

BOOK REVIEW

of

Nancy R. Pearcey and Charles B. Thaxton,
The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy,
Crossway Books, 1994.

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

I first became aware of Nancy Pearcey through her involvement with the intelligent design movement. She gave an impressive speech at a *Darwin, Design and Democracy* conference held in Kansas City a few years ago, which I was privileged to attend. She has contributed chapters to several intelligent design books (*Mere Creation, Of Pandas and People, Signs of Intelligence*, etc.), contributed science and Christian worldview articles to the *Bible-Science Newsletter* over a period of thirteen years, and is currently the Francis A. Schaeffer Scholar at the World Journalism Institute. She has an M.A. degree from Covenant Theological Seminary. She studied Christian worldview issues under Francis Schaeffer at L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland. Charles Thaxton is a chemist, having obtained his Ph.D. from Iowa State University; he was a postdoctoral fellow in the history and philosophy of science at Harvard University. He is perhaps best known, within the context of intelligent design, for the ground-breaking book that he coauthored: *The Mystery of Life's Origin*. My copy of the book under review has endorsements by eight scholars, including J.P. Moreland, Phillip Johnson, James Sire, and Stephen C. Meyer. Johnson wrote the following: "Pearcey and Thaxton show that the alliance between atheism and science is a temporary aberration and that, far from being inimical to science, Christian theism has played and will continue to play an important role in the growth of scientific understanding. This brilliant book deserves wide readership."

The Soul of Science has four parts and a total of ten chapters. Part One is titled The New History of Science. It contains chapter 1, which is titled An Invented Institution: Christianity and the Scientific Revolution. It also contains chapter 2 – The History of Science and the Science of History: Contemporary Approaches and Their Intellectual Roots. Part Two is titled The First Scientific Revolution. It contains chapters 3, 4 and 5. Chapter 3 is titled A New "Thinking Cap": Three Little Sciences and How They Grew. Chapter 4 is The Newtonian World Machine: How Does God Relate to the World? Chapter 5 is The Belated Revolution in Biology: Taking Biology from Metaphysics. Part Three is titled The Rise and Fall of Mathematics. It contains chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 6 is Math in the Past: Discovering the Structure of Creation. Chapter 7 is The Idol Falls: Non-Euclidean Geometry and the Revolution in Mathematics. Part Four is titled The Second Scientific Revolution. It contains chapters 8, 9, and 10. Chapter 8 is titled Is Everything Relative?: The Revolution in Physics. Chapter 9 is Quantum Mysteries: Making Sense of the New Physics. Chapter 10 is A Chemical Code: Resolving Historical Controversies.

Part One introduces the issues of concern to the authors of this book. Chapter 1 alone is worth the price of this book. In it the authors strongly stress that it was not coincidental that the scientific revolution took place only once in history, and that it took place in Christianized Western Europe and no place else. "The type of thinking known today as scientific, with its emphasis upon experiment and mathematical formulation, arose in one culture – Western Europe – and in no other." "Science 'demands some kind of unique soil in which to flourish.' . . . What is that unique soil? Eiseley identifies it, somewhat reluctantly, as the Christian faith." "It should not be terribly surprising that Christianity was an important ally of the scientific enterprise. After all, modern science arose within a culture saturated with the Christian faith. That historical fact alone is suggestive. It was Christianized Europe that became the birthplace of modern science – there and nowhere else." A great deal of historical data and reasonings is presented in chapter 1 to support those statements. Chapter 2 presents a discussion of how the "history of science" has changed over time. Early on there was a strong effort to separate scientific pursuits from Christianity, and to suggest, if not outright claim, that science grew in Europe in spite of Christianity, not because of it. The "histories written in the eighteenth century (not only by Voltaire and Condorcet but also by Hume, Montesquieu, and Gibbon) were designed with one purpose in mind – to discredit Christianity." Much that is taught today still holds that there is and always has been a tension between science and the Christian faith, as though they were at odds with each other. This, in spite of the fact that there has been a significant shift towards recognizing the true history of the development of science.

Part Two gives historical detail on the rise of science in Europe. Chapter 3 covers details on three approaches that have been used in the pursuit of science: Aristotelian, neo-Platonic, and mechanistic. Chapter 4 is an overview of Newton's life and work. Chapter 5 gives an historical overview of the development of biology.

Part Three presents how math grew as the most precise and rigorous area of science. In the beginning of the scientific revolution, math, especially pure math, was viewed as a means of determining truth. Pure math is closely allied with logic and philosophy. However, "today many mathematicians view mathematics as a game, pursued according to its own rules and solving its own internal problems. They no longer speak of mathematics as *true* but only internally consistent." Why the change? Why the loss of certainty? Mathematics used to be thought of in the West as discovering the laws of the Lawgiver. It was assumed that the precision and certainty was there because it was put there by God. "The idea that logical truth could be separated from physical truth represented a massive shift in Western intellectual history. From the time of the ancient Greeks, most Western philosophers had assumed that reality is ultimately rational – that what is logically true is also really true." Once mathematics became viewed as a construct of human origin, and not divinely given, then confidence in mathematical truth corresponding to physical truth was lost.

Part Four is concerned with what the authors refer to as the second scientific revolution, which began early in the twentieth century with developments in relativity, quantum physics, and genetics. Relativity theory was a challenge to Newtonian physics, and incorrectly many began to assume that relativity applied to morals as well. Quantum physics was also a challenge to Newtonian physics due to the supposed randomness of certain things such as subatomic particles. Some took this as supporting various forms of mysticism. The discovery of the DNA code is perhaps a step back in the right direction, with its emphasis on information and information processing at the cellular level. The history of science shows many steps forward as long as hard evidence is being dealt with, and a strong tendency to go astray when philosophical implications are entertained. The question is, could science ever have gotten started if it was not in a culture long saturated with Christianity. The historical fact is that the one and only time it did get started was in just such a culture.

Many authors of books never draw any real conclusions, they just stop writing. Fortunately, Pearcey and Thaxton do draw conclusions, or at least summarize what they have written. At the very end of the book they write the following: "A historical overview of scientific practice such as we have offered in this book reveals clearly that science and scholarship are never carried out in a philosophical and religious vacuum. The Christian religion, hand in hand with various philosophical outlooks, has motivated, sanctioned, and shaped large portions of the Western scientific heritage. Modern Christians ought to drink deeply at the well of historical precedent. If we do, we will never feel intimidated by the positivists and others who deny that religion has any role in genuine scholarship. In the broad scope of history, that claim is itself a temporary aberration – a mere blip on the screen, already beginning to fade."