

Divining ideology

A review of
Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, and Meaning
by Nancy Pearcey
B&H Publishing Group,
Nashville, TN, 2010

Ting Wang

In *Saving Leonardo*, Nancy Pearcey explains that the Bible not only contains individual truths, but also describes the very nature of truth. Nonetheless, in modern public secular discourse, if one “were to suggest that Christianity deals with reality, that is regarded as a category mistake—as if someone were to talk about Hamlet or Harry Potter as a real person” (p. 27). Christianity is relegated to “fictional” status because of the “fact/value split” (p. 2) which Pearcey identifies as the core of modern secularism (p. 49).

The fact/value split

The fact/value split contends “that humans can have genuine knowledge only in the realm of empirical facts” (acquired via the senses, p. 2), whereas truths that “cannot be stuffed into a test tube or studied under a microscope” (p. 24) are “reduced to arbitrary preferences” (p. 2). Consequently, Christianity fails the secular test and is reduced to a “subjective preference, draining it of any spiritual or cultural power” (p. 23). The loss of Christian cultural power is ominous because secular views “preach liberty but practice tyranny” (p. 3) whereas “the only basis for genuine human rights and dignity is a fully biblical worldview” (p. 245).

Understanding worldviews through art and literature

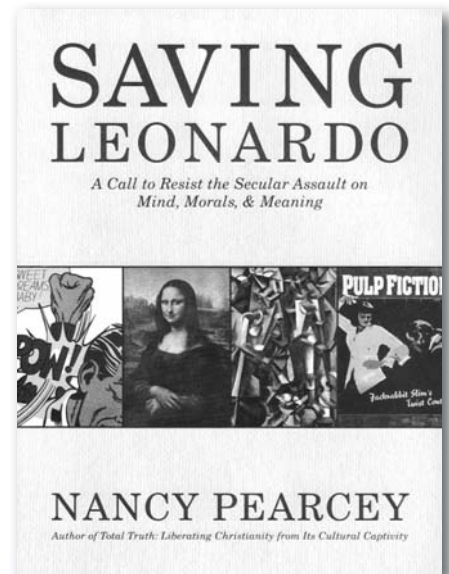
Pearcey aspires that the readers of *Saving Leonardo* would be equipped

“to detect, decipher, and defeat the monolithic secularism that is spreading rapidly and imposing its values on [their] family and hometown” (p. 10). Understanding secularism is essential to propagating the Christian gospel, since “the critical factor in engaging a foreign culture is not learning its language but learning the worldview” (p. 14). To address worldview capably, the Christian must acquire an understanding of art and literature, since “art is not merely personal expression, but translates worldviews into stories and images, creating a picture language that people often absorb without even thinking about it” (p. 4). Indeed, Pearcey demonstrates conclusively throughout *Saving Leonardo* that “we can ‘read’ the history of ideas through the history of changing artistic styles” (p. 77).

For instance, the angles and shapes of Cubism represent a commitment to the scientific perspective, to rationalism, whereas the Reformation artwork of “ordinary people plying their trade” (p. 85) reflects the Protestant doctrine that “any honest work” is a divine calling (p. 85).

In contrast, according to naturalists (and many Darwinists), “humans are trapped in a one-dimensional world of sheer biological existence. Nature is red in tooth and claw” (p. 156)—with neither “higher layers of meaning” nor “an intelligible story line at all” (p. 156). Consequently, works by naturalist writers typically feature “sordid settings, violent plots, coarse characters, and language laced with slang and obscenities” (p. 156) akin to the worldview elements embedded in most contemporary Hollywood movies.

Pearcey asserts that “... while it’s fine to enjoy film as art and entertainment, we should also watch for the ways it reveals the thinking of our generation—not primarily so we can launch protests and boycotts, but so



we can respond to the people in our lives more intelligently and compassionately” (p. 265).

Nonetheless, rather than with insight, the church has typically responded to the arts with Separatism, yielding “closed-minded, dogmatic, harsh and judgmental” people (pp. 31–32).

In contrast to this “fortress mentality” (p. 15),

“... a better approach was suggested by C.S. Lewis when he said that in every subject area, it is Christians who should think the most deeply and be the most creative—until people wonder why it is that all the best books and movies are by Christians” (p. 255).

Christian artistic excellence emanates from the nexus of sanctification and culture, since “those best qualified to understand the arts are those who genuinely love them and who are striving to weave their own lives into a work of art that will attract others to the beauty of truth” (p. 4). Pearcey encourages her readers to “teach ... young people to be [cultural] revolutionaries” (p. 278) for in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge—not only spiritual wisdom and knowledge, but also insight into “government, economics, science, business, and the arts” (p. 26). I much appreciate Pearcey’s assertion

that Christian sanctification cultivates wisdom in all intellectual and cultural domains, including the spiritual.

The fallacious logic of secular worldviews

Saving Leonardo is predicated upon a comprehensive Christian worldview which intrinsically demonstrates the fallacious logic inherent to secular views. For instance, “in the very act of stating that there is no universally valid truth, the postmodernist is asserting his *own* view as true” (p. 238), and “in rejecting abstract concepts, the literary naturalists did not seem to notice that their own naturalistic worldview was itself an abstract concept” p. (157). In addition, Pearcey deftly dismantles Darwinist/naturalist epistemology, for

“... if ideas are merely the results of neuronal complexity, then that applies to all ideas—including the idea of materialism itself. It too is the byproduct of neurons firing in the brain. In which case, why should we give it any credence” p. (148)?

Similarly, despite the fact that secularism professes neutrality toward religion, such a stance “merely says that all religions are wrong” in saying they [themselves] matter, and that the only fact value split is correct (p. 33). But once again the vaunted secular fact/value split cannot be verified empirically by the senses, and hence decidedly fails its own test.

Free will?

In light of such compelling logical lucidity, let me mention a few ancillary considerations that crossed my mind while I was reading *Saving Leonardo*. First, Pearcey writes that “moral responsibility makes no sense unless we can make genuine choices” (pp. 93–94) or, in other words, that responsibility presupposes free will (or free agency). I realize that this reiterates a standard philosophical/theological aphorism, but I think that biblically it is more accurate to assert that responsibility presupposes not free

will, but instead posits One-who-holds-responsible—a Lawgiver. Indeed, in Romans 9, Pharaoh was deemed responsible for his hard heart toward the Israelites precisely because he was *not* free from God (who had fashioned Pharaoh as a ‘common vessel’ for the highest purpose of demonstrating divine power and disseminating God’s name and fame throughout the earth). So I think that we must properly insist that human responsibility does not logically necessitate free will.

Second, regarding free will itself, Pearcey writes that “a deterministic worldview produces characters that are not true to life. In reality, people do make genuine decisions” (p. 152). Indeed, life is full of decisions ranging from the simple to the complex. But biblically, ‘genuine decisions’ are thoroughly compatible with God’s thoroughgoing sovereignty—Christians are exhorted to work out their salvation *because* God works in them to will and to act (and decide) according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:12–13).

Similarly, James admonishes us to perceive that with regard to decisions (and other situations), “if it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that” (James 4:15), and Jeremiah confesses, “Lord, I know that people’s lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). Biblically, human decisions issue consistently from the sovereign purpose and will of God.

Assessing worldviews

Pearcey proposes two worldview tests by which we can determine whether or not a particular worldview under investigation is valid: “1) Is it internally logically consistent? 2) Does it fit the real world” (p. 152)? In other words, “Just as you test a scientific theory by going into the laboratory to see what happens when you actually mix chemicals in test tubes,

so you test a worldview by seeing how well it works in ordinary life” (p. 152). I agree wholeheartedly with the first test, and contend that logical consistency is the unique birthright of biblical Christianity which is rooted and anchored in the very *Logos*—or logic—of God. Pearcey essentially demonstrates as much with her humorous, almost offhand, logical refutations of one secular principle after another. This crucial first test, logical cogency, is sufficient to dignify and commend Christianity above all other worldviews—secular or otherwise. On the other hand, the second test—“How well it works in ordinary life”—is disputable, because what works is not always what is good and true. Perhaps one might argue that the Christian worldview did not particularly ‘work’ for Christian martyrs; moreover, whether or not a worldview works in this world is insignificant compared to whether or not it rewards indubitably in the next.

Empiricism

Pearcey writes much about empiricism, noting with Hume that “the Creator did fashion our senses to give us access to the world he

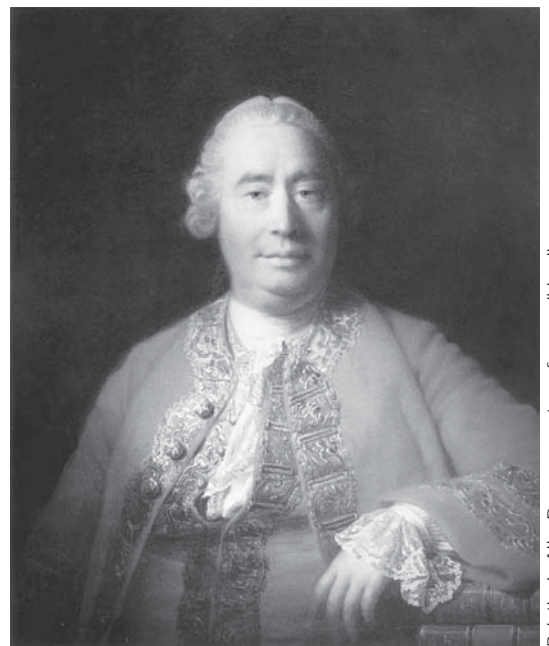


Figure 1. David Hume was known especially for his philosophical empiricism and skepticism.

Painting by Allan Ramsay courtesy of www.wikipedia.org

created” (p. 112), and we learn things by “observations and experiments” (p. 113). She points out that “the empirical is but one aspect of a richer, multi-dimensional reality created by God” (p. 117), affirming that Christian empiricism recognizes “the value of the sensory world without reducing reality to what the human eye sees” (p. 140). In addition, Pearcey points out that Hume himself questioned the validity of empiricism since it cannot empirically establish the vital concept of cause and effect. Nonetheless, how it is that Christian empiricism escapes the logical problem of induction, and the precise relationship between fallible sense-experience and infallible biblical revelation, were not particularly manifest to me.

Conclusions

Despite the above caveats, *Saving Leonardo* is a must-read masterwork of outstanding Christian cultural analysis. Pearcey writes with eloquent ease, interweaving anecdotes and pop-culture discernment with profound historical, philosophical and theological insight. I particularly appreciate her commitment to an all-encompassing Christian worldview throughout. The volume itself is beautifully produced, featuring full-color reproductions of the artwork and book-covers under scrutiny. *Saving Leonardo* will both challenge the secular reader and assist the Christian reader to understand culture, to love God and neighbor, to be salt and light in a dark and decaying world, and to take captive every thought to obedience to Christ.

An overly cautious exposition

A review of
Beginnings: The early chapters of Genesis
by Gregory Goswell
PTC Media, Box Hill North,
VIC., 2010

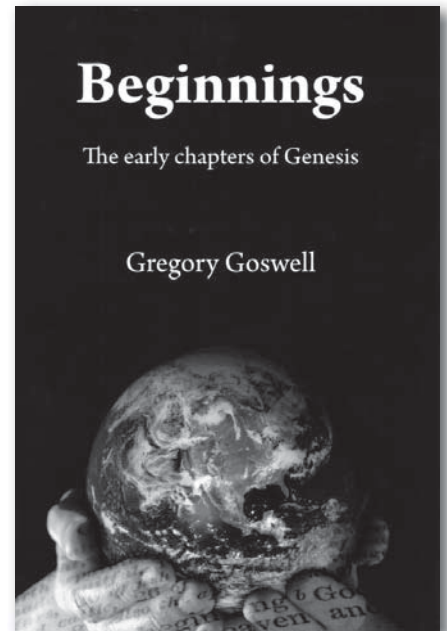
Andrew S. Kulikovsky

Gregory Goswell is an ordained minister and a lecturer in biblical studies at Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne. This book is more of a series of Bible studies than an in-depth treatment of the creation account. It has eight chapters: (1) In Six Days; (2) Problems With Parents; (3) Where did Cain Get His Wife? (4) The Extent of the Flood; (5) God’s Covenant With Noah; (6) The Babble at Babel; (7) Looking Ahead; and (8) Questions for Discussion and Individual Reflection (a series of 24 studies).

Drawing from the higher critical JEDP (Documentary) hypothesis, the author views the first chapter as a priestly account which describes the building of the cosmic sanctuary where human beings can dwell in the presence of God. The JEDP hypothesis is complete fiction¹ but the author, fortunately, does not labour the point.

Like most commentators, Goswell sees the days of creation as being paralleled as follows:

- Day 1 Creation of light
- Day 2 Creation of the sea and the sky
- Day 3 Creation of the earth/plants
- Day 4 Creation of the luminaries
- Day 5 Creation of the fish and the fowl
- Day 6 Creation of land creatures and man



The first three days describe the making of three regions while the second three days describe the creation of their inhabitants. The problem with this common view is that the correspondences are non-existent! Light is not a ‘region’ and the luminaries created on Day 4 inhabit the ‘expanse of the sky’, which was created on Day 2! And the fish created on Day 5 inhabit the seas created on Day 3! However, Goswell affirms that Genesis 1 is clearly narrative and has all the usual grammatical features of prose. There is “no evidence at all that it is merely literary and not a narrative of what really happened” (p. 4). Instead, Goswell claims that the account is ‘heightened prose’.

The first day and the first creative act

Goswell rightly rejects the notion that Genesis 1:1 is heading, but rather, concludes that Genesis 1:1 describes the first creative act of God and tells us what He did in the beginning. It describes the absolute beginning of space and time. He also rejects the