

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

The Prism and the Rainbow. A Christian Explains Why Evolution is Not a Threat

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3q06797g>

Journal

HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE LIFE SCIENCES, 33(2)

ISSN

0391-9714

Author

Ayala, Francisco J

Publication Date

2011

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Prism and the Rainbow. A Christian Explains Why Evolution is Not a Threat* by Joel W. Martin

Review by: Francisco J. Ayala

Source: *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2011), pp. 286-287

Published by: Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn - Napoli

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23335136>

Accessed: 24-07-2018 19:04 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn - Napoli is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*

evolutionary process, which finds its true origin in the material, non-organic, world. The consequence is that the future is clearly different for Mayr and Dobzhansky, as is the role humans have to play in its construction.

The studies of each of the five founders do not have the same value and this is somehow related to the quality of the different writings. Whereas it is difficult to extract something significant from the confused writings of Rensch, Dobzhansky and Mayr permit Richard Delisle to produce a superb epistemological and ontological study.

Yet, I have two regrets. The first is that the scientific contributions of these five founders are not presented more extensively. I feel that this would have helped to shed light on the origin of their different visions. The second regret is that the philosophical approach selected by the author eschews historical enlightenment. These positions were probably not independent of each other. The way these different conceptions were opposed was dynamic. My feeling is that the conception of Mayr has finally “won,” and become dominant among evolutionary biologists.

But even if this is the case, it does not mean that this victory is not superficial or that the major issues raised by Delisle are no longer present. However, the debate is not symmetrical. On the side of Mayr, one has a well-founded mechanism, amply supported by experiments. On the other side, there are vague speculations on the existence of general progressive evolutionary trends in nature, based on evidence emerging from the shape of the tree of life. One question is how to give history its rightful place, without returning to the deterministic historical models of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Delisle is not very precise on the way the conflict might be resolved, although he apparently favours the elaboration of a more sophisticated “cosmic” evolutionary model.

Personally, I would look for a solution to this conflict in the evidence that the neo-Darwinian model of evolution by variation/selection is so far incomplete as long as the precise nature of what is submitted to selection – molecules, cells, organisms – has not been integrated in the model. Whatever the future evolution of the theory of evolution, anyone interested in the philosophical background of present biological research ought to read this thought-provoking book. One can also hope that it will be rapidly translated into English.

MICHEL MORANGE, *Centre Cavaillès and CIRPHLES USR 3308, Ecole normale supérieure, 29 rue d'Ulm, 75230, Paris Cedex 05, France.*

JOEL W. MARTIN, *The Prism and the Rainbow. A Christian Explains Why Evolution is Not a Threat*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010, 158 pp., \$20.00.

George McCready Price (1870-1963) joined as a youth the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, which had been founded in 1863 by Ellen White. In 1902, Price published his first book, *Outlines of Modern Christianity and Modern Science*, but his best known book is *The New Geology*, published in 1923. Price argued for a return to “primitive Christian principles” and biblical literalism, proposing that the world “was brought into existence in six literal days” and that “life has been on our globe only six or seven thousand years”; all fossils are of the same age because they were all deposited during the biblical Flood. In 1961, Henry Morris and others revived Price’s ideas with the publication of *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications*, the founding document of the modern creationist movement.

In 1982, federal judge William Ray Overton declared unconstitutional a statute

mandating that “creation science” and evolution be treated equally and given equal time in the public schools of Arkansas. An identical “Creationism Act,” passed by the state of Louisiana, was declared in 1987 contrary to the First Amendment of the Constitution by the Supreme Court of the United States. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution provides against any law “respecting an establishment of religion.” The Court declared that the Louisiana law impermissibly endorses religion and that proper scientific education is undermined when teaching evolution is forbidden except when creation science is also taught.

Thus, the Intelligent Design (ID) movement was born. The ID “theory” asserts that some features of the organisms are too complex to have arisen by the laws of nature and, therefore, manifest the agency of an intelligent “designer.” The ID theory does not explicitly mention God or any other religious agent, but its religious intent is there for anybody to see, and it was clearly exposed by Federal Judge John E. Jones III in his December 2005 decision against the school board of Dover, in central Pennsylvania. Judge Jones recognized ID as a slightly disguised version of creationism and referred to the school board’s attempt to insert ID in the schools as “breathtaking inanity” and a “sham.”

Several chapters of *The Prism and the Rainbow* concern the ID movement, but the subject of creationism pervades this little book. The book’s two-pronged theme is (1) that creationism and ID, like the Flat Earth movement, are not science; and (2) that science, evolution in particular, is compatible with religious faith.

Joel W. Martin identifies himself as a Christian, “an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church USA” (2). He writes: “I do not consider myself a ‘Biblical Scholar’. [...] On the scientific side, my credentials are stronger. I have an advanced degree in biology. I work as a curator at a major natural history museum, and I am an adjunct professor at two universities” (3).

The Prism and the Rainbow consists of 14 short chapters, adding up to 100 pages. The book is addressed to students. “I have kept it purposefully brief so that it can be read quickly [...]. I know how busy students are today. But [...] I am also writing for the parents of those students and for other adults.” The book seeks to enlighten those who might be “confused about the relationship between science and faith.” Martin is “convinced that there is need for a cogent explanation of how Christians should view science, including evolution, written by someone who is both a scientist [...] and a Christian” (2-5).

As Martin sees it, the evolution and creationism controversy “can be resolved by two very simple statements: 1. Religion is not science and should never masquerade as such. 2. Science is restricted to observing and testing phenomena in the natural world around us and should never be used to argue for or against a particular faith or set of religious beliefs” (4).

The Prism and the Rainbow is written in the clear and direct style that my quotations manifest. The themes and views of Martin are as briefly articulated also in those quotations. The titles of a few chapters may provide a glimpse of the book’s flavor: The Flat Earth Society, Of Serpents and Certainty, The Nature of Science, What Does “Theory” Mean?, What Is Evolution?, What Is Creationism?, What Is Intelligent Design?, The Unnecessary Choice, What Are We to Believe?

The Prism and the Rainbow is a beautiful short book, a wonderful introduction and a concise but cogently articulated answer to the widely perceived conflict between evolution and religious faith. It surely is worth the relatively short time required to read it.

FRANCISCO J. AYALA, *Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of California, Irvine, CA 92697, USA.*