

## REUNITING FACTS AND VALUES

**Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity.**  
Nancy Pearcey. 2004. Wheaton, IL: Crossway. 479 p. \$19.97.

*Reviewed by Paul Giem*

In *Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey identifies an often felt but rarely clearly verbalized split into sacred and secular realms. Many identify the realm of facts with the secular, and the realm of values with the sacred. In this view, the realm of facts and science—the secular—belongs in the public sphere because it is objectively true. The subjective realm of religion and values belongs in the private sphere and should never intrude into the public sphere. Pearcey discusses Process Theology, Legal Pragmatism, Dewey’s philosophy of education, and Constructionism in education as examples where secularism has taken over entire areas of public life. As more and more subjects are claimed by the realm of “science” and “fact,” eventually nothing will be left for the world of “religion” and “values.”

Pearcey traces the history of this destructive dualism, starting with Plato and moving through Thomas Aquinas to Romanticism-Enlightenment dualisms such as the Cartesian dualism of Kant. Value-fact dualism has given rise to modernist science and post-modernist English departments in universities.

Although they have proven to be powerful cultural ideas, none of these dualisms completely solve the problems they were intended to address. Pearcey states, “This is the great intellectual lostness of our age: that many are forced to hang their entire hopes for dignity and meaning on an upper-story [faith] realm that they themselves regard as noncognitive and unverifiable” (p 109).

The major foundation of modern dualism is the modernist scientific image of nature as strictly mechanical and resulting from an amoral, Darwinian struggle for survival. Pearcey notes that the implications of Darwinism eventually destroy the authority of any ethical system, giving examples where Darwinists excuse not only abortion but also infanticide, rape, and bestiality. But, as Pearcey notes, citing Tom Bethell, the secular critics of these extreme views “were disarmed by their shared worldview”(p 214).

However, the “universal acid” (Daniel Dennett’s phrase) of Darwinism ultimately attacks itself philosophically. If evolutionary psychology explains all other thought as a product of evolution, and thus not necessarily true, it also explains itself in the same terms. Darwinism has no good defense against a postmodernist deconstruction of itself.

In addition, Darwinist philosophy has to explain away as illusions such phenomena as human consciousness, morality, altruism, religion and even the success of mathematics in science. Following Thomas Reid, Pearcey notes, “the purpose of philosophy is to *explain* what we know by direct experience, not to contradict or deny it”(p 312).

Darwinism’s grip on the realm of facts is not as tight as the majority of the scientific community would have one believe. Pearcey’s lucidly stated arguments will sound familiar to those who have followed the Intelligent Design movement closely. In the face of these difficulties with Darwinist theory, Pearcey quotes several Darwinists who have admitted that philosophical presuppositions drive their position. Thus Christianity is not automatically excluded from the realm of facts by any analysis of the facts themselves. On the contrary, it is more defensible than materialism, both philosophically and experimentally.

Pearcey argues that choosing a worldview is extremely important, and modernism or postmodernism should not win by default. She observes that many modern “secular” worldviews have a religious structure (as opposed to content) remarkably similar to that of Christianity. That is, they have a story that includes a Creation resulting in an ideal state, a Fall, and a Redemption. For example, for Marx, there was Darwinian evolution leading to the state of primitive communism. Mankind fell from this state of innocence through the creation of private property. Redemption comes from the proletarian revolt and destruction of all private property.

Giving a detailed and interesting history of the evangelical experience in America, Pearcey argues that because most explications of evangelicalism have been at least latently anti-intellectual, evangelicalism has tended to support the separation of life into the sacred and secular spheres. Even though evangelicals would be horrified to think that they are cooperating with the agenda of naturalism, she sees this as fitting in with that agenda.

*Total Truth* does contain some minor errors. There is at one point a stress on the word “cultivate” which the word itself will not sustain in

relation to “culture.” And there is the relegation of Islam to a status near Hinduism and neo-Platonism primarily because of its non-Trinitarian God (Appendix 2, especially p 387) without the realization that the same argument would apply to Judaism. These are more than offset by the author’s integrity, evident particularly when she calls on Christian leaders not to deprive ghostwriters of the rewards of their efforts, and then unobtrusively credits her husband for a phrase he had created (p 372).

I would like to sharpen Pearcey’s thesis slightly. In fact, there is a partial separation between religion and science. A comprehensive doctrine of the atonement or Christology from nature or even secular history seems improbable. When fixing my car, I do not get out my Bible to find out what to do. However, facts and values do not have a watertight separation. Religion (at least true religion) should permeate all of life, and all of thought. Any divisions should be natural in the sense of being unforced, and it should be expected that these divisions are not absolute. Rather than calling for the complete abolishment of dualism, I would argue for recognition of the porous boundary between the elements, which can thus become integrated.

Finally, I would like to call attention to the soul-body dualism which Pearcey apparently accepts (see her comment about the “immortal soul” of humans on p 320). This dualism is the basis of Cartesian dualism, which she rightly rejects, but without explicitly rejecting the body-soul dualism itself. Perhaps the division between body and soul is not as watertight as is commonly believed either.

*Total Truth* makes one of the best cases against the sacred-secular dualism prevalent in our society. It deserves to be read by anyone seeking to integrate his or her worldview.