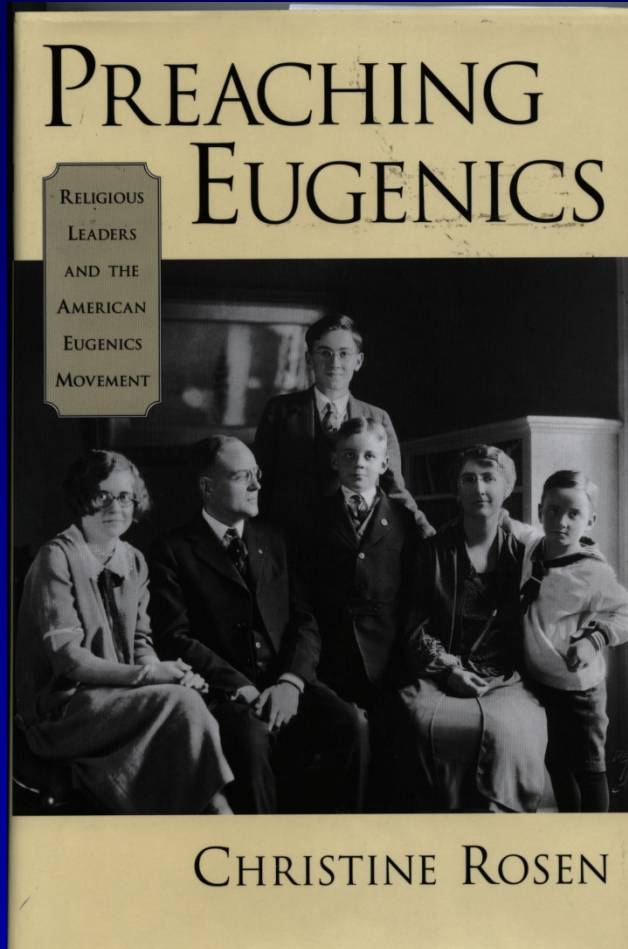


Samuel Christian Schmucker (1860-1943), *The Meaning of Evolution* (1914)

- There is “no end” to what “Infinite Power” and “limitless time” can bring about in the human character. “Slowly the brute shall sink away, slowly the divine in him shall advance, until such heights are attained as we today can scarcely imagine.”




Liberal Protestants and Eugenics



Liberal Protestant scientists and clergy of the 1920s took to eugenics like bees take to pollen—despite the fact that Francis Galton, who coined the word “eugenics” in 1883, had seen it as form of scientific religion that would replace traditional religion. The liberals understood their own faith in terms of actions, not beliefs, and they saw many eugenic reforms as morally appropriate means to spread the kingdom of God on earth.

Liberal Protestants and Eugenics



American Eugenics Party
P.O. BOX 38068
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90038

AMERICAN EUGENICS PARTY PLATFORM

The following Platform of the AMERICAN EUGENICS PARTY is presented to unite individuals and organizations in the United States and throughout the world in opposition to the dygenic forces. With an increasing number of supporters for all, if not most, of the Platform, the eventual attainment of a Eugenic Society is assured:

- RACE AND STOCK PURITY**
National laws must be enacted to prohibit marriage between the races and to encourage stock (ethnic group) purity. The negroes are too different genetically and will always be a source of conflict. Negroes must be resettled in Africa. The remaining genetic types are similar enough to associate amiably with one another, but the tendency for the different genetic types to live, work, and play in separate ghettos is to be encouraged.
- NO PERSECUTION**
No race or stock is to be harshly treated. All caucasian stocks (Germans, Jews, Italians, Poles, etc.) are to remain separate and free from persecution or abuse and must unite to ward off the non-caucasian genetic threat.
- QUANTITY CONTROL**
The United States is already over-populated. We must stop all immigration and impose birth controls.
- QUALITY CONTROL**
Those genetic types within each race and stock having better traits will be encouraged to produce more offspring and those having the lesser qualities will be restricted in the number of their offspring.
- EXPERTS RULE**
History shows that equal vote for unequal people eventually destroys society. Experts are to be selected through various improved qualification tests; all are eligible to take the tests; more than one expert is to be in each important position; and rotation of leadership among the qualified. Experts make fewer errors in all phases of life. This "civil-service-test" selection of leaders will promote confidence and efficiency.
- INCENTIVE ECONOMICS**
A high incentive level is necessary in society because of acquired and hereditary differences. Those who are not capable are to be humanely treated and their basic needs guaranteed. To promote greater progress, significant creativity and other major contributions (social necessities, acts of bravery, etc.) are to be specially rewarded. Depressions and recessions can be cured through control of negative incentives and regulation of the medium of exchange. Wars due to economic struggles between different genetic types will be solved by controlling the availability of markets.

GENETIC INEQUALITY + GENETIC STABILITY → GENETIC CONTROLLABILITY
Basic Eugenic Program: Type — Quality — Quantity Control

(Over)

American Philosophical Society. Noncommercial, educational use only.

Liberal clergy were especially keen to cooperate with scientists at a time when their conservative religious brethren were fighting tooth and nail against evolution. Dozens of pastors served formally as advisors to the American Eugenics Society, while many Protestant scientists offered explicit religious justification for their efforts to promote eugenics.

Alongside liberal religious views of eugenics as a “scientific” form of the “social gospel,” we find secular views of eugenics that are equally explicit about perfecting humans. The instrument to achieve this, however, is the church scientific.

J.D. Bernal, *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (1929)



- Evolution would lead in time to an “aristocracy of scientific intelligence,” in which scientists “would emerge as a new species and leave humanity behind.”
- A Marxist himself, Bernal saw this as “further stage of the Marxian hierarchy of domination.”

H.J. Müller, *Out of the Night* (1935)



“And so we foresee the history of life divided into three main phases. In the long preparatory phase it was the helpless creature of its environment... And in the long third phase, it will reach down into the secret places of its own nature, and by aid of its ever-growing intelligence and co-operation, shape itself into an increasingly sublime creation—a being beside which the mythical divinities of the past will seem more and more ridiculous, and which setting its own marvelous inner powers against the brute Goliath of the suns and planets, challenges them to contest.”

Adolf Hitler, to dinner guests



“If we did not respect the law of nature, imposing our will by the right of the stronger, a day would come when the wild animals would again devour us—then the insects would eat the wild animals, and finally nothing would exist except the microbes... By means of the struggle the elite are continually renewed. The law of selection justifies this incessant struggle by allowing the survival of the fittest. Christianity is a rebellion against natural law, a protest against nature.”

The fundamental question seems to be: Which religious meaning(s) do we take from science, or bring to it?

And the fundamental philosophical issue seems to be captured in two terms:

*BODY-SOUL DICHOTOMY
REDUCTIONISM (Donald MacKay
called this “nothing-buttery”)*

Any effort by Christian thinkers to address these issues effectively today, will need to be based on a sophisticated philosophical understanding of the human person.