

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Readers are invited to submit reviews of current literature relating to origins. Mailing address: ORIGINS, Geoscience Research Institute, 11060 Campus St., Loma Linda, California 92350 USA. The Institute does not distribute the publications reviewed; please contact the publisher directly.

SEEING THE FOREST AND THE TREES

A Meaningful World: How the Arts and Sciences Reveal the Genius of Nature. Benjamin Wiker and Jonathan Witt. 2006. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic. 257 p. Paper \$ 18.00.

*Reviewed by Timothy G. Standish
Geoscience Research Institute*

If you were a fortunate child, your mother read you Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*.¹ At other times she took out a big book with prints of celebrated paintings and page-long descriptions explaining the greatness of each one. Sometimes she may have allowed you to skip school to visit art galleries, and your father may have taken you around the world so that you could experience the art and history of the Old and New Worlds. Then your high school would have taken you to Saturday night orchestral performances that moved your soul, and your English teacher would have encouraged your interest in Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot and the sonnets and sermons of John Donne.

Perhaps Charles Darwin experienced a childhood something like this, but he somehow lost his love for beautiful literature. As he put it: "later in life I wholly lost, to my great regret, all pleasure from poetry of any kind, including Shakespeare."² Darwin's experience is not unique; in fact there are probably many scientists who somehow ceased to thrive on the wonders of art and literature. In *A Meaningful World*, Benjamin Wiker and Jonathan Witt make plain why this is and provide connections that rekindle joy and wonderment at the product of both human and Divine creativity.

Darwinian reductionism dissolves appreciation of the genius behind masterpieces. The human body is merely an arrangement of parts; behavior merely chemical reactions in the brain, paintings only pigments on canvas, sonnets arrangements of words on paper. The words are made from letters and the letters are ink and the ink is chemicals, everything is atoms and

the atoms themselves are electrons, neutrons and protons and the protons are quarks and gluons and ultimately everything is just energy slowly dissipating in a gigantic universe that grinds toward equilibrium and nothingness.

In the Darwinian world, Bach's *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen!*³ is the product of sexual selection because fertile women freely mate with musically talented men. The soprano sings not to "Praise God in all lands" but to increase the number of offspring she produces. She and the offspring are collections of atoms that have arranged themselves via chance changes and natural selection into the likes of Montserrat Caballe. How exactly sexual selection would work with the castratos of Bach's time is unclear, but at least we can be sure that they were made of atoms like everyone else.

For the hollow victims of Darwinian reductionism, the orchestra disintegrates into violins, oboes, trumpets and tympani drums, each of which merely moves the atoms which in turn move atoms in our ears resulting in chemical reactions and the feeling of wonder is simply a shadow which may in some way have caused our ancestors to produce more babies. Knowledge is the fragmented product of what natural selection has caused humans to believe and — while the likes of Richard Dawkins may rant about the God delusion⁴ that evolution has saddled us with — belief must have been adaptive before humans evolved to the exalted state of Dawkins himself.

Given the empty fading-star world Darwinian reductionism presents, traditional Christianity offers a vivid reality, rich with texture and glowing in the light of a unity of knowledge cemented together by one ultimate Truth, one faith and one God. This symphony of knowledge has been discussed in recent books like Nancy Pearcey's brilliant *Total Truth*,⁵ but Wiker and Witt visit this understanding of reality with a clarity and accessibility that is breathtaking. For once readers do not have to be trained scientists or philosophers to understand the hallmarks of genius in nature and human creativity. Rather than having a Biblical and philosophical emphasis like Pearcey's book, *A Meaningful World* is focused on the world of art and nature, making this is a book for those who love art, beauty and elegance, but not just the artistic — the scientists, engineers and mathematicians as well.

A Meaningful World unbuckles the mental straitjacket that scientists get themselves trained into. The heavens part, the rolling forest of knowledge with all its rich interacting and interdependent components is illuminated. This is heady medicine for those who can't see the forest for

the trees. Whether those who insist the forest is only trees and the trees are only atoms will take the medicine and feel the earth tremble, hear the harmony and grasp the vision remains an open question. Those who do so will experience once again the beauty of knowledge, the meaningfulness of words and understand that the joy they experienced from art and prose as a child is not extinguished by a knowledge of nature. In the real world, science and the arts each enrich and complement understanding of the other; both, at their best, are part of and point to the same Truth.

ENDNOTES

1. Lamb C, Lamb M. 1878. *Tales from Shakespeare*. NY: Thomas Y. Crowell.
2. Darwin CR. 1958. *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin 1809–1882 (With original omissions restored; Edited with appendix and notes by his grand-daughter Nora Barlow)*. St James's Place, London: Collins, p 44.
3. JS Bach Cantata 51 *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen!* (Praise God in All Lands!).
4. This is the title of Richard Dawkins recent book: Dawkins R. 2006. *The God Delusion*. NY: Haughton Mifflin.
5. Pearcey NR. 2004. *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.