

## “Clarence Darrow Interviewed”

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Clarence Darrow, the great US trial lawyer, adjusted his starched collar and sat up straight in the armchair. He was facing, in the wake of the famous Scopes trial of 1925 known as the “*monkey*” case, a very inquisitive young male journalist sitting opposite him. But to Darrow’s surprise, this journalist was more intent on questioning him on his personal beliefs and not on the trial itself. There had already been masses written on what some had called “*the trial of the century*”, focusing as it did on the arguments between divine creationism and the natural evolution of the species. But this journalist was more intent upon Darrow’s personal motivations.

“*Are you a religious man?*” the journalist asked inquisitively. Darrow had to admit that despite having had a conventional Presbyterian upbringing, he had inherited a form of religious unorthodoxy from his father. Religious skepticism was central to his outlook. He replied that if the questioner meant affiliation with traditional religion then the answer was in the negative.

The journalist followed up. “*You don’t believe in God then?*” Darrow was straight to the point. “*I am an agnostic. I simply don’t know if there is some supreme being out there - I see no clear evidence of one.*”

“*So you see no purpose in the universe?*”

Darrow thought a moment. Of course everything must have a purpose, a reason why it exists or why it happens. Total accidents are rare, if ever happening. His job was to dig out the motivations and causes of things, to bring them to light in concrete evidence. Cicero had known this when he questioned rhetorically “*qui bono?*”<sup>1</sup> in relation to the human motivation for a particular act of killing. To have a purpose must mean that there is a purposer, and logically there must be a reason for all things and not just for human actions. Otherwise you get into the hazy subject of miracles, a topic that Darrow intensely disliked. That there must be such a purposer to explain the material existence was one of the traditional arguments for the necessary existence of a supreme being. But what was the purpose behind

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<sup>1</sup> Literally “*who benefits*”.

the universe? He had to admit in response to the question that he hadn't yet heard of one. He added that scientific discovery could gradually unlock the Newtonian chain of physical causation within the universe, but not the question of the existence of a purposer and the purposer's purpose behind it.

*“But if there is a supreme being, a “creator” for want of a better word, might not that creator exist beyond the universe, in another spiritual dimension?”* the journalist asked, perhaps displaying some deeper understanding of the dialogue than Darrow had lately been accustomed to. The question also ruffled Darrow a little. He had heard a lot of talk of “creation” lately and was suspicious of the term and all its derivations. He rejected totally the view that there had been a “*once only*” act of divine creation. But there was something about this question that seemed to be leading the matter to another level. Darrow didn't wish to get into another debate about creationism versus evolution. He was content to reply that the answer could be in the affirmative, but that he simply didn't know.

The journalist was not content. He sensed some degree of avoidance in the last short answer of Darrow. *“But if you accept that there could be a supreme God of another dimension, could not that God be the origin and sustainer of that physical chain of causation?”*

Darrow thought for a moment again. *“Where was this line of questioning leading?”* he asked himself. He felt he was being drawn into something, as if he was the witness being cross-examined rather than the counsel. He decided to avoid again.

*“I can't answer that question, I simply don't know.”*

The journalist himself was little unsure as to where to take the matter from there. He was fully cognizant of the brilliant legal mind he was interrogating, and knew that the tables could be turned on him at any stage. He asked *“Would you agree that Mr Darwin's theory of evolution, if correct, must operate within that physical chain of causation?”*

Darrow could not do anything but agree. As he understood the theory, it was not based merely upon chance happenings having no cause, there was no “*abracadabra*” here. The theory was based either upon natural adaption to the exigencies of the situation at hand, or upon the infrequent occurrence

of specific but abnormal events. Either way, it must be a part of the physical chain of causation.

*“But if that is the case, and if there is a supreme being, then what is the difference between creationism and theories of evolution?”*

Darrow was a bit nonplussed by this question. He had grown accustomed to arguments that had pitted these two points of view against each other, as if mortal enemies. He had fought a whole case on this distinction. But here was some nondescript journalist suggesting that the distinction might not actually exist. The creationist case had been put on the basis of a “*once and for all time*” creation, not on the basis of an ongoing creation. The God of the Old Testament was said to have acted to create, in 7 days, that which didn’t previously exist, and nothing had changed thereafter. But this could be only a simplistic, primitive view that literally could not be correct. Darrow didn’t particularly want to contemplate then and there the consequences of rejecting this view as against its alternative, that of an ongoing creation. He needed time to think. He had to find an immediate “*out*” to answer the question.

*“Well,”* Darrow replied, *“there might be an argument here, but it assumes that there is a supreme being, and I do not concede that point.”*

*“Yes, of course”*, replied the journalist.

But the point had hit its mark. Further discussion was pointless at that time. The journalist thanked Darrow for his time, and politely excused himself. Darrow sat there pondering.