

# Strange Bedfellows

*A look at Darwinists and traditionalists and the strategies they share.*

REBECCA MERRILL GROOTHUIS

IT ALL BEGAN WITH A DINNER TABLE CONVERSATION THAT MY HUSBAND AND I ENJOYED WITH PHILLIP Johnson and his wife a few years ago.<sup>1</sup> In listening to Johnson's quiet complaints of how the prejudices and presuppositions of Darwinists have shaped public discourse on the question of life's origin, I recognized a familiar pattern. Much of what Johnson had observed concerning the contours of the debate between Darwinists and creationists, I also had observed in the debate between evangelical traditionalists and egalitarians.<sup>2</sup>

Intrigued by the analogy, I determined to investigate further Johnson's cultural analysis of the evolution/creation controversy. The more I learned about the debate raging in the scientific, educational, and political arenas over the origin and development of life, the better I understood the debate in the evangelical Christian community over the roles of men and women. Conversely, my own observations of the gender wars in the church enhanced my understanding of the "rules of the game" that are operative in the public debate over biological evolution. It seemed to me to be the same game, but with different players waging war over a different set of key concepts.

In each case, the public discourse is controlled by the representatives of the dominant ideology (whether Darwinism or traditionalism) through the repeated and predictable use of a number of rhetorical strategies. Lines are drawn and categories are created to the effect that the views of dissenters are dismissed before they are heard and seriously considered.

Of course, the mere fact that certain semantic strategies are employed to maintain an ideology's cultural hegemony does not mean that the ideology itself is false. But it does mean that if the ideology *is* false, its falsity is being effectively concealed, and arguments in favor of rival positions are being unfairly silenced.

We need to be alert to the various rhetorical devices employed in public discourse, for the way people communicate can do more to obscure than to inform. The following observations concerning some of these communication strategies have been culled from both Phillip Johnson's insights on the Darwinism debate and my own extensive look into the gender issue within evangelicalism over the past ten years.<sup>3</sup>

## Appealing to authority

Proponents of the orthodoxy (i.e., the dominant ideology) typically defend their position by appealing to an authority that their challengers have no reason not to accept. Darwinists preface their assertions with "Science has shown . . ." as readily and frequently as traditionalists intone, "The

Bible says . . ." Frequent appeal to an unimpeachable authority dissuades the public from looking at the entire body of evidence that is available from these sources of authority—evidence that would, if examined carefully, cast doubt on the confident assertions of the orthodoxy.

The cultural hegemony of the orthodoxy is enforced by its "priesthood"—its "wise men" who interpret the meaning and significance of the evidence, whether scientific data or biblical texts. They are the authorities on the source of authority, and to question their dicta is tantamount to questioning the authority (science or the Bible) that they mediate to the common folk.

Consequently, anyone who accepts the source of authority to which the orthodoxy appeals is expected to accept the orthodoxy itself. A real scientist is, ipso facto, a Darwinist. A real Bible-believing Christian is, necessarily and by definition, a gender-role traditionalist. Conversely, opponents of Darwinism are benighted souls who reject science in favor of mindless religious faith. Opponents of gender hierarchy are secularists or heretics who have no regard for the truth of God's authoritative Word but desire simply to twist and revise Scripture as their personal preferences dictate.

As a result of this maneuver, civil and informed dialogue is shut down. Debate is no longer an option. Alternative viewpoints are not countenanced. Darwinian evolution *is* the scientific position. Gender hierarchy *is* the biblical position. To deviate from these views is simply to be unscientific, or unbiblical.

The question at stake in the origins debate, however, is not whether science is a source of truth, but whether an honest application of scientific methodology really points to a naturalistic evolutionary theory of life's origin and development. The question at stake in the gender debate is not whether the Bible is our absolute authority, but whether the doctrine of a universalized, spiritualized gender hierarchy is actually taught in Scripture, or is even theologically compatible with what the Bible clearly states concerning the essential spiritual equality of all persons, the equal imaging of God by both male and female, the priesthood of all believers, and Christ as the one mediator and high priest between God and humanity.<sup>4</sup>



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## **Inventing a public face**

Those who defend and maintain the dominant ideology typically create a PR description of their position by reducing it to its indisputably evident elements. The orthodoxy is thereby made to appear irrefutable by any rational standard. In public rhetoric, evolution is commonly defined as changes in the history of life through breeding patterns, while traditionalism is often described as the acknowledgment of creational differences between women and men and the different roles that follow therefrom. The points at issue in these controversies, however, do not concern these simplistically true statements, but their assumed implications—which are left unspecified in their official, PR definitions.

For example, many Darwinists will cite evidence for microevolution (small-scale adaptive variation within a species) and then act as though they have proven macroevolution (the development of all life forms from a simple life form by a similar adaptive process of gene mutation and natural selection, thus ruling out the need for a supernatural Creator).<sup>5</sup> Traditionalists will cite scientific studies showing psychological differences between men and women and then assume they have proven the “naturalness” of their own gender role prescriptions. As Johnson observes, people are always “eager to underwrite value-laden philosophies by borrowing against the deserved prestige of experimental science.”<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, Johnson’s response to the Darwinist claim in this regard is identical in logical structure to my response to the traditionalist claim.<sup>7</sup> Put briefly, it is not sufficient to note that genetic mutations occur, or that differences exist between men and women. A number of features must be shown to be true about genetic mutations or gender differences before a case can be made for Darwinism or gender hierarchy. As it happens, these features cannot be shown to be true.

A simplistic, propagandistic description of an ideology distracts people from the contradictions and difficulties inherent to the ideology by focusing on its easily affirmed aspects: an observable process of natural variation on a small scale can occur within a species as living things adapt to their environment; gender differences exist, there are roles unique to each sex, role differences do not necessarily entail inequality, and so forth. The keepers of the orthodoxy then present these concepts as definitive of their position, and accuse their challengers of taking issue with these obviously true propositions. This approach portrays dissenters as unconscionably irrational, and it completely sidesteps the heart of the disagreement.

Again, the issue in the gender debate is not whether men and women are different, but whether these differences are sufficient to justify the unequal roles, rights, and opportunities prescribed by traditionalists. The issue in the debate over evolution is not whether some natural variation occurs among living creatures, but whether the processes by which natural variations occur can reasonably be

construed as the sole means by which all forms of life came into being.

## **Creating categories for ridicule**

All too often, proponents of the orthodoxy respond to questions and criticisms with a distinctly superior air, as though the truth of their position were so patently clear only a fool or a fanatic would dispute it.

A false dilemma lies behind much of the orthodoxy’s dismissive ridicule. Many traditionalists and Darwinists hold doggedly to their position because they perceive the only alternative to be, respectively, radical feminism and the breakdown of the family, or an irrational biblical literalism and a rejection of scientific objectivity. Defenders of the orthodoxy frequently assume their opponents have an insidious, radicalized agenda that will stop at nothing short of total, fanatical takeover. Those egalitarians and creationists who present careful, moderate, nuanced views simply have not revealed the full extent of their ideology or intent. There really isn’t, nor can there be, a *biblical* feminist or a *rational* creationist.<sup>8</sup>

*Creationism* is a term similar to *feminism* in that it serves as a useful rhetorical tool for those who oppose it. For each term there is both a narrow and a broad definition. *Creationism* can be used (typically by journalists) to refer specifically to literalistic, six-day, young-Earth creationists, or it can be used (usually by Darwinists) to refer to all those who do not accept evolutionary naturalism, including those in the intelligent design movement who reject Darwinian evolution for primarily scientific rather than biblical reasons.<sup>9</sup> *Feminism* can be—and typically is—used to refer to politically or theologically liberal feminists who have little respect for the authority of the Bible; but it can also be used quite broadly (usually by traditionalists) to designate all those who reject gender hierarchy, including those who do so for biblical rather than cultural or political reasons (and who would probably be regarded as “traditionalists” by modern liberal feminists). In each case, the rhetorical punch is in the equivocation—when Darwinists or traditionalists use one of these terms in the broad sense, knowing that it will connote the narrow, more negative meaning in the minds of their audience.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, opponents of Darwinian evolution are routinely represented as scientifically ignorant religious fanatics who refuse to acknowledge the indisputable scientific fact that genetic changes occur across generations.<sup>11</sup> Opponents of traditionalism are frequently accused of being foolish, self-centered feminists who deny all differences between men and women, as well as the authority of Scripture. Commentator Thomas Sowell’s observation is applicable here as elsewhere: “Once you are committed to a moral melodrama, rational responses to the real problem become almost impossible.”<sup>12</sup> In a holy war, argument proceeds by means of demonizing the opposition.

Prominent among the weaponry of demonization are

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the rhetorical strategies of caricature and stereotype. Johnson points out that, contrary to the allegations of some Darwinists, "the intelligent design position is not that miracles should be arbitrarily invoked in place of logical inferences from evidence, but rather that evidence pointing to intelligent causes, where present, should not be disregarded due to bias."<sup>13</sup> In other words, opponents of Darwinism invoke "miracle" (in the sense of supernatural causation) only when the evidence points to it. Nonetheless, they are frequently caricatured as invoking miracles capriciously and irresponsibly, thus jeopardizing the entire scientific enterprise. Similarly, opponents of gender hierarchy invoke "equality" (in the sense of equal ability or function) only when the evidence points to it; that is, they attempt to discern when gender differences make a significant difference and when they do not. Yet traditionalists repeatedly depict egalitarians as invoking equality capriciously and irresponsibly, such that all differences between men and women are obliterated, even to the point where same-sex "marriage" becomes as natural and acceptable as marriage between a man and a woman.

Fundamental conceptual distinctions tend to dissolve in the heat of rhetorical warfare. To say that the origin of species is not adequately explained in naturalistic terms is not to say that there is never a natural explanation for anything. To affirm that gender differences are irrelevant to determining qualification for Bible teaching, decision-making, or spiritual leadership is not to declare gender differences always irrelevant to all human activity.

Because of the orthodoxy's entrenched antipathy toward dissenting viewpoints, criticizing the orthodoxy can end a person's career—whether it is in the field of scientific research or conservative Christendom.<sup>14</sup> People in the sciences or the church who do not adhere to the dominant view (Darwinism or traditionalism) must be careful to distance themselves from the "religious" or the "feminist," lest they be grouped in one of these categories—and, thereby, dismissed from the realm of the credible.

Just as Darwinists frequently use "religion" as a surrogate word for "nonsense,"<sup>15</sup> so traditionalists tend to use "feminism" as a surrogate word for "heresy" or "secularism." In each case, a term with a legitimate (if controversial) meaning becomes a code word for the contemptuous. In this way, positions that challenge the orthodoxy are sneered at, not overtly, but in code, as it were. Johnson observes that "what cannot be done explicitly can often be done implicitly, by the imposition of categories and definitions that are anything but neutral in their impact."<sup>16</sup> In other words, "a viewpoint or theory is marginalized when, without being refuted, it is categorized in such a way that it can be excluded from serious consideration."<sup>17</sup>

Darwinists typically assert that creationism is a religious belief, and thus has to do with subjective feelings or val-

ues, while Darwinian evolution is scientific, which is a matter of objective knowledge or facts.<sup>18</sup> Defining and compartmentalizing the issue in this way conveniently exempts Darwinists from having to give the scientific case for creation (or intelligent design) a fair hearing. Similarly, saying that the idea of gender equality comes from modern cultural feminism and traditional gender roles from the Bible excuses traditionalists from seriously considering the biblical and theological case for equality on its own merits.

As Johnson notes, "evolutionary naturalists rely on a cultural stereotype to shut off all criticism of their philosophy. The stereotype portrays all opponents as extreme Genesis literalists who reject the evidence of science for purely religious reasons."<sup>19</sup> Likewise, traditionalism maintains its ideological dominance, not primarily through hermeneutical arguments (which are not followed by rank and file evangelicals), but through constant recourse to the cultural argument: biblical egalitarians have simply been duped by secular feminism. The relentless ridicule and rejection of anything categorized as "feminist" imposes ideological blinders on people's minds, ensuring that their thinking remains in lockstep with that of the traditionalist priesthood. For instance, the ferocity of the public outcry in the spring of 1997 that shut down translators' efforts to render the New International Version of the Bible in gender-inclusive language was not a result of compelling arguments related to translational issues, but of sensational journalistic rhetoric that cleverly categorized the proposed revised translation as a "unisex," "feminist" product of modern cultural ideology.<sup>20</sup>

The cultural stereotypes almost invariably prevail when the media address these issues. Johnson complains that he has "found it practically impossible, for example, to get newspapers to acknowledge that there are scientific problems with Darwinism that are quite independent of what anybody thinks about the Bible."<sup>21</sup> So, too, have I found it practically impossible to get newspapers and magazines to acknowledge that there are biblical and theological problems with traditionalist gender roles that are quite independent of what anybody thinks about feminism. Unlike Johnson's dilemma, I (and other biblical egalitarians) encounter this with Christian media as well as secular news publishing.

Whoever "owns the microphone" (i.e., controls the media) determines whose voice is heard and whose is silenced.<sup>22</sup> Because the guardians of the orthodoxy are the gatekeepers of public discourse, they easily maintain ideological dominance by systematically freezing out dissent, frequently refusing even to engage or understand the rival view before high-handedly dismissing it. In the end, the media story follows the script written by the orthodoxy. As a result, much of the public remains entirely unaware of even the existence of credible alternative theories.<sup>23</sup> Yet if

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the defenders of the orthodoxy really believe their view is the plain, obvious fact of the matter, it seems they would seek to establish this through open and reasonable argumentation and not seek repeated recourse to the rhetoric of desperation (ridicule, caricature, the silent treatment, insult, presuming ignoble motives, and so forth).

## Obscuring the issue

The semantic strategies employed in public discourse are often designed to divert people's attention from the dominant ideology's core affirmations, undefined definitions, and hidden assumptions. The PR emphasis on the genetic changes that normally occur in the history of life obscures a foundational premise of Darwinian orthodoxy, namely, that no supernatural God need be postulated in order to account for the existence of natural life in all its complexity.<sup>24</sup> The emphasis on the simple fact of gender differences obscures the often unstated traditionalist assumption that gender differences entail status differences. (From this assumption traditionalists go on to assert that anyone who disputes women's subordinate status is simply refusing to recognize the differences between men and women.) Masked by the orthodoxy's public persona, the offense of its fundamental premises goes unnoticed in the heat of a debate that is essentially controlled by the orthodoxy's priesthood.

One has but to nose around a bit behind the PR picture of Darwinism to realize that the evidence for macroevolution is not at all compelling unless one begins with the presupposition of philosophical naturalism—the belief that nature (matter plus energy) is all there is, and that all phenomena can and must be explained in these terms. As Johnson points out, that which “is presented to the public as scientific knowledge about evolutionary mechanisms is mostly philosophical speculation and is not even consistent with the evidence once the naturalistic spectacles are removed.”<sup>25</sup> The “truth” of Darwinian evolution depends on metaphysical naturalism being true. This is the point on which the issue hinges. Darwinists are not typically willing to admit this, however.

Similarly, the biblical evidence for a God-ordained hierarchy of man's spiritual authority over woman is not compelling unless the Bible is viewed through the spectacles of traditional gender stereotypes. The idea of universal male leadership is implausible apart from the premise that there are some things that women are just not spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually fit to do. This is what the argument is really about, but few traditionalists want to admit it.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the certainty with which the orthodoxy is set before the public, its claims are not supported adequately, or entirely, by the evidence. “As a general theory of biological creation,” Johnson observes, “Darwinism is not empirical at all. Rather, it is a necessary implication of a philosophical doctrine called scientific naturalism.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, scientists are compelled to be Darwinists, not by the empir-

ical evidence for the theory, but by the philosophical necessity of the theory. “There can be argument about the details, but if God was not in the picture something very much like Darwinism simply has to be true, regardless of the evidence.”<sup>28</sup>

Likewise with traditionalism. There can be argument about the details (e.g., exactly where the line should be drawn between what women can do and what only men can do), but if women are not designed for certain positions of leadership, and if it is fundamentally unfitting and unfeminine for women to enjoy the same rights, opportunities, and religious privileges as men, then the Bible must set forth a universal principle that mandates some sort of male supremacy and female subordination, regardless of how spotty, equivocal, and fraught with contradiction the biblical evidence for this may be.<sup>29</sup>

In the end, the evidence serves the assumptions of the orthodoxy's priesthood, and these assumptions are fundamentally metaphysical; that is, they pertain to the nature of things, whether of male and female, or of ultimate reality. The refusal to “come clean” concerning foundational issues sidetracks and obfuscates public discussion of these controversial topics. As Johnson powerfully puts it, “Addressing the metaphysical questions honestly will not heat up the culture wars, but rather tend to make them a part of the normal political and intellectual debate that characterizes a free and pluralistic society. What infuriates people is not disagreement but the subtext of contempt that necessarily accompanies the pronouncements of a ruling intellectual establishment whose power is based on a secret it is unwilling to disclose.”<sup>30</sup>

We cannot arrive at the right answers unless we ask the right questions. But when those who set the agenda are also those who pose the questions, the debate easily veers off into conceptual territory that is favorable to those who are framing it. The questions that challenge the orthodoxy are intentionally and easily sidelined. As Johnson observes, “Dogmatism thrives by obfuscation, especially by giving the impression that the really important questions should not be asked. When those questions are clearly placed in public view, the truth has a chance to speak for itself.”<sup>31</sup>

What, for example, would happen if these debates were to address honestly the following questions: Does scientific inquiry consist of an objective consideration of the evidence wherever it might lead? If so, why don't Darwinian scientists pursue the evidential gaps in evolutionary theory, such as the question of how natural selection can increase genetic information? Likewise, are women truly equal to men in their standing before God, their human value, and their essential being? Why must a woman be spiritually submissive to a man if women and men are spiritually equal? Why should a person be permanently assigned an inferior rank, solely because of some inherent personal attribute (in this case femaleness), if she is not inferior in her personal being? When crucial questions such as these

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are so readily dismissed in favor of questions that evade the core issues, the truth does not have a chance to speak for itself.

## Conceptual cover-ups

In addition to the semantic camouflaging of issues and objections, various theoretical constructs are devised by the orthodoxy's priesthood in order to finesse conceptual difficulties within each system of thought. Both traditionalism and Darwinism require that certain assumptions and expectations be imported from outside the available evidence (whether biblical or scientific), in order to fill in the gaps and shore up the weak links in the system. To derive the doctrine of a universal hierarchy of male spiritual authority, the actual biblical data must be augmented with suppositions, inferences, and anachronisms.<sup>32</sup> So, too, must the evidence for Darwinian evolution be enhanced with assorted theories and speculations in order to derive from it a completely naturalistic account of life's origin and development.<sup>33</sup>

In each view, the system of thought is held together at its sundry weak links by cobbled-together constructs. The whole house would fall down without these strategic but precarious postulates. Darwinists rely on such notions as emergent properties, catastrophism, the blind watchmaker thesis, and a disjunct between science and religion.<sup>34</sup> Traditionalists rely on a questionable interpretation of "head" in the New Testament as necessarily a metaphor for spiritual leader, an assumption that submission (when required of women to men) means unilateral obedience to spiritual authority, a carefully and circuitously constructed hierarchy of ministerial authority, and, of course, a disjunct between woman's function and woman's being.<sup>35</sup>

Two of the constructs mentioned here merit a closer look, namely, the Darwinian notion of emergence and the traditionalist disjunct between being and function. Johnson explains how some Darwinian thinking manages to incorporate the theoretical benefits of the concept of the mind as an immaterial entity, yet without actually asserting the existence of immaterial, supernatural reality (which, in their view, would be prescientific, religious nonsense).<sup>36</sup>

If the mind, as well as the objects and ideas it studies, are all elements that have evolved within a closed system operated by natural laws, then the mind—like the rest of the natural world—is merely a product of a mindless system, a pawn of random forces. How can it assess and judge the system reliably? Such materialist reductionism renders all scientific theorizing inadequate and untrustworthy. As Johnson observes, "The story of the great scientific mind that discovers absolute truth is satisfying only so long as we accept the mind itself as a given. Once we try to explain the mind as a product of its own discoveries, we are in a hall of mirrors with no exit."<sup>37</sup>

Darwinists who do not wish to succumb to the consequences of materialist reductionism must, Johnson ex-

plains, "fight it by setting up a barrier to reductionism that is sufficiently impermeable to provide the advantages of dualism while being sufficiently flexible to avoid serious metaphysical trouble. The code word for this 'now you see it, now you don't' barrier is *emergence*, a term that refers to the tendency of surprising new properties to emerge when substances are combined."<sup>38</sup> Thus, consciousness is neatly defined as an emergent property of brain chemistry. It is a "something" distinct from brain chemistry, yet it consists of nothing but brain chemistry. The mind, like everything else in a naturalistic universe, is a product of blind evolutionary forces. Yet, the self-conscious mind is still something more, somehow, than the sum of its material parts, and we can proceed on the basis of the assumption that it is a more or less reliable organ of knowledge.

Similarly, advocates of gender hierarchy must find a way to argue that the female nature is suited for inferior status, yet is not inferior. Unless women can be said to possess essential qualities that uniquely equip them for roles of subordinate domesticity and put them in need of the spiritual governance of men, the entire edifice of traditionalist dogma becomes arbitrary and untenable. Nonetheless, traditionalism today—unlike the truly traditional view—is committed to repudiating the notion that women are inferior to men. So women must be portrayed as innately and uniquely fitted for a place of permanent subordination to men, yet without being inferior to men.

As with naturalistic scientists, the dilemma is resolved through the manipulation of language. The vocabulary of the traditionalist argument is carefully designed to protect its proponents from charges of misogyny, while also providing some sort of metaphysical warrant for women's subordination to men. To adapt Johnson, the linguistic barrier devised for this purpose is sufficiently impermeable to allow some basis in "nature" for the gender roles that follow from the traditional, prescientific belief in woman's inferiority, while being sufficiently flexible to avoid serious metaphysical trouble. The "code words" for this barrier include "femininity" (defined as woman's natural aptitude for supporting and submitting to male leadership), "masculinity" (defined as man's inherent sense of authority, especially over woman), "difference" (to refer to the feminine role of inferior status), "responsibility" (to refer to the masculine role of superior status), "servanthood" (to redescribe male authority), and, finally, "equal in being, unequal in function" (to reconcile woman's unequal status and opportunities with her alleged equality).<sup>39</sup> Thus, woman's inferior rank is rooted in and validated by woman's nature—not because she is by nature inferior, but because she is "feminine" and "different" yet "equal" in value. In this way, an ideology that makes no sense without the premise of woman's inferiority manages to incorporate the theoretical benefits of this premise, all the while officially denying it.

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the orthodoxy's priesthood is determined to disallow (whether belief in the supernatural or in woman's inferiority) is smuggled back into the ideology when it is necessary for meaning, coherence, and justification.

## Camouflaging the contradictions

The rhetoric of the orthodoxy also misleads when it implies that there is no real conflict between the orthodoxy and its opposition. Some proponents of Darwinism have been attempting to palliate troubled theists by saying that evolution is not incompatible with religious faith, but only with a Genesis literalism. Evolutionary biology does not rule out, but rather (when properly understood) points to, the existence of a wise Creator. The orthodox Darwinian position, however, is that the theory of evolution renders the idea of God unnecessary and irrelevant.<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, traditionalists have in recent years taken to insisting that when their position is properly understood, it acknowledges and honors woman's essential equality with man. The feminists, therefore, are fussing over a fallacy. However, the traditional rationale for gender hierarchy has always been the logically coherent one, namely, that woman's inferior status points to and follows from her inferior nature.

The differences between creationism and Darwinism, and between gender equality and gender hierarchy, are

irreconcilable.<sup>41</sup> To affirm the one is to deny the other. God either did or did not play a direct and necessary part in life's origin and development. If God did so, then the Darwinian effort to account for life in purely naturalistic terms is false. Women either are or are not equal to men in terms of spiritual prerogative and moral responsibility. If they are, there is no logical or theological basis for their permanent and necessary subordination to men in these areas.

Nonetheless, Darwinists and traditionalists who want to defer dissent—or who feel threatened by dissenters' arguments—will often deny the fundamental issues that are in conflict, and attempt to play both ends against the middle. The result of such evasive action is internal incoherence, which is cheerfully disregarded for the sake of maintaining ideological dominance.

The keepers of the orthodoxy routinely disguise conflicts and deflect criticisms by positing a disjunct between contradictory concepts. Naturalistic scientists separate Darwinism (which is "science") from creationism (which is "religion"), and claim that science is concerned with objective knowledge and religion with subjective beliefs. Traditionalists declare a woman's ostensibly equal "being" unrelated to her clearly inferior "function."

These conceptual disjuncts serve to deliver their respective ideologies from cultural "hot water." In fact, they are

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## Endnotes

1. Johnson, a law professor at the University of California at Berkeley, has authored several books critiquing Darwinism, including *Darwin on Trial* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991; revised 1993). Johnson's most recent assessment of the debate is *The Wedge of Truth: Splitting the Foundations of Naturalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

2. Traditionalists believe that the Bible teaches a universal gender-based hierarchy of female subordination to male authority. Biblical egalitarians disagree, maintaining that mutual submission and equal opportunity for ministry should characterize the relationships of all believers, regardless of race, class, or gender.

3. Some disclaimers before I proceed: (1) There are traditionalists, as well as Darwinists, who are more interested in pursuing truth and reason than ideological hegemony, and so do not resort to these semantic strategies in promoting their beliefs. These are not the people of whom I speak in this article, because they are not typically the ones politicking and crusading for their ideology, thereby setting the tone and the terms of the public discourse. (2) The comparison between Phillip Johnson's and my insights on the evolution and gender debates (respectively) are not intended to reflect in any way on Johnson's own view of the gender issue. (3) The purpose of this paper is not to present a complete argument against traditionalism or Darwinism, but to address and analyze the similarities in the public rhetoric employed to defend these two systems of thought.

4. See Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997),

chaps. 1, 3, and 4.

5. Phillip E. Johnson, *Reason in the Balance: The Case Against Naturalism in Science, Law, & Education* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 73–74.

6. *Ibid.*, 200.

7. See *ibid.*, 80–82; and Groothuis, 234–35.

8. On the orthodoxy's fear of radicalism in their opponents, see Johnson, *Reason*, 47, 183; and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Women Caught in the Conflict: The Culture War Between Traditionalism and Feminism* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1994; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub., 1997), chaps. 8 and 11.

9. Johnson, *Wedge*, 65; Johnson, *Reason*, 74.

10. A similar effect occurs with the relatively recent use of *complementarianism* to refer to traditionalist gender hierarchy. Broadly speaking, a complementarian is someone who believes that men and women complement one another—certainly not a controversial concept. But the term's current usage actually denotes a much narrower meaning—namely, someone who believes men and women complement one another precisely when men authoritatively mediate God's will and interpret God's Word in the home and the church, and women submit to the men's authority in these areas. When those who hold this view refer to themselves as complementarians, they use the term in its narrow, specified sense; but to the public mind, the term is likely to connote simply the broad—and broadly acceptable—notion of gender complementarity.

11. Johnson, *Reason*, 73.

12. Thomas Sowell, *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, 12 July 2000, 33A.

13. Johnson, *Wedge*, 130.

invoked so frequently for this purpose, they almost sound like mantras. The traditionalist mantra is that the prescribed female subordination to male authority has nothing to do with a woman's "being" but only her "function." Women are not inferior to men in essence, but only in role or function. The Darwinist mantra is that evolutionary theory has nothing to do with religion, but only science; the question of life's origin pertains to facts and knowledge, not values or beliefs.

The repeated intoning of these mantras keeps objections at bay, and it forestalls open discussion about foundational assumptions. The question of women's inferiority cannot be discussed, because it is denied. The question of divine intervention in the origin and development of life cannot be discussed, because the presence of any metaphysical or religious beliefs within the context of scientific investigation has been ruled out by definition. There is no contradiction between women's equality and women's subordination, because the two are deemed unrelated. There is no contradiction between creationism and Darwinism, because the two are deemed unrelated. Thus, traditionalists are immune from the criticism that gender hierarchy denies the equality of women, and Darwinists are immune from the criticism that their theory of evolution offends and opposes those who believe God had a hand in creating life.<sup>42</sup>

### Concluding thoughts

There seem to be two kinds of crusaders for Darwinism or traditionalism: the simplistic and the sophisticated.<sup>43</sup> The simplistic accept uncritically the official stereotype, the PR version of the orthodoxy (i.e., natural variations occur, gender differences exist), and believe that this settles the case

and leaves no room for debate. The sophisticated are aware of the loopholes and lacunae in their position and attempt to finesse them with complex arguments, arcane data, authoritative assertions, and euphemistic redescrptions. Like the simplistic, however, the sophisticated often evince no willingness to give serious consideration to rival views, but claim absolute certainty that their own position is correct, and profess astonishment that their opponents should be so deluded.

This state of affairs is not likely to change very much, given the cultural (and ecclesiastical) influence and opportunities enjoyed by representatives of the orthodoxy, their ready access to the arenas of public debate, and the string of semantic strategies that are routinely employed "to bamboozle, intimidate, and coax the public into accepting the view that furthers the interests of the priesthood."<sup>44</sup>

Contemplating the contours of public discourse in these two controversies has persuaded me that postmodernists are correct when they say that the politics of power is largely the politics of language games in the service of ideological dominance. As postmodernist philosopher Richard Rorty observes, "anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescrbed."<sup>45</sup> This, of course, doesn't make a thing good or bad; but it does make it appear so in the eyes of an easily bamboozled public.<sup>46</sup> ■



Rebecca Merrill Groothuis is a freelance writer and editor and the author of *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality (Baker)* and *Women Caught in the Conflict: The Culture War Between Traditionalism and Feminism (Wipf & Stock)*. The author has revised and expanded an earlier version of this article, first published in *Christian Ethics Today* (Feb. 1998).

14. See Johnson, *Reason*, 96, with respect to the field of science. Any number of egalitarian pastors, professors, and leaders within various evangelical organizations can testify to this reality with respect to conservative Christian ministry.

15. See *ibid.*, 182.

16. *Ibid.*, 33.

17. *Ibid.*, 21.

18. *Ibid.*, 48.

19. Phillip Johnson, *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 21.

20. The irony is that these rhetorical strategies, which many traditionalists find so useful, do not represent the traditional way of marketing ideas, but the politicized, postmodern way of rejecting rational discourse in favor of the repeated intonation of inflammatory catch phrases that ridicule the opposition. In the NIV controversy, there were some attempts to discuss actual issues, but it was the inflamed rhetoric that inflamed public opinion.

21. Johnson, *Defeating*, 34. This complaint may be losing its pertinence in Johnson's case, given the burgeoning influence of the intelligent design movement.

22. *Ibid.*, 32–33.

23. I have been surprised to discover how many, many evangelicals—including students at theological seminaries—have never even heard the biblical case for gender equality.

24. Johnson, *Reason*, 14–16, 196.

25. *Ibid.*, 12; see also 16, 205–06.

26. See Groothuis, *Good News for Women*, chaps. 2–4.

27. Phillip E. Johnson, "What Is Darwinism?" *Christian Research Journal*, Spring 1997, 26

28. *Ibid.*, 22.

29. The ambiguities and contradictions inherent to the biblical case for gender hierarchy are explored in *Good News for Women*.

30. Johnson, *Reason*, 191–92.

31. Johnson, *Wedge*, 16.

32. See Groothuis, *Good News*, chaps. 5–9. A typical anachronism is the reading of NT texts as though they were written directly to 20th-century readers.

33. See, for example, Johnson, *Reason*, 82–83.

34. See *ibid.*, 75–86; 126–128.

35. See Groothuis, *Good News*, chaps. 2, 3, 6 and 8.

36. Johnson, *Reason*, 125–28; *Wedge*, 118–21.

37. Johnson, *Reason*, 62.

38. *Ibid.*, 127.

39. See Groothuis, *Good News*, chaps. 2–3.

40. See Johnson, *Reason*, 75.

41. See *ibid.*, 109, 205–18, with respect to theism vs. naturalism.

42. Johnson notes that polls show only 10 percent of Americans believe God had nothing to do with the origin and development of life. Johnson, *Wedge*, 65.

43. See Johnson, *Reason*, 83.

44. From a lecture on Darwinism by Phillip Johnson.

45. Richard Rorty, "Ironists and Metaphysicians," in *The Truth About the Truth: De-Confusing and Re-Constructing the Postmodern World*, ed. Walter Truett Anderson (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 101.

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