

Marilynne robinson's essay "darwinism" essay



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Marilynne Robinson is a Pulitzer-winning novelist who has graced us with her essays found in *The Death of Adam*. Robinson gives the reader the feeling of being much more educated than he or she really is. These essays provide readers with different ways of discussing history, religion and society. They, although difficult to comprehend at times, are flawlessly argued and, throughout, are grounded in universal human experience. When reading them, it is hard not to be persuaded, especially if reading them with an open mind.

One of her most intriguing essays is that of Darwinism. Darwinism is one of the most widely admired and taboo-bounded idols of this age and time. To say that Robinson had a difficult task writing against it is an understatement. However, she does so with great reason and imagination. She provides firsthand evidence and realistic arguments that is very unique in this time.

While Robinson offers many ideas (or themes) in her essay, three specific ones stood out more than the others. She spends some time discussing the relationship between Creationism and Darwinism; she attacks the way a Nietzschean ethic of selfishness has become respectable in the world; she also discusses the problems of the ideologies of Sigmund Freud. Along with references from Daniel Migliore and his book, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, these ideas provide much towards Robinson's argument against Darwinism.

In "Darwinism", Robinson talks of the idea of Creationism and its relationship with Darwinism. Creationism, according to Migliore, is "also known as 'creation science'" and that is "opposes the theory of evolution and the estimates of the age of the universe by modern cosmology. It holds

that the world was created by God in a manner corresponding closely to the biblical accounts and is perhaps 10, 000 years old rather than many billions of years as modern cosmology teaches".

1. Creationism relies on the belief of a God; Darwinism, on the other side, relies on science and facts. The controversy between the two ideologies has been around for many years and continues to exist today.

Robinson, in her essay, claims that while Creationism is owned by " Religious Right", Darwinism is owned by " Irreligious Right"

2. She writes that the differences between the two are meaningless and that the people who defend religion make religion seem foolish while the defenders of science attributed to objectivity. Many people believe that Creationism and Darwinism do not belong together and are about as similar as cats and dogs. Just as there are cat people and dog people, there are people who stick to one belief or the other in the creation versus evolution debate. Robinson disagrees, however, and says that Creationism is probably the best thing that has happened to Darwinism. Darwinism, she writes, is " the caricature of religion that has seemed to justify Darwinist contempt for the whole of religion"

3. Robinson also wrote a novel called Gilead, which discusses the fictional memories of a pastor in Iowa. In this novel, Robinson writes, " There are two occasions when the sacred beauty of Creation becomes dazzlingly apparent, and they occur together. One is when we feel our mortal insufficiency to the world, and the other is when we feel the world's mortal insufficiency to us"

4. Robinson is a firm believer in the Creationist approach and refutes the idea of evolution. However, she does believe that Creationism helps Darwinism in a way that obscures religion under the attack of people who have claimed science's authority. In her essay, Robinson continues on to discuss the ideologies of Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche is a philosopher/critic who " attacked Christianity as a religion of resentment in which weakness and mediocrity are made virtues while strength and genius are despised". He used a parable to announce the death of God and proclaims that there will be an " advent of the superior human being"

5. There is a passage in his *Ecce Homo* in which he talks of the two millennia of anti-nature and the idea of a tragic age. Robinson includes this passage in her essay and ends up attacking Nietzsche's ethic of selfishness and the way that it has become respectable. Nietzsche's defenders always claim that he was never being " overheated". Robinson claims that the most striking thing to her was the fact that there was extensive similarities between his language and Darwin's in *The Descent of Man*. She continues to deconstruct Nietzsche's passage. She argues that " it is not the failure of Christianity but its success, in terms of its own highest values, for which it is despised"

6. She also says that the idea of human goodness is not natural and because of that, it isn't beneficial. Nietzsche's argument is proved capable of corruption. Robinson, then uses the example of the Nazis to bring the argument to a conclusion. She tells the reader to imagine them using the passage as crucial to act as the " agents of nature" which resulted in " a hideous crime, which issued in so many kinds of catastrophe that we will never see the end of them"

7. I agree with Robinson that we should be drawing conclusions from experience rather than treating the questions as purely theoretical. This point concludes Robinson's attack on Nietzsche and she immediately moves on to critique the next philosopher. Sigmund Freud is another philosopher/critic who "dismissed religion as an infantile illusion"

8. He claims that "religion is the camouflaged longing of finite, mortal human beings to be protected by an omnipotent power"

9. Freud is a well-known Darwinist who rejected Judeo-Christianity and replaced it with his own accounts. In "Darwinism", Robinson accounts the arguments between Einstein and Freud and also discusses the problems with Freud's ideas. In 1932, Albert Einstein wrote Freud a letter and asked "is it possible to control a man's mental evolution..."

10. Freud responded to the letter and talks of a specific kind of heresy and certain organisms in the world. Freud, according to Robinson, took this heresy (or blasphemy) from Nietzsche. Nietzsche's "transvaluation of values" is centered around the idea of the origins of conscience. We see that Freud is very alien towards the world from self. We also see that the "organism" of which Freud refers to in his response, is actually humankind. His response claims that humankind is an "organism" on which conscience is forced synthetically. This says that whatever we, as humans, receive as instruction from our conscience is undoubtedly unnatural and that it isn't good at all for our well-being. Once again, we see that Freud seems to not be persuaded of the external world's reality. (He doesn't understand that aggression is followed by retaliation.)

Robinson once again uses the example of the Nazis during the World Wars to retaliate against Freud's response to Einstein. She says that it is bizarre for Freud to argue his point of resisting hatred to be just as important as the desire to act on that same hatred¹¹. Like Nietzsche, Freud does not use experience, sense, or decency when he was writing his response; he just refers to the question to study. Both Einstein and Freud make the politics of science very clear.

Marilynne Robinson concludes her essay with the idea that the death of Adam means the death of much more than many people realize. Throughout the essay, she gives a very persuasive argument against Darwinism and says that "the modern is that science exposed religion as a delusion and more or less supplanted it. But science cannot serve in the place of religion because it cannot generate an ethics or a morality. It can give us no reason to prefer a child to a dog, or to choose honorable poverty over fraudulent wealth...And this is more or less where we are now" ¹². However, it is safe to say that her target is clearly not evolution as a scientific theory. Through the examples of philosophers such as Freud and Nietzsche and the ideas of Creationism as an aid to Darwinism, Robinson has undoubtedly written a very enlightening and persuasive essay.