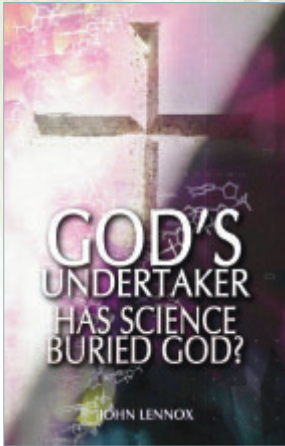




GOD'S UNDERTAKER: HAS SCIENCE BURIED GOD?

REVIEWED BY ANDRE KYME



God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?

Dr John Lennox
Lion, 2007, 192pp

Few questions engage the human mind and have such timeless relevance as those to do with the origin and purpose of life. Seeking to answer such questions inevitably brings to the fore numerous disciplines—cosmology, biology, mathematics, geology, philosophy—and it therefore presents as a daunting task to comprehensively interact with, let alone challenge, the mainstream schools of thought. In his book *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* Dr John Lennox—scientist, mathematician, philosopher and theist—not only attempts to probe the relationship between science and religion, but ultimately demonstrates where the scientific evidence really points. The book comes in the context of ongoing public debate on the compatibility of science and religion, and Lennox has some important and insightful things to say to challenge those who insist on an atheistic science.

At the heart of Lennox's thesis is the claim that the source of conflict is not actually between science and religion, as

it is often purported to be, but rather between two worldviews—naturalism and theism. Naturalism, the view that everything proceeds from, and remains in, the realm of the material, is fundamentally atheistic because it rejects any notion of the supernatural. Theism and, in particular, monotheism, is the belief in a unique creator God who made and upholds the universe. Unlike science and

of atoms in motion, human beings are *simply* machines for propagating DNA, and the propagation of DNA is a self-sustaining process. It is every living object's *sole* reason for living' (italics mine). Lennox helpfully shows how adding the italicised words subtly shifts it from an unobjectionable scientific statement to 'not a statement of science but rather an expression of personal belief' (p18).

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religion, Lennox argues that naturalism and theism *are* mutually exclusive. His proposition is that the remarkable (logical) compatibility of a very influential scientific theory—biological macroevolution—and a worldview—naturalism—results in '... so much a priori philosophical pressure ... that aspects of the theory may not be subjected to the wide-ranging, rigorous, self-critical analysis which is ... characteristic of all science' (p97). He supports this view by citing various examples of 'scientific' conclusions that he claims run against the evidence.

As Lennox rightly points out, this is entirely contrary to the philosophy of the scientific method which, by definition, should 'lead one wherever the evidence points' (p37).

Lennox further supports his claim by highlighting inconsistencies in the rhetoric—statements by scientists that misleadingly present as 'scientific'. The following comment by perhaps the best-known academic voice against theism, Richard Dawkins, serves as an example: 'The universe is *nothing but* a collection

Lennox also seeks to dispel some long-held myths surrounding the relationship between theism and scientific endeavour. For example, contrary to many opponents of theism who would suggest that theism hinders scientific discovery, Lennox shows the opposite to be true—the fact that observations in our universe have explanations in terms of well-defined mechanisms and theories is totally consistent with a monotheistic worldview involving a creator God. Indeed, as Lennox notes, it was monotheistic belief that inspired the early scientific pioneers because they expected their experimentation to elucidate a non-chaotic world, functioning according to predictable, observable mechanisms.

Overall, Lennox's claim that the conflict is actually worldview-driven is quite persuasive. If nothing else, it certainly encourages greater discernment in this debate in distinguishing the objective (based on scientific observation) from the subjective (personal). Regardless of whether one agrees with his claim or not, it serves to introduce a key question he wishes to answer through the rest of

the book: Which worldview—naturalism or theism—does the scientific evidence sit most compatibly with?

To address this question, Lennox first presents evidence on the cosmological front—citing, for example, the rational intelligibility of the universe (that is, the very fact that the universe is not chaotic but able to be studied) and the fine-tuning of the fundamental forces and

that evolutionary biologists are all wrong, or that the design he argues for has its source in the Christian God; rather, his aim is to show that an hypothesis of design per se is wholly consistent with the science. This is a deliberate emphasis on Lennox's part, precisely to avoid the accusation of 'God of the gaps' laziness. Having said this, however, he certainly does take the opportunity to point out

evidence that information is conserved in nature. He says that such conservation, while not yet definitive, is the direction in which information and algorithmic theory is pointing. His proposition is that if information is conserved in nature, like other fundamental quantities such as energy, then it would be impossible for the vast complexity of information inherent in the genetic code to have appeared through random processes. Some input of information would be necessary. It is in light of this that Lennox demonstrates how various naturalistic hypotheses for biogenesis 'smuggle' information in and do not, as they claim, produce complexity from randomness.

In conclusion, in the context of the ongoing debate regarding the compatibility of science and religion, Lennox has presented well-reasoned arguments to suggest that, when it comes to questions regarding the origin of life, an inference to design cannot be ruled out. Importantly for Lennox, it is the science that has revealed these things, and it is theism, as opposed to naturalism, which provides reasonable justification for them. Lennox's contribution is systematic and insightful. While requiring careful reading and reflection to digest properly, many readers unfamiliar with the technicalities of some of the areas broached will appreciate the time Lennox affords in introducing them before

conditions in the universe that make life possible. However, most of his attention is focused on the biological front, especially the mechanism of the origin of life.

Lennox argues that change across species and, more importantly, the origin of life event, cannot readily be explained by the random processes of evolutionary biology. He claims that many evolutionary biologists, however, want to go one step further than saying natural selection accounts for the form of life, to say that it also accounts for its origin. Lennox's style in this section is quite strongly defensive, and it is perhaps a fair criticism that due merit of evolutionary biology—such as examples of where it has provided powerful insights and explanation—is not acknowledged as readily as it could be.

Importantly though, Lennox's aim in the book is not to convince readers

the consistency of the design inference with the Christian worldview, where, of course, God is the designer. On one occasion also, Lennox goes one step further to show the legitimacy of

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identifying the 'Logos' or 'Word' of the New Testament with the 'input of information' he has argued is necessary for biogenesis (see below). This point, although intriguing, stands slightly aloof of the main impetus of the book and could understandably frustrate some readers.

Perhaps the freshest contribution Lennox makes to the debate is his analysis of the concept of information and, in particular, whether there is any

framing his arguments. At the very least, Lennox has done an important service by exposing some key misconceptions in the science/religion debate, and by pulling together and analysing, in a relatively short space, much contemporary thought on it. ☺

Andre Kyme is doing a PhD in physics at the University of Sydney, trying to improve neurological imaging of small animals in preclinical research.

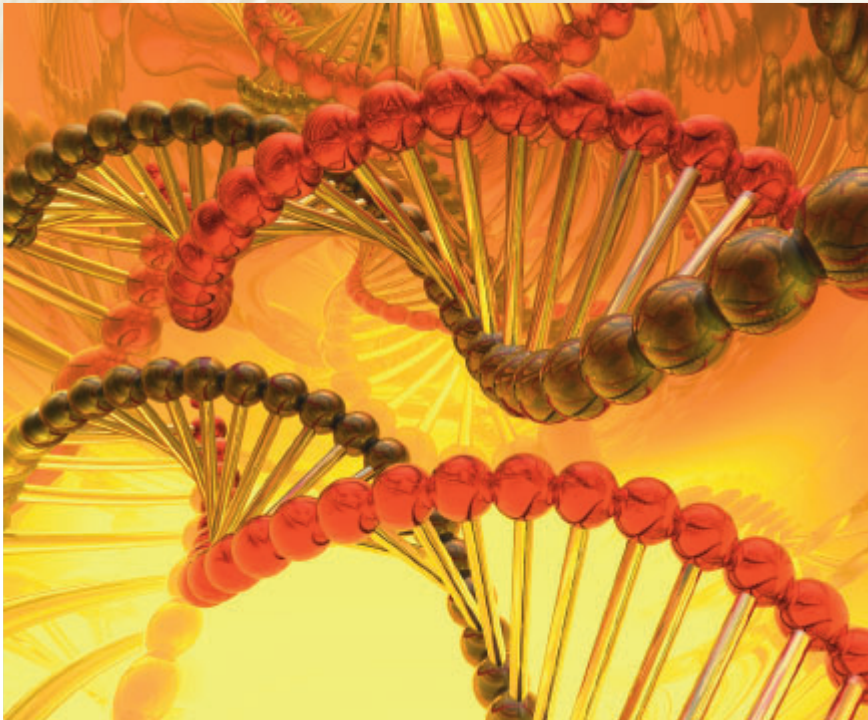


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