Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco (Ed.). *Creation through Evolution: New Perspectives from Thomistic Philosophy and Theology*. The Catholic University of American Press 2025. 281 pp. $85.00 USD (9780813239255); $34.95 USD (9780813238708).

The title of *Creation through Evolution* is intended to reflect the view that "God used and continues to use an evolutionary process to create the novelty and diversity that adorn the living things that populate our universe" (2), while the contributions to the book are aimed at diminishing the apparent tensions that such a view might present to Catholic believers by using the resources of Thomistic philosophy and theology in particular. In his editorial introduction, Austriaco describes the book as "intended for Catholics who are struggling with questions that relate evolution to their Christian faith" (9), while hoping that it will be of interest to a wider group of Christians as well. It is probable the six chapters that address areas of theological contention will be of less general interest than the four chapters that address three areas of philosophical contention—involving the question of whether biological taxa have essences, the principle of proportionate causality, and the relationship between evolutionary biology and Thomistic natural law ethics.

Mariusz Tabaczek's contribution, a revised version of chapter 2 of his *Theistic Evolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), offers a detailed review of the various concepts of biological species available. On the most popular species concepts, such as Ernst Mayr's Biological Species Concept, a given organism belongs to a particular species in virtue of properties extrinsic (and hence not essential) to it. Tabaczek, however, prefers species concepts that also appeal to intrinsic properties, such as Michael Devitt's in his *Biological Essentialism* (Oxford University Press, 2024). Among them, he favors a "hylomorphically informed definition of species" (41), on which the essences of species are mixtures of actuality (substantial form) and potentiality (primary matter), which he recommends as at least worthy of consideration. Covering a lot of territory in a short space, Tabaczek's discussion is understandably but frustratingly condensed, and there is remarkably little discussion of biological practice, in light of which a form of pluralism or conventionalism about species concepts might be more appealing.

Both Brian Carl's and Daniel D. De Haan's contributions address the worry that Aquinas's principle of proportionate causality (PPC)—"nothing can give what it does not possess," in slogan form—poses a barrier to evolution, as Catholic opponents of evolution (Carl cites Michael Chaberek) sometimes claim. They take rather different approaches: Carl examines the details of how Aquinas explains various relevant phenomena in biology and cosmology, while De Haan stages a philosophical combat between Thomist naturalism (which accommodates evolution) and Thomist supernaturalism (which requires direct divine action to fill the gaps required by a particular evolution-unfriendly understanding of the PPC). But they nevertheless converge on rejecting understandings of the PPC that pose a barrier to evolution and on acknowledging the metaphysical resources available to the Thomist that allow evolution. De Haan moreover offers a few arguments against Thomist supernaturalism, which have no counterpart in Carl's contribution.

In his contribution, Raymond Hain identifies what he describes as two challenges posed by evolutionary biology to Thomistic ethics, one metaphysical and one epistemological. The

epistemological challenge is to understand "the relationship between our knowledge of evolutionary biology ... and our knowledge of the virtues and the natural law" (99). Hain suggests, in a sustained discussion, that it is to be answered through a recognition that "accounts of human nature and accounts of practical principles are mutually entangled in such a way that neither can be independently foundational for ethics" (106) in a basically Aristotelian way. The legitimacy of these accounts requires a stable human nature, which evolutionary biology appears to threaten: this is the metaphysical challenge. Hain briefly suggests, à la Devitt's biological essentialism, that in advancing structural explanations biology is in effect committed to at least partly intrinsic biological essences. Hain concludes, "[E]volutionary biology (at least in its current state) leaves Thomistic ethics for the most part where it has always been" (114).

Turning to the theological chapters of *Creation through Evolution*, Simon Francis Gaine's "The Teaching of the Catholic Church and the Evolution of Humanity" provides a detailed and informative description of the sources and limits of Catholic teaching on human evolution in particular. Richard Conrad's "What if 'Adam' Had Not Sinned?" is, in contrast, exploratory in nature. Paleoanthropology affirms that there are continuities between the first humans and their hominin ancestors, whereas, according to Conrad, "the traditional Christian picture" affirms that the first humans enjoyed "immortality and invulnerability" (143). Conrad suggests that Aquinas provides the resources to bring these views into conversation, even as certain of his own views (such as understanding Genesis 2 historically) fall by the wayside. Robert Barry's contribution interestingly canvases several ways to understand the transmission of original sin in light of evolution, concluding that "the transmission of original sin is sufficiently explained solely by the transmission of human nature" (190).

Isaac Augustine Morales's "What Kind of Death?" offers a reading of Romans 5:12–21—which connects the sin of Adam and death's entrance into the world—in the light of modern science; Morales contends that "death" is to be understood as human alienation from God and its consequences. Austriaco defends the historicity of Adam and Eve, identifying Adam as the first member of *Homo sapiens* to be capable of language and Eve as his mate, whether she was capable of language, as he prefers, or not. His account is thus polygenist in the modern theological sense (see Gaine's contribution, 136–42). Austriaco relies, perhaps a bit opportunistically, on the controversial account of language evolution given in Robert C. Berwick and Noam Chomsky's *Why Only Us* (MIT Press, 2016). Finally, Daria Spezzano contends that Aquinas offers "insights that help to understand how, in God's providence, human evolution was directed toward an eschatological end" (238); she concludes, "God prepared the human body for the ontological leap of a transition to spiritual life not only in this world but in resurrected glory" (260).

There is plenty of philosophically and theologically interesting material in *Creation through Evolution*, but it is disappointing that the views of Catholic anti-evolutionists are not explicitly addressed. It is not as though the editor is unaware of such views or unwilling to engage with them: on his Thomistic Evolution website circa 2022, Austriaco was conducting a written *disputatio* with fellow Catholics who reject evolution in favor of progressive creationism (Michael Chaberek, who is mentioned in a few footnotes in *Creation through Evolution*) and young-earth creationism (Hugh

Owen). Unfortunately, the debate was never concluded, the Thomistic Evolution website is defunct. Given that Catholics who are struggling with reconciling their faith with evolution are likely to have been exposed to philosophical and theological (as well as scientific) misinformation, there is a need to debunk it, which *Creation through Evolution* might have tried to meet.

Whether framed as debunking or not, it would have been particularly valuable for *Creation through Evolution* to address the intelligent design movement (with which Chaberek is also associated). The movement is arguably at bottom a recrudescence of the argument from design as popularized in British natural theology by William Paley. But there is a long-standing suspicion of Paley's argument among Catholic philosophers, on the grounds that it assumes a mechanistic conception of the world and that it results in a demiurge rather than a deity. For example, in his *Thomas Aquinas: God and Explanations* (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), C. F. J. Martin concludes, "The argument from design [à la Paley] fails, then, because it is an argument from ignorance, because it confuses the final and efficient modes of explanation, and because even if it succeeded it would not prove the existence of God but of some Masonic impostor." Understanding these considerations would equip Catholic believers to resist intelligent design's attempts to dissuade them from accepting evolution.

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