

**PRESS & TELEVISION**

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most as much as they do.”

In more optimistic times, Kasen observes, comic strips helped perpetuate Americans' belief in equality of opportunity. Today, they portray a “democracy of underdogs.”

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**RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY**

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*Darwin's Faith*

“God and Natural Selection: The Darwinian Idea of Design” by Dov Ospovat, in *Journal of the History of Biology* (Fall 1980), c/o 235 Science Center, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Charles Darwin (1809–82), whose theory of evolution shook the foundations of religious faith in the West, claimed to believe in God—at least from 1838 to 1859, when he was formulating the theory. But recent biographers dispute him, citing unpublished jottings by Darwin that characterize God as a creature of man's imagination.

Ospovat, a University of Nebraska historian, argues that the naturalist's public testament is true.

In 1838, two years after his globe-girdling research trip aboard the *Beagle* ended, Darwin believed that God worked through “secondary causes.” By this, he meant that the Creator had devised a set of natural laws designed to achieve certain ends, rather than styling and altering each species himself. This suggests to some scholars a view of God as a human construct. “May not the idea of God arise from our confused idea of ‘ought,’ joined with the necessary notion of ‘causation’?” Darwin wondered. But he was not implying that man invented God to explain the unfathomable, Ospovat contends. Instead, Darwin meant that God had produced a human brain organizationally capable of conceiving of the idea of him.

Darwin's spiritual crisis was prompted late in 1838 by his theory of natural selection, which held that successful species develop initially by chance. How could this view dovetail with the notion of a plan of creation? Darwin resolved the dilemma by postulating that evolution's laws guarantee general, not specific, results. The emergence of a particular organ, for example, is governed by chance. But natural selection will never support a structure harmful to an animal.

Not until the 1860s, writes Ospovat, did Darwin abandon his faith. Throughout the 19th century, anatomists studied related structures (such as the bird claw and the human hand) whose differences could not be explained by function alone. Why were tasks sometimes performed by different organs in different creatures (e.g., an elephant draws water with its trunk, but a giraffe laps it up with its tongue)? And why did some species' changes lead to extinction? Darwin could find no answers consistent with the idea of an all-powerful, intelligent Creator. His conventional faith faded into agnosticism.