



By Design: Science and the Search for God, A Book Review by Jeffrey Stueber (January-February, 2006)

Witham, Larry, By Design: Science and the Search for God, (San Francisco, Encounter Books, 2003)

Larry Witham's *By Design* is partly a story of Darwinists' pronouncements of an evolution victorious as they towered over the corpse of creationism that Darwin had vanquished. Yet, almost by design, evolution began to falter and new intimations of creation began to flourish and unseat the Darwinist hegemony.

Witham, in his introductory chapter "Darwin Triumphant," describes Louis and Mary Leakey's fossil teeth find that ushered in another supposed pre-man link. The Leakey's discovery came as America, in 1959, was about to celebrate the centennial celebration of Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species*. Evolution had certainly made progress in achieving recognition among the public by then and Julian Huxley in his keynote speech at the celebration offered no conciliatory gestures toward the religious. Huxley told the public that "Darwinism removed the whole idea of God as the creator of organisms from the sphere of rational discussion. Darwin pointed out that no supernatural designer was needed." Creationists did fire back with the now famous publication of *The Genesis Flood*, but by 1959 much of the damage had been done and, after a construction of an elaborate evolutionary tree and various neurological breakthroughs, the Genesis creation epic seemed relegated to the dust bin.

Yet, before the dust had settled in this battle, cracks were already appearing in the Darwinist framework. Witham describes a controversy between geneticists and gradualists – the former suggesting that genetic mixing among isolated groups drove the engine of evolution and the latter suggesting that natural selection drove it. Once it was acknowledged that changes came from genetic variations, it became the task of evolutionists to explain how large macro changes could accumulate to produce what the grand scheme of evolution demands. They turned to computers for help, but they could never get over what Witham calls the "creation problem" – the fact that an intelligent designer had to design the computers that showed that evolution is possible. If anything, this showed that an intelligent designer stands behind evolution – a theory that some theistic evolutionists have long believed. More fuel was placed on the fire of doubts about evolution when the Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology convened in Philadelphia and featured attacks on the mathematical impossibility of Darwinism. Many of the scientists at this convention were disturbed that the only solution to the evolution of life appeared to be divine design, but the mathematicians did not provide cold comfort to them.

These cracks in Darwinism came as science was uncovering fresh signs of intelligent design. One surprise was the discovery that the universe had a beginning. This disturbed evolutionist scientists and Stephen Hawking admitted that "Many people do not like the idea that time has a beginning, probably because it smacks of divine intervention . . . There were therefore a number of attempts to avoid the conclusion that there had been a big bang." Soon after, a staggering number of anthropic coincidences – finely tuned cosmic constants - revealed the clever "tinkering" that must have been involved to allow the universe, and specifically Earth, to exist as a machine-like whole. (Hugh Ross put the number of cosmic constants at 40 in a video about ufos.) This was the beginning of a scientific movement that suggested clever design, not hapless random biological accidents, defined the universe.

Often the revolution from evolution to intelligent design creationism comes from the twin pillars of science and philosophy. The revolution in thinking in the science of neurology bears this out. Witham describes the "decade of the brain", the 1990s, as engendering a mood of optimism among scientists that "because the mind must have material causes, consciousness itself must be explainable and they could find with the tools of science what religion had for centuries identified as the soul." This optimism came on the heels of several scientific discoveries that seemed to confirm their materialistic suspicions. For instance, when a railroad

worker had an iron rod fly through his head causing cerebral damage that corrupted the speech functions of his brain, it suggested a link between our everyday functioning and certain areas of our brains. Scientists like Owen Flanagan even disputed and refuted Rene Descartes' philosophical proofs for the existence of the soul. Then, an a philosophical theory of emergent mind came to the forefront and posited that a non-material entity like a soul could emerge from the material, much like the slipperiness of water emerges when numerous water molecules are combined. This theory has even led to the fanciful notion that mind can emerge in computer circuitry, a notion that has played itself out on the futuristic television show Star Trek.

The cracks in this idea came from science and philosophy. Wilfred Penfield performed surgery on numerous epileptics and found that with each touch to their brain by an electrical probe, they were able to perceive the sensations. There was a mind that understood what the brain was feeling. Penfield concluded in *The Mystery of the Mind* that "The mind of the patient was as independent of the reflex action as was the mind of the surgeon who listened as he strove to understand. Thus, my argument favors independence of mind-action."

Thomas Nagel raised the philosophical issue of subjectivity – why it is never possible to understand what it is like to be another person, or even a bat. The subjective nature of each individual's consciousness would argue there is a non-material entity that is capable of perceiving itself and the biological state of it. Other philosophers like Alvin Platinga raised the worthy question of the how frivolous it is to argue that Darwinian evolution accounts for mind and religious beliefs when neither has survival value. A creationist explanation would, however, explain both if we assume the mind was designed to perceive and believe in God.

Witham's book is a tremendous account of the scientific changes that drove evolutionist beliefs and the scientific finds that propelled theories of intelligent design. Hence, we find a dialogue between the two and it is no longer fashionable to speak of science as if it stands in opposition to religion. Science, it seems, confirms the theologian, and, as Witham points out, evolutionists no longer feels as certain about their victory over God as they did when Julian Huxley announced that Darwin had banished God from reality. *LSI*