



[John Henry Newman](#) [1]

1868, May 22

The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman

The Oratory Bm May 22/68

[Birmingham, May 22, 1868]

My dear Canon Walker

I got Smith on the Pentateuch at once on your suggestion, and have been much interested in what I have read of it — but have not read enough to get into it as a whole [W. Smith, *The Book of Moses or the Pentateuch in its Authority, Credibility, and Civilisation*, London 1868]. Mr Beverly's work too has come, but with no supplemental chapter. Pray convey my acknowledgement to the *unknown* author [*The Darwinian Theory of the Transmutation of Species examined by a Graduate of the University of Cambridge*, London 1868]. It is a careful and severe examination of the theory of Darwin — and it shows, as is most certain he would be able to do, the various points which are to be made good before it can cohere. I do not fear the theory so much as he seems to do — and it seems to me that he is hard upon Darwin sometimes, which [sic] he might have interpreted him kindly. It does not seem to me to follow that creation is denied because the Creator, millions of years ago, gave laws to matter. He first created matter and then he created laws for it — laws which should *construct* it into its present wonderful beauty, and accurate adjustment and harmony of parts *gradually*. We do not deny or circumscribe the Creator, because we hold he has created the self acting originating human mind, which has almost a creative gift; much less then do we deny or circumscribe His power, if we hold that He gave matter such laws as by their blind instrumentality moulded and constructed through innumerable ages the world as we see it. If Mr Darwin in this or that point of his theory comes into collision with revealed truth, that is another matter — but I do not see that the *principle* of development, or what I have called construction, does. As to the Divine *Design*, is it not an instance of incomprehensibly and infinitely marvellous Wisdom and Design to have given certain laws to matter millions of ages ago, which have surely and precisely worked out, in the long course of those ages, those effects which He from the first proposed. Mr Darwin's theory *need* not then to be atheistical, be it true or not; it may simply be suggesting a larger idea of Divine Prescience and Skill. Perhaps your friend has got a surer clue to guide him than I have, who have never studied the question, and I do not [see] that 'the accidental evolution of organic beings' is inconsistent with divine design — It is accidental to *us*, not to *God*.

Most sincerely yours in Xt John H Newman

P.S. Why is not the principle of generation atheistic, if that of development is? Did we not know the *fact*

that species and races are drawn out in succession from one couple, we might say that it was a theory inconsistent with the doctrine of creation. And à fortiori, it might be urged, 'here the *accidental* meeting and marriage of two persons, or the sinful intercourse, will oblige the Almighty to create a soul at any moment.' Therefore (not only not the body, but) the soul is *not* created, but is the accidental consequence of the human will, etc. etc.

The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman, edited by C.S. Dessain and T. Gornall, vol. XXIV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 77-78.

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