

BOOK REVIEW

Evolution Stands Faith Up: Reflections on Evolution's Wars

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This is an inspiring, readable collection of 21 essays of reflective value to everyone. You can dip into any of these well-crafted and thoughtful essays at leisure without concern for order. The layout of each essay is appealing, beginning with a quote extracted from the essay, which summarizes the key insight, and finishing with a list of suggested readings and resources. The essays, mainly written within the past 4 years, are taken largely from the author's contributions to local newspapers and his online blog, Evolution Literacy.

The author is an evolutionary biologist and an atheist who originally immigrated to the U.S. as a graduate student from Ecuador. His preface to the book provides a rationale for these essays arising from his training as a scientist and the need to address the breadth of irrational thinking around us. Notably, he points to the vain attempt by many to try and accommodate scientific rationalism with supernatural beliefs. They are simply incompatible. To emphasize this point, his first essay, from which the title of this set of essays is taken, is based on his critical book review in Amazon.com of "The Language of Science and Faith" by Francis Collins (former head of the Human Genome Project) and Karl Giberson. Francis Collins, a widely respected genetic researcher but devout Christian, demonstrates a cognitive dissonance between one's scientific skills and the emotional need for an ineffable, "spiritual" connection to something greater outside of oneself. This latter sense of connection with the natural world devolves into an inborn tendency to take mental shortcuts and default to "unseen" supernatural causes, a common impediment to critical thinking.

The essays address a broad range of topics, including faith healing, astronomy, physics, nature, archaeology, the curiosity-driven urge to discover, and the serious threat from the arrogant ignorant who equate opinion with knowledge, especially those in positions of power to further corrode education. As the author counsels, "Escort out of office those who see fiction and facts compatible, or worship ignorance-based opinions as rightful views of equitable value to the empirical truth."

The author has a marvellously eloquent style of writing, full of inspiring metaphors and lateral observations that reinforce connections to the foundations of scientific inquiry and to biological evolution in particular. These thoughtful essays are accessible to the general public and an inspiration to all of us who should write an occasional essay for our local newspaper or an online blog to help clear the fog in our own communities and arm our neighbors against theistic anti-science, medical quackery and other irrational nonsense.

Review provided by Dr. Greg M. Stott, Canada