

BOOK REVIEW

of

Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey,
Science and Evolution: Developing a Christian Worldview of Science and Evolution,
Tyndale House Publishers, 2001.

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This review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

Charles Colson is well known as a popular author and speaker, and founder of Prison Fellowship. Nancy Pearcey is also well known as an author and speaker. Perhaps her best known book is *Total Truth*, which won the 2005 Evangelical Christian Publishers Association Gold Medal Award for the best book in the category of “Christianity and Society.” The main text of the book under review is chapters 5 through 14 of the 1999 book *How Now Shall We Live?*, also published by Tyndale, and by the same authors. The book under review is shorter in length, and designed for individual and group study. In this form it is still a little over 200 pages in length. The larger volume is a little over 640 pages.

The book under review contains an Introduction, and How to Use This Book. It is then divided into five sessions. Session 1 is titled Is Nature God? Is Science Religion? The session has two chapters: Dave and Katy’s Metaphysical Adventure, and Shattering the Grid.

Session 2 is titled Was there a Beginning? Is there a Design? The session has two chapters: Let’s Start from the Very Beginning, and Life in a Test Tube?

Session 3 is titled Did We “Just Evolve”? The session has two chapters: Darwin in the Dock, and Darwin’s Dangerous Idea.

Session 4 is titled Choose Life. The session has two chapters: A Matter of Life, and Whatever Happened to Human Life?

Session 5 is titled Life Worth Living. The session has two chapters: In Whose Image?, and God Makes No Mistakes.

Each session ends with Discussion Questions. At the end of the volume is a fairly lengthy list of Recommended Reading.

The approach taken in the book is to include a fair amount of technical detail, supplemented with notes and recommended reading, but also a winsome writing style that stresses the importance of the material. For example, the opening chapter, Dave and Katy’s Metaphysical Adventure, is a story about a father, Dave, and his daughter, Katy, who visit Dis-

ney World’s Epcot Center and the materialistic worldview that they encounter there, and how this leads into a serious study on the part of Dave about the truthfulness of such a worldview. On the other hand, chapter three, Was there a Beginning? Is there a Design?, is a serious look, in popular terms, of the impact of the Big Bang theory, and how the earth appears to be just so in many, many ways for life to exist here.

An overall theme throughout the book is the necessity, which materialists fail to do, of separating true, empirical science from a materialistic philosophy which scientific evidence does not justify. In fact, true scientific evidence increasingly confirms a Christian worldview while a materialistic philosophy leads to denial and contradictions.

In Chapter 2, our society is described as teaching in our public schools and presenting in places like the Epcot Center that “science is the source of truth, while religion is merely subjective opinion, something we tolerate for those weak enough to need that kind of comfort.” (p. 17) Christians do challenge such notions, but “The moment a Christian questions evolution, he or she is labeled a backwoods Bible-thumper, an ignorant reactionary who is trying to halt the progress of science.” (p. 23) “We must challenge the assumption that science by definition means naturalistic philosophy.” (p. 23) The key in this last quotation is “by definition”. Science *is not* naturalistic philosophy by definition.

In Chapter 3, briefly mentioned above, it is stated that “After maintaining for centuries that the physical universe is eternal and therefore needs no creator, science today has uncovered dramatic new evidence that the universe did have an ultimate origin, that it began at a finite time in the past – just as the Bible teaches.” (p. 31) This, of course, refers to the so-called Big Bang. This theory, when first proposed, was resisted by many scientists for the simple reason that it did imply a Creator, but more and more evidence has been gathered such that it is widely accepted today that the universe has a finite existence: “the idea of creation is no longer merely a

matter of religious faith; it is a conclusion based on the most straightforward reading of the scientific evidence.” (p. 33) “The great physicist Arthur Eddington summed up the feelings of many of his colleagues when he stated that the idea of a beginning is philosophically ‘repugnant.’” (p. 34)

After reviewing developments in origin of life theories and experiments in Chapter 4, the following is concluded: “Today, holding on to the hope that some natural process will be found to explain DNA is supremely irrational. The elusive process that naturalists hope to find would have to be completely unprecedented, different in kind from any we currently know. Surely *this* is an argument from ignorance.” (p. 62)

Chapter 5 addresses Darwinian evolution directly. Probably the most important and compelling observation in this chapter is that variation within a species has been observed to be limited and that evolution has never been empirically observed: “The best argument against Darwinism has been known for centuries by farmers and breeders, and it can be stated in a simple principle: Natural change in living things is limited.” (p. 71) “Darwinism cannot deny that all observed change is limited”. (p. 72) “Neither Darwin nor anyone else has ever actually witnessed evolution occurring. It is a conjecture, an extrapolation going far beyond any observed facts.” (p. 73) “The core of the controversy is not science; it is a titanic struggle between opposing worldviews – between naturalism and theism.” (pp. 82-83)

Chapter 6 is concerned with the very weighty implications of naturalistic evolution. The authors quote William Provine of Cornell University, who was prior to his death a very outspoken advocate of evolution, but openly accepted the implications of such: “Darwinism means: ‘No life after death; no

ultimate foundation for ethics; no ultimate meaning for life; no free will.’” (p. 86) The authors note that “Whether we start with the assumption that we are creatures of a personal God or that we are products of a mindless process, a whole network of consequences follows, and these consequences diverge dramatically.” (p. 87) Near the end of the chapter, four reasons for rejecting evolution and a naturalistic worldview are given as follows: “First, cosmology has discovered the shattering truth that matter is not eternal after all, . . . Second, there are the staggering ‘coincidences’ that make the universe fit for life. . . . Third, laboratory experiments touted as proof that life can arise spontaneously by random natural forces turn out to prove nothing of the sort. . . . Fourth, Darwin did not succeed in demonstrating that life developed by means of mindless, undirected natural forces.” (p. 96)

Chapter 8 is concerned with the implications of where human life came from: blind naturalistic forces, or from the creative act of God. This question of the origin of human life is critically important: “The most vexing cultural issues of our day – abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia, genetic engineering – all turn on questions about what it means to be human, about the value of human life and how life should be protected.” (p. 127)

This book makes it clear that a person’s attitude toward science and evolution has profound worldview implications. Is science the only pathway to objective knowledge? Is science inherently committed to a naturalistic worldview? Are we the product of ageless biological evolution that is blind and without purpose? The Christian religion answers no to all three questions and provides the only coherent worldview that makes sense of all of knowledge and experience.