

Have You Seen the Platypus?

Throughout the book of Job, Job argues that since the world is ordered, since the world is just, and since he's done nothing wrong, he should not be suffering. Job demands that YHWH appear as the defendant in a legal case and explain to him why he is suffering. When YHWH finally appears, his answer can be summarized as a strident, "Have you seen the platypus?"

When the platypus was first documented by explorers and sent to scientists, the scientists thought it was a bad joke, an animal stitched together from different animals. A few years later, over-zealous scientists would mistakenly accept the authenticity of an actual hybrid creature: Piltdown. They accepted this hybrid creature, made from the skull of a modern human and the jawbone of an orangutan, because it fit with the prevailing view that since intellect was humanity's self-chosen defining feature, increases in brain size must have preceded other changes in the lineage leading to humans. Research actually shows walking on two legs evolved first.

Whether one believes the platypus was created or evolved, that the platypus exists is a reminder that our concepts and our categories are human, not metaphysical. Just as they can produce a clarity and order the world, they can also produce blinders that can prevent us from recognizing the real, and far too quickly accept the unreal, depending on our expectations. Perhaps I can start a new phrase, said in response to times when the world does not appear ordered, when someone is forcing their ordering of the world upon you, when the good suffer and the evil flourish, where those familiar with Atlas Shrugged might say "who is John Galt?" We could say, "have you seen the platypus?"

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