

# Unnatural enemies

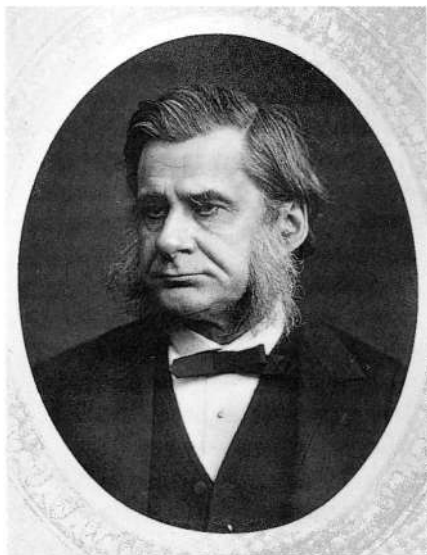
By Kirsten Birkett

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Reviewed by David Green

*Unnatural Enemies* is an introduction to the conflict between Christian faith and popular science. Happily, its position is that the conflict is artificial. Birkett shows us quite effectively, if briefly, how modern science flowered in a climate of widespread Christian belief and respect for the Bible and was developed by people of Christian conviction. In their minds there was no conflict between science and Christian faith.

There is however, today, the remains of a conflict promoted particularly by the media in a loose alliance with those academics who have perhaps had a smaller dose of the history of science than would be wise. The Church does not deal adequately with this conflict and one hopes that Birkett's book will go some way to redressing the balance. Unfortunately, as with so much Christian writing, it will not be sold in general bookstores, so is unlikely to be reviewed in general publications and will possibly not be read by non-Christians.

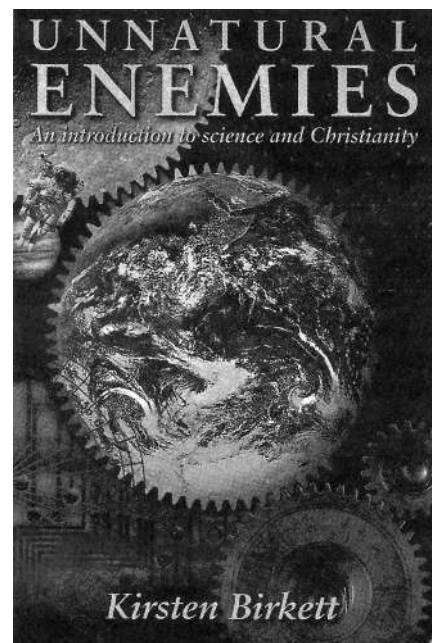


T.H. Huxley (1825–1895)

Regrettably, a failure of *Unnatural Enemies* is that it skirts the reason for the perceived conflict between Christian faith and science. This reason was put by Altick in the *Financial Review*, of all places (November 28, 1997) in 'Science as Saviour: Thomas Huxley's Crusade'. He stated that the 'scientific' world view which Huxley promoted had '*knocked the props from under creationism ... [so that] belief in Divine will had given way to a reluctant acceptance of natural processes*'. Birkett addresses the formation of this conflict in the last century but refrains from a thoroughgoing critique. Instead, she discusses 'Huxley's Victory' in social terms. While these are significant, the metaphysical dominance which materialism has achieved has not, in my view, been given sufficient examination in a contemporary setting.

If we are to be enabled to speak usefully to our culture we must have adequate intellectual equipment. I do not believe that *Unnatural Enemies* goes far enough toward providing that equipment. If only it had made clear the religious nature of common views of science, enlarging on its chapters on White and Draper, it would have been very helpful, I believe. Science is looked to for answers to basic questions, questions which are outside the competency of science and are 'religious' in nature: 'Where did we come from?' 'What is life all about?' and by implication 'Where are we going?'.

Science, at least at the popular level, is asked about the 'unfathomable' when its real domain is (merely) the explorable. One writer, Andruj Pacholczyk<sup>1</sup> of the University of Arizona, regards cosmology (the study of the origin and structure of the cosmos) as a 'noncorrespondence science' — one based on almost pure speculation. It is speculation of this order which has, in the popular mind (or at least, as that mind is represented in the media), replaced the biblical world



view, and its dependence on its Creator, with a materialist world view and independence of a Creator.

Michael Denton in his book *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* also speaks of the highly speculative nature of evolutionary ideas. Arguably, it is these ideas which provide the platform for either 'New Age, humanist-rationalist or just plain old 'average westener' rejection of the Gospel. Birkett fails to lift the lid on this sufficiently. Therefore, she fails to explore the ancient pagan origin of the idea of evolution and fails to educate the Church as to the real religion of today.

It goes further than this, though, for the 'ordinary' practical atheist. This person doesn't see merely a conflict between science and Christian belief, but rather the total invalidation of Christian belief by science. They simply believe that the theory of evolution, the pivotal submission in their cause, has eliminated recourse to the supernatural for explanations of our origin and therefore our purpose and our destiny. Indeed, many look to evolution for ultimate 'salvation' in the hope that we will 'evolve' upwards into something better however ironically, evolution is more about death and extinction than life. This was expressed in a rather bizarre way in the Heaven's Gate cult's mass murder-suicide of a couple of

years ago in the United States.

Birkett's book is generally adequate in its basic research, although a major mistake appears where she tells us that Darwin's theory was that of '*natural selection*' (p. 120). It was not. It was the 'theory' that natural processes could explain the evolution of life as we see it from simple beginnings. This of course directly contradicts God, who has revealed to us in the Bible that He created all kinds of life within a few days.

Birkett also seems to accept without sufficient question what the theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg criticises as science's '*methodological atheism*'. Science does not need to assume religious naturalism to succeed. It needs to assume something more akin to the existence of design in the physical world and that its creator is consistent and not capricious. These are precisely the assumptions of those Christians who were instrumental in the formation of modern science. Birkett touches on this, but in her persistent avoidance of the Bible's reliability at the key point which it itself makes, that of our origin at God's hand, she misses the opportunity to provide a direction for what might be a Christian view of science. That would be, perhaps, a view that confines science to the examinable and accepts reliable historical information despite the discomfort which might be had by the metaphysicians of contemporary science with its implications.

Unfortunately *Unnatural Enemies* will occupy the reading time of the Christian public without giving it enough in the way of understanding of the religious issues of our time, despite essaying these issues as they developed last century. The book fails to adequately provide that information which the Christian public needs to proclaim a robust gospel, when its author obviously has the training and skill to do so.

### References

1. Pacholczyk, A., 1997. God of the quantum vacuum. *New Scientist*, 156(2102):28—31.

## Quotes

### Darwinism - a political ideology

If the scientists ever had to retreat on this issue, the cultural consequences could be significant. Persons who now have prestigious status as cultural authorities would be discredited, and the political and moral positions they have advocated might be discredited with them. That is the fear of Michael Ruse, author of *Darwinism Defended*. Ruse proclaims proudly that Darwinism reflects "a strong ideology," and "one to be proud of." According to Ruse, contemporary Darwinians "show a strong liberal commitment" in both their politics and their sexual morality. Advocates of creation, on the other hand, want to restore a "morality based on narrow biblical lines" with respect to marriage and sexual behavior. Upholding Darwinism is therefore an important way of protecting political liberalism, feminism, and the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Ruse concludes his book with these stirring lines "Darwinism has a great past. Let us work to see that it has an even greater future."

Berkeley law professor Phillip Johnson writing in J. Buell and V. Hearn (ed.) *Darwinism: Science or Philosophy?* p. 11, Foundation for Thought and Ethics, Richardson, Texas, U.S.A., 1994.

Michael Ruse is quoted from his book *Darwinism Defended*, pp. 280, 328-329, 1982.

### Evolution = materialism / atheism

'Let me summarize my views on what modern evolutionary biology tells us loud and clear ... There are no gods, no purposes, no goal-directed forces of any kind. There is no life after death. When I die, I am absolutely certain that I am going to be dead. That's the end for me. There is no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning to life, and no free will for humans, either.'

William B. Provine, Professor of Biological Sciences, Cornell University (*Origins Research* 16(1/2):9, 1994)