

Non Christians recognize that the creation demands a creator

Natural God: Deism in the Age of Intelligent Design

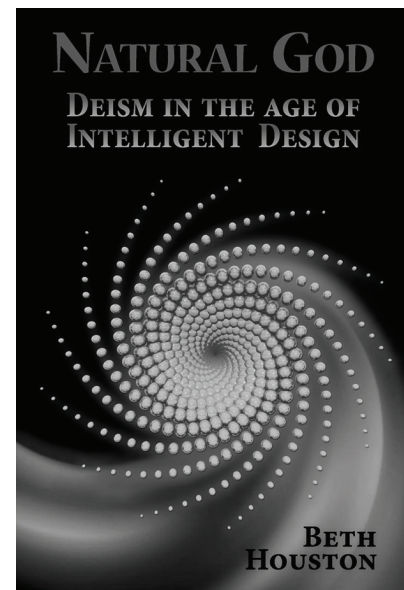
Beth Houston

New Deism Press, 2012

Jerry Bergman

The author, a professor of creative writing and literature at the University of California and several other universities, covers a lot of material rarely reviewed in books critical of molecules-to-man evolution. One may wonder what a professor of creative writing and literature could contribute to the creation–evolution debate, and the answer is a fresh approach written in an engaging style that reflects a good understanding of psychology, logic, history, and biology.

Her work is one of many examples that have refuted the common claim that rejection of Darwinism is motivated primarily by theistic religion, not the problems with evolutionism. No friend of Christianity, Professor Houston includes a fair amount of criticism of the New Testament in her book. Her conclusion is that people do not need Scripture to learn about God. Reason, science, and observation are sufficient to realize that God exists, and that He created the world and all life in it. This position is called Deism, and is the same worldview that American President Thomas Jefferson held (figure 1). The focus of her work is not biology, although this area was covered in some detail, much of which is familiar to creationists and Intelligent Design supporters. Rather, her focus is on logic, history, and psychology. For



this reason, this review will focus on several specific aspects of the book relating to Darwin’s motivations.

She stresses that science, especially Darwinism, has now become a form of dogmatism that she feels should be challenged. One point documented is that Darwin’s central ambition was not to explore the world to let it reveal itself, but to become famous (figure 2). She concludes that

“... more than anything else, it was partly Darwin’s focused ambition for respect that accounted for his success. It certainly explains his rush to publish the *Origin* ... once Wallace arrived on the scene. It is also conceivable that the central role of survival-of-the-fittest competition in his theory of natural selection was a projection of his own ambitious nature. Though he doubted his intellectual agility, he considered his talent for observation and collection of facts to be

superior, and his love of natural science, ‘steady and ardent’” (p. 126).

Houston writes that although Darwin enjoyed being a naturalist his motivation was, to quote Darwin himself, “much aided by the ambition to be esteemed by my fellow naturalists”.¹ Early in his life, “Darwin was less than intellectually inclined. Ambitious as he was, his years at Cambridge were, in his words, a waste of time. ... his academic interests were quite limited and his performance well below par” (p. 127).

While still a student at Cambridge, Darwin admitted that reading works by naturalists “stirred up in me a burning zeal to add ... to the noble structure of Natural Science”.² He once explained the reason he wanted to make a contribution to science was that he had a drive for fame.

The *Beagle* voyage

During Darwin’s famous HMS *Beagle* voyage, his research was motivated by his drive to investigate, but also from his “strong desire to add a few facts to the great mass of facts in Natural Science ... and [Darwin admitted] I was also ambitious to take a fair place among scientific men.”³ When he returned from his *Beagle* voyage, “Darwin was most strongly influenced by Sir Charles Lyell, a science mentor who ‘was very kind-hearted, and thoroughly liberal in his religious beliefs, or rather disbeliefs’” (p. 127). Lyell’s influence was important in helping Darwin achieve his goal of fame because “it was Lyell’s encouragement, advice, and example that most ignited Darwin’s aspiration to prove specifically a theory of origin—a topic very much in the air, and one that was sure to impress the impressive Lyell” (p. 127).

Furthermore, Darwin knew full well that his one chance at making a major contribution to science

“... would only be his theory of natural selection. Despite his own grave doubts, by the time the *Origin* was published and barked by his Bulldog [T.H. Huxley], Darwin was fully invested, if not in his theory’s validity, then in the *need* for it to be valid and true, or at least highly esteemed. That need itself evolved” (p. 127).

In the end, Houston concluded that, in spite of Darwin’s

“... tendency toward self-depreciation, Darwin’s ambition fueled his vanity and triggered defensiveness toward his ‘original’ theory of natural selection. Though his goal was to impress a few select people, he did relish the fame that

came with success. Is ambition vain or humble if the writer cares not about the readers who made him famous? In Darwin’s case, perhaps a bit of both” (p. 127).

For example, Darwin wrote, “I think that I can say with truth that ... though I cared in the highest degree for the approbation of such men as Lyell and Hooker, who were my friends, I did not care much about the general public.”⁴

In contrast to this admission, Darwin once admitted that it was the *public success* of his first work, *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1845),⁵ a book that covered his observations made on the volcanic islands that he visited during his *Beagle* voyage, which “always tickles my vanity more than that of any of my other books”.⁶ Houston concluded that

“Vain or not, the fundamental force that drove his work was a desire for that high esteem among fellow naturalists that can only be attained by an important contribution to ‘the noble structure of Natural Science’” (pp. 127–128).

Darwin’s loss of his aesthetic sensibility

Houston has had a life-long interest in aesthetics, an interest that has determined the focus of her teaching career. She has carefully documented her position that evolution theory has caused its developer, Charles Darwin, to lose both his aesthetic sensibility and his appreciation of esthetic beauty. On what basis did she conclude this? First, she documented from Darwin’s own words the fact that as he developed his evolutionary theory he lost his aesthetic sensibility, noting that as a young man, Darwin

“... loved his dogs and his beetles, but he also loved killing and collecting trophies. Early on he believed in

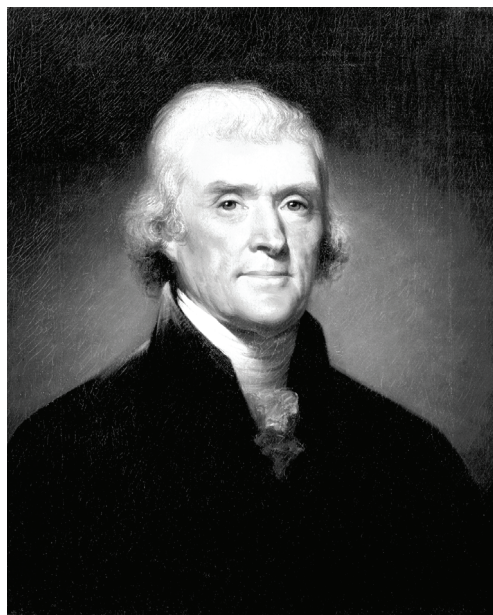


Figure 1. Jefferson is one of the most well-known American Deists. He believed in God based on the evidence of design in nature. Today Jefferson would be considered a supporter of Intelligent Design, yet he is exploited by secular humanists due to his authorship of the phrase “the wall of separation of church and state”, which was part of a letter he wrote to the Danbury Baptist Church, written to assure them that the state would not interfere with the affairs of the churches then. In view of his own beliefs, he would hardly oppose the teaching of the evidence for creation in government schools today.

God and the Bible and even fervently defended his religion against the taunting crew of the *Beagle*; later his religion gave way to agnosticism which gradually slipped toward atheism. Darwin evolved—he grew up, he changed” (p. 162).

Houston added that Darwin changed in one other significant way. As he established his evolution theory “in spite of his fame and place beside the great scientists of the age, Darwin was aware that something profound and natural in him had been sacrificed: first and foremost, the faculty of aesthetic sensibility” (p. 162). To document this claim, she pointed to Darwin’s love of art as a young man, which was clear evidence of his early aesthetic sensibility. She noted that, as a young man, “art brought him ‘intense pleasure’ and even sometimes ‘excited’ in him a ‘sense of sublimity’”. While a student at Cambridge,

“... Darwin was, as he put it in his *Autobiography*, ‘inoculated’ by his friends and professors with a taste for quality art. He frequented the Fitzwilliam Gallery and the National Gallery in London, and the intense pleasure he got from the art of Sebastian del Piombo excited in him ‘a sense of sublimity’” (p. 162).

Darwin also “acquired a taste for music from his musician schoolmates” in college (pp. 162–163). He “regularly listened to the daily anthems in King’s College Chapel and even hired the chorister boys to sing in his rooms” (pp. 162–163). Later in life, he wrote in his autobiography that he admitted he was, when younger, “so utterly destitute of an ear, that I cannot perceive a discord, or keep time and hum a tune correctly; and it is a mystery how I could possibly have derived pleasure from music”.⁷ In response to this claim, Houston asks:

“If Darwin’s aesthetic faculty was so severely handicapped, what is the quality of pleasure he derived from flat, distorted sound ... ? What is the quality of pleasure deprived of

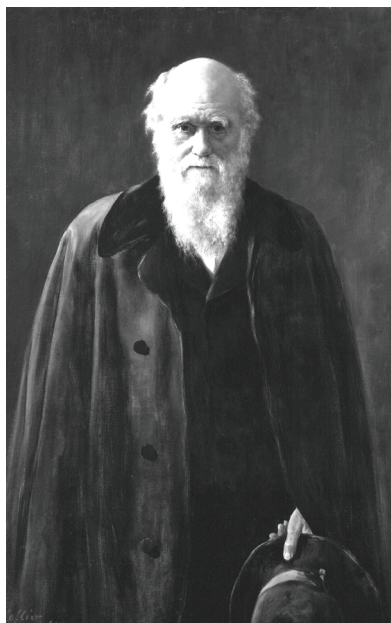


Figure 2. Charles Darwin in a photograph taken shortly before he died. More than any other man, he was responsible for the replacement of theistic creationism with evolution in Western society. Evolution has now become the secular creation story.

the depth and meaning of genuine appreciation? (p. 163).

Houston also documented that Darwin’s loss of his love for literature and poetry occurred later in life. When, as a young man on his five-year-long trip around the world on the *Beagle*, Darwin delighted in reading “the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Milton, his favourite at that time and, most famously, the poet of *Paradise Lost*. But his love of metaphysics and poetry waned during his twenties” (p. 163).

She added that

“Though he was informally taught to appreciate art and probably did derive pleasure from it ... it’s fair to ask whether by looking at art he was actually *seeing* and *appreciating* the work itself [emphasis in original]” (p. 163).

Even if Darwin’s aesthetic sensibilities were not fully refined as a young man, all of the evidence we have shows that his pleasure in music and poetry that he claimed existed when he was young was genuine.

Darwin’s loss of the aesthetic may be part of the reason, he rarely attended funerals.⁸ In fact, “Darwin avoided funerals all his life unless it was absolutely impossible for him not to attend.”⁹ Darwin had a total of ten children, and three died while Charles was still alive (Anne, aged ten; Mary Eleanor, aged three weeks, and Charles Waring, aged one and a half).¹⁰ He did not attend the funeral of his father, nor even his favourite daughter, Anne, who died of tuberculosis.¹¹ One funeral that he did attend was the 1 September 1881 funeral of his older brother Erasmus Alvey Darwin.¹²

Was Darwin’s loss of aesthetic sensibility due to his evolution theory?

Houston concludes that it is no mere coincidence that, as Darwin developed his theory of evolution, his spiritual and aesthetic faculties both atrophied (pp. 163–164). Darwin’s own assessment of the demise of his personal aesthetics is clear evidence of Houston’s view. Darwin openly admitted that his appreciation for aesthetics had dynamically changed, at least in one major respect, during the last twenty or thirty years of his life, writing:

“Up to the age of thirty ... poetry ... such as the works of Milton, Gray, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, gave me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took intense delight in Shakespeare, especially in the historical plays. I have also said that formerly pictures gave me considerable, and music very great delight. But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry: I have tried lately to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also almost lost my taste for pictures or music.”¹³

He also wrote in his autobiography that his “curious and lamentable loss of the higher aesthetic tastes is all the odder, as books on history, biographies,

and travels (independently of any scientific facts which they may contain), and essays on all sorts of subjects” still interested him, but, nonetheless, Darwin acknowledges that his mind had

“... become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive ... if I had to live my life again I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once every week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied would thus have been kept active through use.”¹⁴

Darwin then admitted that the “... loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature”.¹⁵

Houston concludes that it strikes her “as a peculiar tragedy worthy of Shakespeare or Milton” that Darwin,

“... the man most responsible, nominally at least, for the sacrifice of the human spirit on the altar of mechanistic determinism could admit nonchalantly that he had in essence willfully programmed his mind into a machine—a computer—that resulted in loss of happiness, injury to moral character, emotional enfeeblement, and, ironically, severe mental atrophy. Darwin the man created the theory that symbolizes the absurd predicament, perhaps even the tragic flaw, of modern humanity” (pp. 165–166).

Evidence that evolution was partly responsible

The fact is, Darwinism became widely accepted in spite of its many major lethal scientific flaws and its open racism. And when Darwin was shown to be clearly wrong “he would always

conclude that, all things considered, he was still right and everyone else was wrong”.¹⁶ Houston argued that

“Darwin’s faith in his theory of evolution reached the pitch of religious conviction even while he expressed his doubts about the theory’s validity. The passionate naturalist, cannibalized by the dark lord kill-or-be-killed, leaned toward mechanistic atheism. ... Darwin describes the objects and processes that his close observation once reckoned as beautiful, yet his stance now seems aloof and flat, as if his enjoyment of nature was like his tone-deaf ‘enjoyment’ of music or his atrophied pleasure in art and poetry” (p. 165).

She concluded that what was wrong with Darwin was that the “dimension that gives life lived to the fullest its zing” was gone or

“... verged on extinction. By the time he finished the *Origin*, and certainly his later *Autobiography*, beauty had ceased to be beauty at all. Darwin objectified nature into a kind of intellectual pornography for scientific voyeurs; beauty was observed and used like a prostitute for a distant satisfaction of an immediate need, never for love of beauty for its own sake, never for the pleasure of intimate contact [with nature] [emphasis in original]” (p. 165).

Houston then applied this trend that occurred in Darwin to Darwin’s followers:

“Darwin, like some neo-Darwinians today, could state the facts of elegance and beauty in an objective, abstract tone even while the descriptions themselves betray the inherent vitality of their own inherent elegant beauty. ... mechanistic agnostics like Darwin ... know intellectually that nature is beautifully constructed while emotionally denying that it is. The aesthetic atrophies when the spirit does, or when the spirit lies dormant

and inactivated. It is ... mechanistic determinism and Darwinian natural selection. There is never any death of God, only the murder or suicide of the killer’s own God-given faculties” (p. 165).

Darwin’s spiritual disassociation

Houston concluded that, even though Darwin had major doubts about his theory, his faith in evolution was still strong enough to cause the atrophy of his aesthetic dimension:

“Far from scientific treatises proving natural selection, Darwin’s writings betray the psychological angst of a man plagued by self-doubt, contradiction, and denial. Read closely, his work becomes a casebook exposing the consequences of spiritual dissociation that has infected modern thought. The atrophy of the aesthetic faculty and its subsequent flattening of perception is a crucial symptom of spiritual dissociation rarely considered when assessing declarations of scientific theory as fact” (p. 166).

Furthermore,

“Darwin realized that his mind had become a machine for grinding out abstractions from collections of facts, but because he had repressed his spiritual faculty and erased the possibility of spiritual dimension from Nature, he was unable to understand why his aesthetic faculty had atrophied ... What Darwin *knew about* he could not truly *know* [emphasis in original]” (p. 166).

Darwin wrote that he “had always been much struck by such adaptations” as the ability of “a woodpecker or a tree-frog to climb trees, or a seed for dispersal by hooks or plumes” but “until these could be explained it seemed to me almost useless to endeavor to prove by indirect evidence that species have been modified” via evolution (pp. 166–167). Darwin then

“... spent the rest of his life trying to prove that species types have been modified into new types. He never succeeded. To an artist, transcending modifications are perfectly natural. Darwin was unable to process the *creation* in Creation. As any true artist knows, creation is a generous act of love [emphasis in original] (pp. 166–167).

Why evolution causes loss of aesthetic sensibility

As he developed his theory of evolution, Darwin concluded that he saw nature more and more both brutal and selfish. In one example, he wrote,

“Natural selection cannot possibly produce any modification in any one species exclusively for the good of another species; though throughout nature one species incessantly takes advantage of, and profits by, the structure of another.”¹⁷

In short, “Darwin considered life to be a battleground where opposites fight and separate themselves out, but Darwin’s ‘good’ was brute selfishness, the antithesis of anyone else’s definition of *good*” (p. 167). In Darwin’s own words, “natural selection can, and does, often produce structures for the direct injury of other animals, as we see in the fang of the adder, and in the ovipositor of the ichneumon, by which its eggs are deposited in the living bodies of other insects”.¹⁸ Houston concluded, from her detailed study of Darwin’s writing, that in

“... Darwin’s world of fangs and ovipositors, good equals harm successfully inflicted on another. In other words, benefit exists only through harm. ... Darwin knew that his theory was dependent upon the inherent ruthlessness of Nature, not upon something reminiscent of the benevolent God of his abandoned religion” (p. 167).

For example, Darwin wrote if “it could be proved that any part of the structure of any one species had been formed for the exclusive good of another species, it would annihilate my theory, for such could not have been produced through natural selection”.¹⁹ Houston then speculates that

“Darwin’s insistence that natural selection is ultimately brutal is a projection of ... the brutal side of his own nature. Natural selection justifies brutality and sanctifies guilt. The brutal cannot face a God who might not condone brutality. Therefore, religions create their gods in the image of their own brutality to justify and sanctify brutality, and science creates its god, natural selection, the shadow of civilized man, for the same purpose” (p. 168).

Furthermore, she concluded that the contrast of Darwinism and Creationism is critical in causing a loss of aesthetic value, writing that

“... cooperative goodness produced by the God proclaimed by every major religion and recognized by the vast majority of people who have ever lived is an abstract construct to the tone-deaf, spiritually myopic Darwin. Intellectually, abstractly, Darwin understands the facts. ... For Darwin, the glass is entirely empty. Life exists only to reproduce itself in an endless loop of brute survival for its own sake” (p. 168).

She generalized that the “Darwinians are like people who visit art museums but are never deeply moved by the art. For them, Nature is a picture of life, a still life produced with paints on a two-dimensional canvas. ... What escapes them is depth, representational meaning, the correspondence between one world and another. ... Reason is diluted by reductive scansion; intuition, emotion, and aesthetic exist like phantom limbs” (p. 168).

Summary

Professor Houston makes a convincing case that the natural world provides clear evidence for a creator. She also documents the adverse effects of Darwinism on society and persons, using, as a prime example, its destructive effect on aesthetics. Exhibit one was Darwin himself, who lost his early love of poetry, music, and his aesthetic sensibilities in general when he accepted an evolutionary origin for life. She then proposed a plausible explanation for this loss, namely his changed worldview, when he moved from a theistic creationist to an atheistic/agnostic evolutionist worldview. Last, she carefully documented her case in a convincing manner.

References

1. Barlow, F., *Charles Darwin, His Life*, D. Appleton, New York, p. 55, 1892.
2. Barlow, F., *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin 1809–1882*, Norton, New York, p. 68, 1958.
3. Barlow, ref. 2, pp. 80–91.
4. Barlow, ref. 2, p. 82.
5. The popular name for a book that had the formal title, *Journal of researches into the natural history and geology of the countries visited during the voyage of H.M.S. Beagle round the world, under the Command of Capt. Fitz Roy, R.N.*
6. Barlow, ref. 1, p. 40.
7. Darwin, C., *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, D. Appleton, New York, p. 43, 1896.
8. Berra, T.M., *Darwin and His Children: His other Legacy*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 62, 2013.
9. Berra, ref. 8, p. 43.
10. Berra, ref. 8, p. 187.
11. Berra, ref. 8, pp. 43–48.
12. Berra, ref. 8, p. 75.
13. Darwin, ref. 7, p. 81.
14. Darwin, ref. 7, pp. 81–82.
15. Darwin, ref. 7, p. 82.
16. Maddox, B., Deconstructing Darwin, *Discover Magazine*, p. 40, November 2009.
17. Darwin, C., *On The Origin of Species*, John Murray, London, p. 200, 1859.
18. Darwin, ref. 17, pp. 200–201.
19. Darwin, ref. 17, p. 201.