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Modern History Sourcebook: St. George Jackson Mivart (1827-1900): On the Genesis of the Species, 1871

Mivart (1827-1900) was a Catholic convert who wrote a noted reply to the Darwinian thesis in 1871. In 1876, Pope Pius IX conferred on him the degree of doctor of philosophy.

In the strictest and highest sense "creation" is the absolute origination of any thing by God without pre-existing means or material, and is a supernatural act. In the secondary and lower sense, "creation" is the formation of any thing by God derivatively; that is, that the preceding matter has been created with the potentiality to evolve from it, under suitable conditions, all the various forms it subsequently assumes. And this power having been conferred by God in the first instance, and those laws and powers having been instituted by Him through the action of which the suitable conditions are supplied, He is said, in this lower sense, to create such various subsequent forms. This is the natural action of God in the physical world, as distinguished from His direct, or, as it may be here called, supernatural action.

In yet a third sense, the word "creation" may be more or less improperly applied to the construction of any complex formation or state by a voluntary self-conscious being who makes use of the powers and laws which God has imposed, as when a man is spoken of as the creator of a museum, or of "his own fortune," etc. Such action of a created conscious intelligence is purely natural, but more than physical, and may be conveniently spoken of as hyperphysical.

We have thus (1) direct or supernatural action; (2) physical action; and (3) hyperphysical action---the two latter both belonging to the order of nature. Neither the physical nor the hyperphysical actions, however, exclude the idea of the divine concurrence, and with every consistent theist that idea is necessarily included. Dr. Asa Gray has given expression to this. He says, "Agreeing that plants and animals were produced by Omnipotent fiat does not exclude the idea of natural order and what we call secondary causes. The record of the fiat---'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed,' etc., 'let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind'---seems even to imply them," and leads to the conclusion that the various kinds were produced through natural agencies.

Now, much confusion has arisen from not keeping clearly in view this distinction between absolute creation and derivative creation. With the first, physical science has plainly nothing whatever to do, and is impotent to prove or to refute it. The second is also safe from any attack on the part of physical science, for it is primarily derived from psychical not physical phenomena. The greater part of the apparent force possessed by objectors to creation, like Mr. Darwin, lies in their treating the assertion of derivative creation as if it was an assertion of absolute creation, or at least of supernatural action. Thus, he asks whether some of his opponents believe "that, at innumerable periods in the earth's history, certain elemental atoms have been commanded suddenly to flash into living tissues." Certain of Mr. Darwin's objections, however, are not physical, but metaphysical, and really attack the dogma of secondary or derivative creation, though to some perhaps they may appear to be directed against absolute creation only....

As has been said, it is plain that physical science and "evolution" can have nothing whatever to do with absolute or primary creation. The Rev. Baden-Powell well expresses this, saying: "Science demonstrates incessant past changes, and dimly points to yet earlier links in a more vast series of development of material existence; but the idea of a

Industrial Revolution II	<i>beginning, or of creation, in the sense of the original operation of the divine volition to constitute nature and matter, is beyond the province of physical philosophy."</i>
Darwin, Freud	
19C Religion	<i>With secondary or derivative creation, physical science is also incapable of conflict; for the objections drawn by some writers seemingly from physical science are, as has been already argued, rather metaphysical than physical.</i>
World War I	
Russian Revolution	
Age of Anxiety	<i>Derivative creation is not a supernatural act, but is simply the divine action by and through natural laws. To recognize such action in such laws is a religious mode of regarding phenomena, which a consistent theist must necessarily accept, and which an atheistic believer must similarly reject. But his conception, if deemed superfluous by a naturalist, can never be shown to be false by any investigations concerning natural laws, the constant action of which it presupposes.</i>
Depression	
Fascism	
Nazism	
Holocaust	
World War II	<i>The conflict has arisen through a misunderstanding. Some have supposed that by "creation" was necessarily meant either primary, that is, absolute creation, or, at least some supernatural action; they have therefore opposed the dogma of "creation" in the imagined interest of physical science.</i>
Bipolar World	
US Power	<i>Others have supposed that by "evolution" was necessarily meant a denial of divine action, a negation of the providence of God. They have therefore combated the theory of "evolution" in the imagined interest of religion.</i>
US Society	
Western Europe Since 1945	<i>It appears plain, then, that Christian thinkers are perfectly free to accept the general evolution theory. But are there any theological authorities to justify this view of the matter?</i>
Eastern Europe Since 1945	<i>Now, considering how extremely recent are these biological speculations, it might hardly be expected a priori that writers of earlier ages should have given expression to doctrines harmonizing in any degree with such very modern views, nevertheless such most certainly is the case, and it would be easy to give numerous examples. It will be better, however, only to cite one or two authorities of weight. Now, perhaps no writer of the earlier Christian ages could be quoted whose authority is more generally recognized than that of St. Augustine. The same may be said of the medieval period, for St. Thomas Aquinas; and, since the movement of Luther, Suarez may be taken as a writer widely venerated as an authority, and one whose orthodoxy has never been questioned.</i>
Decolonization	
Asia Since 1900	<i>It must be borne in mind that for a considerable time after even the last of these writers, no one had disputed the generally received view as to the small age of the world or at least of the kinds of animals and plants inhabiting it. It becomes therefore much more striking if views formed under such a condition of opinion are found to harmonize with modern ideas regarding "creation" and organic life.</i>
Africa Since 1945	
Middle East Since 1945	<i>Now, St. Augustine insists in a very remarkable manner on the merely derivative sense in which God's creation of organic forms is to be understood; that is that God created them by conferring on the material world the power to evolve them under suitable conditions. He says in his book on Genesis: "Terrestria animalia, tanquam ex ultimo elemento mundi ultima; nihilominus potentialiter, quorum numeros tempus postea visibiliter explicare.@" This means that God created terrestrial animals last of all, as from the last remaining element; however, he created them not completely but containing within themselves a potentiality, the various kinds (or species) of which, time should hereafter unfold and make plain....</i>
20C Latin America	
Modern Social Movements	<i>St. Thomas Aquinas . . . quotes with approval the saying of St. Augustine, that in the first institution of nature we do not look for miracles, but for the laws of nature...Again, he quotes with approval St. Augustine's assertion that the kinds were created only derivatively, "potentialiter tantum."</i>
Post War Western Thought	<i>It is then evident that ancient and most venerable theological authorities distinctly assert derivative creation, and thus harmonize with all that modern science can possibly require. It may indeed truly be said with Roger Bacon, "The saints never condemned many an opinion which the moderns think ought to be condemned."....</i>
Religion Since 1945	
Modern Science	<i>Surely the evidence from physical facts agrees well with the overruling, concurrent action of God in the order of nature; which is no miraculous action, but the operation of laws which owe their foundation, institution and maintenance, to an omniscient Creator of whose intelligence our own is a feeble adumbration, inasmuch as it is created in the "image" and "likeness" of its Maker.</i>
Pop Culture	
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IHSP Credits	

This leads to the final consideration, a difficulty by no means to be passed over in silence, namely the origin of man. To the general theory of evolution, and to the special Darwinian form of it, no exception, it has been shown, need be taken on the ground of orthodoxy. But, in saying this, it has not been meant to include the soul of man. It is a generally received doctrine that the soul of every individual man is absolutely created in the strict and primary sense of the word, that it is produced by a direct or supernatural act, and, of course, that by such an act the soul of the first man was similarly created. It is therefore important to inquire whether "evolution" conflicts with this doctrine.

*Now, the two beliefs are in fact perfectly compatible, and that either on the hypothesis--
-1. That man's body was created in a manner different in kind from that by which the bodies of other animals were created; or 2. That it was created in a similar manner to theirs....*

Man, according to the old scholastic definition, is "a rational animal", and his animality is distinct in nature from his rationality, though inseparably joined, during life, in one common personality. This animal body must have had a different source from that of the spiritual soul which informs it from the distinctness of the two orders to which those existences severally belong.

Scripture seems plainly to indicate this when it says that "God made man from the dust of the earth, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." This is a plain and direct statement that man's body was not created in the primary and absolute sense of the word, but was evolved from pre-existing material (symbolized by the term "dust of the earth"), and was therefore only derivatively created, i.e., by the operation of secondary laws. His soul, on the other hand, was created in quite a different way, not by any pre-existing means, external to God Himself, but by the direct action of the Almighty, symbolized by the term "breathing:" the very form adopted by Christ, when conferring the supernatural powers and graces of the Christian dispensation, and a form still daily used in the rites and ceremonies of the Church....

In this way we find a perfect harmony in the double nature of man, his rationality making use of and subsuming his animality; his soul arising from direct and immediate creation, and his body being formed at first (as now in each separate individual) by derivative or secondary creation, through natural laws. By such secondary creation, i.e., by natural laws, for the most part as yet unknown but controlled by "natural selection," all the various kinds of animals and plants have been manifested on this planet. That divine action has concurred and concurs in these laws we know by deductions from our primary intuitions; and physical science, if unable to demonstrate such action, is at least as impotent to disprove it. Disjoined from these deductions, the phenomena of the universe present an aspect devoid of all that appeals to the loftiest aspirations of man, that which stimulates his efforts after goodness, and presents consolations for unavoidable shortcomings. Conjoined with these same deductions, all the harmony of physical nature and the constancy of its laws are preserved unimpaired, while the reason, the conscience, and the aesthetic instincts, are alike gratified. We have thus a true reconciliation of science and religion, in which each gains and neither loses, one being complementary to the other.

Source:

From: St. George Mivart, On the Genesis of the Species, (New York, 1871), pp. 269-283, 294-305.

Scanned by Jerome S. Arkenberg, Cal. State Fullerton. The text has been modernized by Prof. Arkenberg.

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