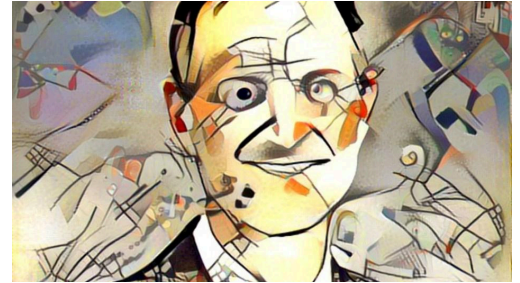




A Lutheran's Artistic Tree

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<https://peacefulscience.org/articles/lutherans-artistic-tree/>



Why would God choose not to leave evidence that the 100-year old tree is only a week-old?

Why isn't there more clear evidence for God in nature?

I think of God as a poet or an artist. Perhaps God's work of creation is like that of an artist creating something beautiful, rather than a lawyer trying to make a case for His existence. If so, the question is beside the point; akin to asking why would a poet put archaisms in her poem (and then not leave evidence that they are archaisms)?

Regarding poems, discussion of a poem and its features starts on the emotional level, before the the cognitive or logical. How does the poem affect you? What happens inside of you when you read it? How does the poem work to produce emotion?

Our answers explore the emotions the poetry evokes, and our reactions to the features we see. We would investigate how the poet uses language to create the effects she does. We would talk of mystery and maybe simple wonder, even curiosity. We would admire the poet's skill as a language shaper. (Though, we would not question the author's existence.)

The British literary theorist Terry Eagleton puts it,

God the Creator is not a celestial engineer at work on a superbly rational design that will impress his research grant body no end, but an artist, and an aesthete to boot, who made the world with no functional end in view but simply for the love and delight of it. Or, as one might say in more theological language, for the hell of it. He made it as gift, superfluity, and gratuitous gesture—out of nothing, rather than out of grim necessity. In fact, for Christian theology there is no necessity to the world at all . . . He created it out of love, not need. There was nothing in it for him. The Creation is the original 'acte gratuit.'¹ The doctrine that the world was made out of nothing is meant to alert us to the mind-blowing contingency of the cosmos—the fact that like a modernist work of art it might just as well never have happened, and like most thoughtful men and

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women is perpetually overshadowed by the possibility of its own nonexistence.

So, if we think of God the Creator as an artist, the "problem" that the question raises is eased. There is no reason (as we are talking about reason) at all. And we are not under any pressure to come up with that kind or reason. It is sort of beside the point. The intentions or the mind of God in his work of art can't be discerned. I also think of God's work of Creation in light of something Daniel Siedell has written about artists. He writes that we want artists to tell us, once for all, 'what the painting means,' yet this is contrary to how artists understand their work. Art fights against this notion.

If nature is art, how does God reveal Himself to the world?

In Lutheran theology, the ultimate answer is that He reveals Himself in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The author of Hebrews writes,

but in these last days he [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.[Hebrews 1:2]{.su-quote-cite}

Jesus is the one we love and trust. He is the one we follow because he rose from the dead and promised that we too will rise. That's the good Word God speaks to us by his Son. We read the Scriptures, and seek to understand them so that we can know Him more fully and so that we can order our lives as he would have us. We read the Scriptures in light of who Jesus is and what he has done for us and for



This painting is by Jackson Pollock, one of the seminal artists of Abstract Expressionism. He said about his art that he wanted the viewer to "look passively and try to receive what the painting has to offer and not bring a subject matter or preconceived idea of what they are to be looking for."

1. "Acte gratuit" is a French term for an impulsive act without motive.

his Creation. Because Jesus is our authority, we look to what he says about himself and how he and his disciples interpret the Scriptures so that we can read them faithfully.

In short, Jesus is our starting point for the way we read Scripture and even why we read it as we do. Our faith in Jesus leads us to believe that the Scriptures which the Holy Spirit has given us are true. We don't first have to somehow present evidence that the Bible is "accurate" and then decide to become Christian.

As to the question of why there isn't more clear evidence for God in nature, that's a different question. But my short answer is that Christians see evidence of God's handiwork everywhere. I will leave readers with two quotes from Stanley Fish that explains what I am getting at. The first one is from his book, The Trouble With Principle. He writes,

Moreover, persons grasped by opposing beliefs will be equally equipped ('on both sides equal') with what are, for them, knock-

down arguments, unimpeachable authorities, primary—even sacred—texts, and conclusive bodies of evidence. And since anyone who would presume to arbitrate disputes between believers will himself be a believer for whom some arguments, authorities, and bodies of evidence will seem 'naturally' weighty, no one's judgment will display the breadth and impartiality that would recommend it to all parties.

The second one, which can be considered a nice summation of the former, comes from an article entitled, "Why We Can't All Just Get Along."

What you believe is what you see is what you know is what you do is what you are.

In other words, the situation *everyone* finds themselves in is not "seeing is believing" but "believing is seeing."

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