

Understanding the Times: *The Reinterpretation of Reality* March 16, 2010

INTRODUCTION & REVIEW

God created man to be a rational being. This is a part, at least, of what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God, because God himself is a rational being.

This is a strange thought to many people—the thought that God himself is a rational being. In fact, there are large segments of the Christian church in which there is a very strong current of anti-intellectualism. They think that the mind is a hindrance to godliness—that the intellect is a threat to the faith—that faith and reason are necessarily and invariably opposed to each other. But nothing could be further from the truth. It *is* true that people often make an illicit use of the intellect to justify their rebellion against God, but the blame does not belong to the intellect, but to those who use it illicitly.

God has given us our rational powers in order to be able to know and understand truth, to be able to commune with him, and to give him a free and intelligent worship. Intelligent in the sense of “with understanding.” The inanimate creation gives praise to God and renders him obedience, always being subject to his will. But then again, inanimate things, being inanimate, can’t do otherwise, can they? But man is an intelligent creature whose worship and obedience stem from free and intelligent choice. And God often appeals to us on the basis of reason.

Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD (Isa. 1:18)

And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he *reasoned* with them from the Scriptures (Acts 17:2)

So he *reasoned* in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there (Acts 17:17)

And he *reasoned* in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4)

And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and *reasoned* with the Jews (Acts 18:19)

He *reasoned* about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment (Acts 24:25)

In fact, it would not be too much to say that every time God speaks to us, he is making an appeal to our reason. He is setting forth his case, presenting his arguments, delivering his proposals, using his arts of persuasion. He instructs us, he commands us, he exhorts us, he rebukes us, he makes promises to us. And he expects that we will see the wisdom, the rightness, the reasonableness of what he has to say. “Come, let us reason together.”

It is reasonable to believe God, to trust in his promises, because he is good and kind and he keeps his word. It is reasonable to fear him, for he is the Lord of all the earth, who will judge the world in righteousness. It is reasonable to obey him, because his commandments are holy and just and good, and they work to our benefit.

Being a Christian is the most reasonable thing in the world to do. Knowing and loving and serving God is the very essence of wisdom.

“Come, let us reason together, says the LORD.”

In the first chapter of St. John’s Gospel, it says, “In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God and the *Logos* was God” (Jn. 1:1). The Greek word “logos” is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, as is made clear in verse 14, “And the *Logos* became flesh and dwelt among us.” *Logos* is usually translated in these verses as “Word.” But it might just as well be translated *Wisdom* or *Reason*. Our English word “logic” is derived from it. The passage could very easily be translated, “In the

beginning was Wisdom (Reason), and Wisdom (Reason) was with God, and Wisdom (Reason) was God.” Jesus is the embodiment of wisdom. He is the human expression of the divine reason.

I say again, God himself is rational being and he has created us in his image and likeness, meaning that we, too, are rational beings. I emphasize this as a way of reminding you of what we considered last time. “Ideas have consequences.” Given certain premises, a given conclusion will necessarily follow. Given a certain set of presuppositions, a certain conclusion will inevitably be reached. Man is a logical being. His rational nature desires consistency in thought and action. What is held to in theory will inevitably be put into practice.

This is very important to understand. Some people have very little appreciation for the importance of theoretical thought. They pride themselves in being practical. But they don’t realize that all practice is the practice of some theory. Even the practice of ignoring theory stems from the theory that theory is unimportant! It’s never a matter of practicing theory or not practicing theory but always a matter of which theory you practice.

It matters whether we begin our thinking with God or not. What we have witnessed over the course of the last 150 years is the replacing of the Christian worldview with the materialist worldview, the idea that all there is (ultimately) is matter.

Remember our sketch of the two worldviews we’ve been discussing:

	Naturalism/Materialism/Secularism	Christianity
In the end... <i>what</i>	Man ceases to exist at death; universe itself will also “die”	Soul survives death of the body and lives forever
Norms for human behavior	None	Divine Law
<i>Why</i> did things develop like they did?	Accident/Chance	Divine Purpose
<i>How</i> do we account for things as they exist today?	Evolution	Creation
In the beginning... <i>what?</i>	Matter	God

These are two wholly distinct, wholly self-contained, and wholly antagonistic worldviews. The debate between them usually takes place on levels 2 and 4. It takes place on level 2 because of what it implies about level 1. Evolution implies materialism and creation implies the existence of God.

The debate takes place at level 4 for the same reason. To say there are transcendent norms for human behavior implies the existence of God. How can there be such norms otherwise? On the other hand, arguing for some form of moral relativism is implicitly an argument against the existence of God.

You can see how these are self-contained worldviews. They come as package deals. Grant any one step and you grant all the rest also.

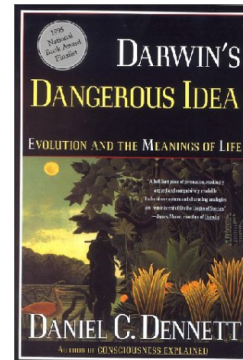
The Devolution of Ethics

The shift from the Christian worldview to the materialist worldview requires a reinterpretation, not just of these five areas, but of *all of reality and of all human experience*—a reinterpretation which is consistent with the new presupposition that nothing exists but matter in motion. This is the organizing principle around which all of reality must be understood.

Many people fail to see that the implications of Darwinism stretch beyond the

narrow confines of biology. Many people think, “What’s the big deal? Why make such a fuss about evolution? It’s just a biological theory. Why get so uptight about it?”

The reason is this: the theory of evolution is not only a statement about biology; it is the basis of an entire worldview that is fundamentally at odds with Christianity, having implications for every area of life. Evolutionist Daniel Dennett understands this. In his book, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, he describes the theory of evolution as a “universal acid” that eats through virtually all traditional beliefs.



“Almost no one is indifferent to Darwin, and no one should be. The Darwinian theory is a scientific theory, and a great one, but that is not all it is. The creationists who oppose it so bitterly are right about one thing: Darwin’s dangerous idea cuts much deeper into the fabric of our most fundamental beliefs than many of its sophisticated apologists have yet admitted, even to themselves” (p. 18). “Today, more than a century after Darwin’s death, we still have not come to terms with its mind-boggling implications” (p. 19).



Daniel C. Dennett (b. 1942), Professor of Philosophy at Tufts University

“The kindly God who lovingly fashioned each and every one of us (all creatures great and small) and sprinkled the sky with shining stars for our delight—that God, is like Santa Claus, a myth of childhood, not anything a sane, undeluded adult could literally believe in. *That* God must either be turned into a symbol for something less concrete or abandoned altogether” (p. 18).

We are well along the path of reinterpreting the world in light of this new understanding. We can get an idea of just how down the road we have traveled by considering a number of books that have been written in recent years with the specific intent of applying this new understanding to various fields of study. In the field of culture we find titles such as *Darwinizing Culture*, *Evolution and Culture*, and *Genes*,

Culture, and Human Evolution.

If politics is your thing, you can read *Darwinian Politics: The Evolutionary Origin of Freedom*. If you're on the right of the political spectrum you can read *Darwinian Conservatism*. If your political views are decidedly liberal, you might prefer *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution, and Cooperation*.

In the field of economics you can find titles such as *Economics as an Evolutionary Science*, *Darwinism and Evolutionary Economics*, and *Evolutionary Psychology and Economic Theory*.

If your interest is law, you might want to read *Evolutionary Jurisprudence*, or *Law, Biology and Culture: The Evolution of Law*.

Among a number of books applying the theory of evolution to education, one may find *Origins of Genius: Darwinian Perspectives on Creativity* and *Evolution and Literary Theory*.

In the area of medicine, there's *Evolutionary Medicine* and *Why We Get Sick: The New Science of Darwinian Medicine*. In a related field one can find *Darwinian Psychiatry* and *Genes on the Couch: Explorations in Evolutionary Psychology*.

Sexual behavior also needs to be explained from an evolutionary point of view. Among other books on this theme, you can check out *Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating*, *Ever Since Adam and Eve: The Evolution of Human Sexuality*, and *The Mating Mind: How Sexual Choice Shaped the Evolution of Human Nature*.

Even religion must be explained from a Darwinian viewpoint. A couple of books attempting to do so are: *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, and *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*.

Evolution is said to be the explanation for everything. Not long ago I saw a piece on the news that gave the results of a new study at some university yielding a stunning discovery: namely, that men tend to be attracted to women who are...how shall we say it...rather well-endowed around the upper torso, and that women tend to

be attracted to men with muscles. The interesting thing about the story was how the guest went about explaining why this should be so. And, of course, she explained it from an evolutionary point of view. Men today, she said, are attracted to well-endowed women because in our evolutionary history large breasts were deemed a sign of fertility; and women today are attracted to men with muscles because in our evolutionary past it was a sign of a mate who could provide and protect. Not that this was all consciously thought out, you understand, but that there was some kind of genetic predisposition to this sort of thing. Somehow the genes knew this. Today a man looks at an attractive, well endowed woman, and he just thinks, “She’s hot!” A woman looks at a hunk of a man and she thinks, “What a stud!” But really it’s all below the level of conscious thought. Your genes are making you think that way. It’s all about the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest.

The point is everything must be interpreted in a manner consistent with the new understanding of reality—nothing exists but matter in motion.

Let’s consider the implications for ethics. If nothing exists but matter in motion, then man is nothing but a machine, a very complex machine to be sure, but just a machine. He has no freedom to make intelligent moral choices. He has no soul or spirit which transcends the physical and material world. All of his behavior is the result of the activity of the physical organ of the brain which operates according to the laws of nature. All his thinking, all his feeling, all his emoting, desiring, hoping, and believing—everything—is due to involuntary chemical reactions and electrical impulses in the brain. All these are forces beyond his control. Man is not so much an actor as he is something acted upon.

Consequently, man’s behavior, both good and bad is explained in biological terms. In the same way that religion is explained as a natural phenomenon, so a biological basis is given for behavior.

And an evolutionary explanation is given also to man’s *evaluation* of his

behavior. One has to ask the question: If man is not a creature made in the image of God, with a moral nature as a part of his very being, then how do we account for the concept of morality? In other words, if man is just matter in motion, the result of blind evolutionary forces, what is the origin of man's moral sense? How did the idea of right and wrong, the concept of good and evil, arise in the first place?

This question also has been addressed in a number of books: *Morality as a Biological Phenomenon*, *The Origins of Virtue: Human Instincts and the Evolution of Cooperation*; *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong*.

The basic idea is summarized by Michael Ruse, professor of philosophy at Florida State:

“Our moral sense, our altruistic nature, is an adaptation—a feature helping us in the struggle for existence and reproduction—no less than hands and eyes, teeth and feet. It is a cost-effective way of getting us to cooperate, which avoids both the pitfalls of blind action and the expense of a superbrain of pure rationality.”

“In a sense...the evolutionist's case is that ethics is a collective illusion of the human race, fashioned and maintained by natural selection in order to promote individual reproduction. ... ethics is illusory inasmuch as it persuades us that it has an objective reference. This is the crux of the biological position.”



Got it? Ethics, in the sense of an objective moral order that really exists outside of us and to which we ought to conform our lives, is simply an illusion. It's an illusion fashioned and maintained by natural selection. In other words, it proved useful in the struggle for existence—useful for the species.

The idea is that an individual who is a member of a community is more likely to survive in the struggle for existence than an isolated individual. But morality is necessary in a community. Otherwise each member of the community will be fighting

against each other. The community will not have the cohesiveness to actually be a community. So those members of the species that evolved a sense of morality and developed community survived. The others did not. But it was all a natural process.

But let's consider the flip side of it. If an evolutionary explanation must be given for *moral* behavior, shouldn't an evolutionary explanation be given for *immoral* behavior also? If moral behavior is rooted in biology, would it not seem logical to say that immoral behavior is as well? Let me give you the titles of a few more books: *Why We Lie: The Evolutionary Roots of Deception and the Unconscious Mind*, and *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*.

But why do we even call the one behavior moral and the other immoral? Isn't that simply an evolutionary prejudice? If God does not exist, can there really be any such thing as morality or immorality. Morality and immorality, right and wrong, good and evil are just meaningless terms. If God doesn't exist behavior cannot be judged to be good or bad *ultimately*. If God doesn't exist, behavior is just behavior. To say that it's moral or immoral is to suggest that there is some objective standard by which it is to be judged. But if God doesn't exist, what can possibly be the standard, and where did it come from?

Conclusion

Now more than ever we must very self-consciously—purposely—look to Scripture as our authority in all matters of faith and practice. Scripture gives us not only the first principles, the presuppositions, upon which to properly construct a philosophy of life, but it also gives us the only sure basis for how we are to live. It shows us very clearly not only that there is a right and wrong, but *what* is right and wrong. It is an ethic which is rooted in the righteousness of God himself.