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Dirk R. Johnson, *Nietzsche's Anti-Darwinism*

Nietzsche's Anti-Darwinism by Dirk R. Johnson

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Fourth, this Orthodox preference for humanism is inseparable from the church's most consistent objection to science: the fundamental materialism of scientific explanations, which diminished or abolished the will of God and, by extension, the free will of human beings created in God's image. For the Cappadocian fathers, the insuperable problem in Aristotelian physics was the theory of the eternity of matter. What the late Archbishop of Athens and his cohorts condemned in both evolutionary theory and Marxism was the principle of material determinism. This principle was also, I would suggest, what lay at the root of the church's condemnation of astrology in the middle Byzantine period, a subject to which this book devotes some pages without bringing out its full significance. Byzantine churchmen condemned astrology not because they, like modern historians of science, regarded it as a marginal pseudoscience but because it offered a mechanistic, material theory of natural causation that was fully consistent with Aristotelian physics and Ptolemaic astronomy.

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Dirk R. Johnson. *Nietzsche's Anti-Darwinism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. 240. \$89.00 (cloth).

This study began more than 20 years ago as a graduate seminar paper, grew into a 1990 PhD dissertation, and now appears as a scholarly monograph. In the intervening decades, judging by the notes and references, Dirk Johnson has become a full-fledged Nietzsche scholar. Unfortunately, apparent aspects of the structure of the dissertation remain. Thus, part 2 of the book, comprising three of a total of six chapters, consists of a systematic examination of the main theme as reflected in, respectively, parts 1, 2, and 3 of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. I say "unfortunately" because the closely argued and noted text makes for difficult reading by a nonspecialist such as myself, a general philosopher of science with, however, a more than usual familiarity with Nietzsche's work.

The objectives of the work are stated clearly in the second paragraph of the introduction: "While the first objective of this study is to argue for the pre-eminence of Darwin for the development and articulation of Nietzsche's philosophy, its main thrust is to point to the *antagonistic* character of their relationship and to show how Nietzsche's final critique against Darwin and

his followers might represent the key to understanding his broader (anti-) Darwinian position" (1–2). The resolution of the tension in Nietzsche's appropriation of Darwinism is woven throughout Johnson's book. My own resolution is much simpler. What inspired Nietzsche's early and middle works was Darwin's account of organic evolution. And for the standard reason that evolution by natural selection made it unnecessary to invoke an intelligent creator to explain the apparent design in nature. Darwin provided a thoroughly naturalistic explanation of the existence of humans. That suited Nietzsche's broader purposes. Where Nietzsche departed from Darwin was in the explanation of morality and human society in general, a topic Darwin avoided in the *Origin* and publicly took up only with the 1871 publication of *The Descent of Man*. In the meantime, of course, others were all too eager to apply Darwinian ideas to human, and particularly British, society.

British naturalistic moralists, such as Mill and Hume, attributed morality to a natural "moral sense." Darwin thus took it as a challenge to show how such a moral sense could evolve by natural selection. He basically gave up on this task, concluding that natural selection played little role in the development of society as then constituted. The only possible exception, given a social structure in which females choose to accept or reject male suitors, was some evolution in males favoring traits preferred by females. For a contemporary liberal, it is painful to read Darwin's serious reference to an article elaborating a thought experiment in which one begins with equal numbers of Irish and Scots and finds, after a few generations, 90% Irish (but with the minority Scots holding most positions of power; *The Descent of Man*, chap. 5).

Nietzsche was also appalled at the idea of society evolving by natural selection, with a premium on numbers of offspring, but hardly out of liberal sensibilities. He held a contrary naturalistic theory of the development of morality based not on the presumption of a natural moral sense but on a natural "will to power," a development of Schopenhauer's notion of an inherent "will to life." In addition, Nietzsche posited several different psychological/physiological "types," generically identified as "masters" and "slaves" but sometimes as "warriors" and "priests." His historical thesis was that eventually the slaves won out, so that European society in his time was dominated by a "slave mentality." His solution was the development of aesthetically superior "Übermenschen," sometimes identified as "philosophers of the future," who, like himself, might forgo family in favor of developing a higher aesthetic sensibility "beyond good and evil."

During the 2 decades of Nietzsche's professional life, roughly 1870–90, Darwinian ideas had not yet achieved the dominance they later acquired,

and particularly not in Germany. There was therefore cultural and conceptual space for views like Nietzsche's. This is no longer the case. His views on the development of morality are now mainly of historical interest. Johnson takes pains to make the historical point that Nietzsche's polemic was directed not merely at self-proclaimed Darwinians but at Darwin himself.

In the last few sections of chapter 6 and in the conclusion, Johnson goes beyond Nietzsche's views on Darwin to consider his critique of modern science more generally. For a contemporary philosopher of science, this may be the most interesting and relevant part of the book. Nietzsche posited a separate "scientific type" of person ruled not only by a will to power but also by a separate "will to truth." According to Nietzsche, although scientists may profess to be atheists, their will to truth rests on a metaphysical faith in the existence of truth comparable to the faith of theists in the existence of God. As Nietzsche put it, "that unconditional will to truth, ... , even if, as an unconscious imperative, make no mistake about it,—it is the faith in a *metaphysical* value, a *value as such of truth*" (*The Genealogy of Morals*, bk. III, 24). Thus Nietzsche sees scientists as the successors of Christian priests, differing in having replaced a metaphysical god with metaphysical truth. For scientists, truth serves the function served by God for priests, the object of their quest and veneration.

For one interested in Nietzsche's general critique of science, Johnson only whets the appetite. His project restricts his attention to what Nietzsche had to say about science in *The Genealogy of Morals*. In other writings, Nietzsche attacks the notion of a law of nature. He also outlines a positive alternative to a science inspired by a will to truth, a science that yields only interpretations generated from within a particular point of view, a perspective. For an introduction to these further developments in Nietzsche's thought, one must look elsewhere, such as Maudemarie Clark's *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Ronald N. Giere, *University of Minnesota*

Peter R. Anstey. *John Locke and Natural Philosophy*. Pp. xii+252. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. \$65.00 (cloth).

John Locke and Natural Philosophy is one of the most interesting and insightful books published recently on Locke. It is a refreshing revision of many of