

**FEATURE: Does Evolution Justify Atheism?  
(First in SERIES of 6)**

VOICE: Professor, I've been reading about a scientist who claims that evolution makes atheism intellectually respectable. Is evolution a credible substitute for God?

PROF.: A recent book provides a good answer. Let's talk about it.

FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

VOICE: Richard Dawkins is a British evolutionary biologist and a vocal advocate of atheism. From 1995 to 2008 he was Professor for the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University in England. After spending most of his life studying biology, he thinks everything could have come into existence without God.

PROF.: Yes, but he has to work very hard to make that argument. In one book, he wrote, "Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose."  
But then he spent 300 pages trying to prove that the "appearance of design" is only an illusion.

VOICE: You said you've been reading a book that *answers* statements like that. What is it?

PROF.: It's entitled *Letter to an Influential Atheist*. Author Roger Steer says his 150-page "letter" is directed to Prof. Dawkins.  
He begins, "In your book, *Climbing Mount Improbable*, you...describe how, when your daughter, Juliet, was six, you were driving her through the countryside. When Juliet pointed to some flowers by the side of the road, you asked her what she thought they were for..."

VOICE: ...What purpose they had.

PROF.: " 'Two things,' she replied. 'To make the world pretty, and to help the bees make honey for us.'  
Steer responds, "You admit to being touched<sup>1</sup> by this reply, but you felt obliged to tell your daughter that was not true. You acknowledge that Juliet's answer was much the same as that which most adults throughout history would have given. But you say we must all learn to see things through non-human eyes."

VOICE: Seeing things "through non-human eyes"?

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1 Having a pleasant emotional reaction.

PROF.: Dawkins thinks nothing was made for the benefit of humans. Steer paraphrases the idea: "...flowers are not there for our benefit. They are for spreading copies of instructions for making more flowers, just as elephants are for spreading copies of instructions for making more elephants. The instructions are written in the language of DNA."

Prof. Dawkins interprets, "It so happens we have a world full of pretty flowers, but the fact we enjoy looking at them is beside the point."

VOICE: How does this compare with the ideas of the early evolutionists?

PROF.: He claims that both Darwin and his contemporary<sup>2</sup> scientist Alfred Wallace thought evolution had solved the mystery of life and made atheism intellectually respectable. But Steer points out that in reality, Wallace argued precisely the opposite. He was convinced that *scientific observations led inevitably to believe in a higher being...*"

VOICE: ...A creator-God.

PROF.: Yes. Steer continues writing to Dawkins, "You do not tell us whether you persuaded your daughter to change your mind. I hope, however, that you told her about the distinguished scientist who...independently of Darwin arrived at the theory of evolution by natural selection and who *agreed with her* and not with *you*."

Wallace and Darwin agreed that the various colors of flowers helped bees to avoid mistakenly cross-pollinating various flower species.

VOICE: Confused bees would produce flowers that were not genetically pure. Were Darwin and Wallace saying that if all flowers were the same color, bees might get confused and mix pollen from various species?

PROF.: Yes. But Steer points out where Wallace differed from Darwin. Steer writes, "Like your perceptive daughter, however, *he did not believe that this was a complete explanation for color in nature*. Wallace noted that the blue of the sky, the tints<sup>3</sup> of sunset, the snow-covered mountains and the many shades of green in the country are unending sources of pleasure. He maintained that there is a relationship between this wealth of color and our emotional and moral natures. Everyone can admire and delight in the cheerful colors of flowers, birds and insects."

VOICE: So one reason there is so much color into the world, is that *God wanted people to enjoy it*.

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2 Living at the same time as Darwin.

3 Colors.

PROF.: Exactly! Six-year-old Juliet and the adult Wallace shared a logical view – that these colors exist for our enjoyment. Steer points out, “For Wallace, color reinforced his belief in some guiding Power, some supreme mind, directing and organizing the forces of nature. He simply could not believe that human enjoyment of color had been developed only as a survival strategy in the struggle for existence. Our love of color, along with our appreciation of scenery and music were, in his words, ‘gratuitous gifts’ ...”

VOICE: Darwin thought everything had to have “survival value.” But Wallace realized that humans could survive without loving color or appreciating music.

PROF.: So he reasoned that these “gratuitous gifts” were powerful arguments for “a benevolent Author of the universe.” God is not just a brilliant engineer, making organisms that function well. He's also an artist.

VOICE: That reminds me of a verse I read in the Bible. The second chapter of the very first book says, “And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were *pleasing to the eye* and good for food.” (Genesis 2:9).<sup>4</sup>

Astronomer Johannes Kepler expressed a similar thought: “We do not ask for what useful purpose birds do sing, for song is their pleasure *since they were created for singing.*”

PROF.: Steer points to what he calls Dawkins' most famous sentence: “This book is written in the conviction that our own existence once presented the greatest of all mysteries, but that *it is a mystery no longer* because Darwin and Wallace solved it, though we shall continue to add footnotes to their solution for a while yet.”

VOICE: That's an interesting statement: Evolution explains our existence, and future discoveries will merely elaborate and add details to our understanding of it.

PROF.: Steer counters that statement by telling Dawkins, “I am writing this letter because I think you claim too much for evolutionary mechanisms. You try to make them into a theory of ‘life, the universe and everything.’ And a biological theory...is not up to such a Herculean task.”

He continues, “It is an abuse of science to take a good theory out of its scientific context and use it for ideological purposes. ...You mislead people by suggesting that Darwin and Wallace set out to solve the mystery of our existence. The truth is that the puzzle they sought to unravel was more modest.”<sup>5</sup>

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4 In some languages, the book of Genesis is called “I Moses.”

5 Much smaller.

- VOICE: Darwin called his book *Origin of Species*, not *Origin of the Universe and All Things*.
- PROF.: That's a good point. Dawkins claims that both Wallace and Darwin thought that the theory of evolution made atheism "intellectually respectable." But Steer points out that Wallace was convinced the universe was made by God. He also criticizes Dawkins for not acknowledging that many scientists disagree with his atheistic interpretation of the facts.
- VOICE: Yes, various episodes of this program feature respected scientists who believe in God.
- PROF.: Steer tells Dawkins, "Our disagreement...is over the *explanatory power* of the theory of evolution by natural selection; in other words we disagree about the philosophical and religious implications of Darwinism. I do not agree with you that what Darwin and Wallace discovered either solved the mystery of our existence or strengthened the case for atheism. I see natural selection as a...process that produces biological diversity; you want to convince the world that it is a...sufficient explanation for our existence in all its complexity."
- VOICE: Darwin didn't think his theory explained "our existence in all its complexity." His closing sentence in *Origin of Species* says merely that he thought "a few forms" or one form of life had developed into the multiple life forms that exist today.
- PROF.: That's true. His exact words were, "There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning, endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved."
- VOICE: While you were reading those words, I noticed that Darwin said that life was "*originally breathed by the Creator* into a few forms or into one..." It doesn't sound as if he thought his theory justified atheism.
- PROF.: That's a good observation. Darwin thought his theory could explain the "origin of species." But he didn't claim that it explained "the origin of everything."  
Steer says he doesn't have a "knockdown" case<sup>6</sup> for religious belief. Steer explains, "I am accepting that if there were unanswerable arguments for either theism or atheism, we should expect every informed and thoughtful person to be either a religious believer or an atheist, and clearly this is not the case."

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6 Proof so strong that no one can argue against it.

VOICE: In other words, if there were positive proof, the disagreement would end. If we ever proved beyond doubt either that God doesn't exist or that He does, everyone would become an atheist, or everyone would believe in God.

PROF.: Steer continues his "letter" to Dawkins, "My objective is to draw attention to the weaknesses of your atheistic worldview. I think you have a problem in accounting for an orderly universe in which...mindless molecules have transformed themselves into mind, meaning, memory and morality; [a universe in which] chemicals have produced complexity, creativity, consciousness and character; replicators have conveyed reason through countless generations so that we have a world of life, love, beauty, values, happiness, altruism,<sup>7</sup> a sense of purpose...and a widely held belief in God."

VOICE: So molecules needed somebody smart to assemble them into living creatures.

PROF.: Yes. Darwin theorized that if life originated with a few living forms, they might evolve into the other species that exist on Earth. But he didn't claim that natural processes had produced the first living forms. He spoke of them being made by "the Creator," whom the Bible identifies as God.

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<sup>7</sup> Unselfishness, concern for other people.