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J. David Hoeveler. *The Evolutionists: American Thinkers Confront Charles Darwin, 1860-1920.* Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007. xii + 265 pp. $76.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-1174-3; $25.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7425-1175-0.

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Evolution's Inroads

In *The Evolutionists*, J. David Hoeveler surveys a range of American intellectuals in an attempt to explain how scientists, religious figures, legal theorists, sociologists, feminists, and historians all dealt with the ramifications of evolution by natural selection. By concisely telling the story of how prominent figures grappled with this paradigm shift, Hoeveler's book provides a handy guide for tracing the intellectual transformations brought on by Charles Darwin's revolutionary thesis in a manner well suited for those unacquainted with its considerable impact near the turn of the century.

We often take evolution for granted in the twenty-first century. The discovery of fossil evidence supporting Darwin's theory of natural selection–among other discoveries in the fields of anthropology, geology, and cognition–have reinforced the nineteenth-century edifice Darwin and his admirers erected against considerable resistance. Yet, as Hoeveler shows, American intellectuals' initial reception of Darwin's ideas was not without reservation. The theory of evolution by natural selection's unnerving implications (the notions that humans are simply more advanced animals; that perhaps a personal God did not create advanced life forms ex nihilo after all; and that entrenched biological impulses may lie behind desires and feelings purportedly unique to humans) were radical long after 1859, when *The Origin of Species* was first published. This should not be surprising, as even in twenty-first-century America these conclusions are still controversial among an unusually large percentage of the population.

Familiar names reappear throughout Hoeveler's book, including the sociologists Lester Ward and William Graham Sumner. Yet figures not traditionally discussed in the context of evolution frequently appear as well; from the Orthodox Protestant theologians Charles Hodge and James McCosh, to their more liberal contemporaries, Henry Ward Beecher and John Bascom, the author illuminates the ways in which religious figures sought to shore up their faith against the rising tide of scientific evidence eroding their deepest held convictions. As Hoeveler notes, the crisis "produced the most bitter quarrels, and not only between theists and secularists, but between theists of all kinds. It gave a new life to liberal Christianity; but some of its exponents had to endure heresy trials at denominational courts" (p. 77). These fascinating chapters on how the faithful reconciled their traditions with Darwin's theory should fill in many gaps left by survey texts whose focus is on the political and scientific shifts after Darwin.

By providing a text that is comprehensive in scope, from the rise of legal realism, to the reconciliation of faith and science, to the feminist appropriations of evolution by natural selection's conclusions, Hoeveler has succeeded in producing a highly readable and well-researched work on a topic that continues to unsettle us. Through an accessibly laid out, thematically oriented survey of Darwin's reception in America, the author has made a useful contribution to a field rife with narrowly focused, discipline-specific monographs. *The Evolutionists* is perfect for those who want to experience the broad implications of Darwin's transformative theory in a sophisticated manner without becoming bogged down in technical minutiae or donning a lab coat. And though rarely exploring each subfield in depth, the book is useful as a quick reference for broad themes and their interrelatedness over a transformative period in American intellectual history.

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