

Thomas Aquinas vs. THE INTELLIGENT DESIGNERS (and the Materialists)

or

What's God's Finger Doing in My Pre-Biotic Soup?

by

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Where are the Catholics?

From the top of their barricades defending our culture from the onslaughts of secularism and materialism, Intelligent Design Theorists often cry “Where are the Catholics?” After all, they go on to say, our fight against Darwinian Evolution and its scientific and atheistic implications is *their* fight too. One might think that Thomistic philosophers in particular, having been among the first targets of modern secular materialists, would welcome the likes of Michael Behe, William Dembski, and other Intelligent Designers to the fight. But, where are they?

Indeed, the voices of contemporary Thomists are notably absent in support of Intelligent Design Theory, despite the fact that Thomists share many of the cultural concerns of those who oppose Darwinism. The reasons for this go back to the fundamental contributions of Thomas Aquinas himself to the philosophy of God and nature. Modern Thomists find themselves in a situation where their concerns about Darwinism are not quite the same as those of the Intelligent Designers. Thomists also realize that they cannot accept central claims of Intelligent Design Theory without abandoning their Thomism.

Tertium Quid

Given the polarized nature of the debate between Darwinian Evolutionists and Intelligent Designers, all attention has been focused on these two alternative approaches. As a result, the Thomistic voice has been lost in all the shouting. Yet, contemporary Thomism offers a third alternative that is worthy of consideration. Developing a Thomistic response to the Intelligent Designers' question “Where are the Thomists?” can, perhaps, add some additional depth and range to the debate, counteracting its divisive effects in our public and intellectual discussions.

Thomas Aquinas' own distinction between existence and function in natural beings provides a principle by which modern Thomists can carefully distinguish God's creation of nature from the power nature has to operate in the way she does. Thus, nature can be seen to operate autonomously of divine agency and yet on account of divine agency. Biologists, whose concern is with this autonomous operation of nature, need not include in their account of organisms reference to God's acts even though what they are explaining is known to exist because of God's acts. The same principle can be applied to the irreducible complexities of the Intelligent Designers and their god-of-the-gaps reasoning. It is true that God is causally responsible for the existence and operation of

nature, but God's causality is of a different order than that of nature's operations themselves. To claim, then, that irreducibly complex organisms can only be explained by God's direct agency is to treat natural cause as equivalent to God's ultimate causality and thereby violate God's transcendent divinity, making the notion of creation *ex nihilo* unintelligible.

A New Discussion

Such Thomistic principles and their implications have been notably absent in the mainstream debate between the Darwinians and the Intelligent Designers. Indeed, Thomism, and the classical tradition in general, has been a minority view for a long time, especially regarding the understanding of science and nature. Perhaps the question of the Intelligent Designers and its implied complaint provide the opportunity for a new discussion on evolution—a discussion in which Thomism is something more than a voice crying in the wilderness. Might not this discussion benefit from the sophisticated understanding of faith and reason found in the Thomistic tradition as well as the work of modern Thomists on the principles of nature?