

The Penumbra Effect (1 of 6)

It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.
-Charles M. Schultz (of *Peanuts* fame)

In the beginning of his book, *The Everlasting Man*, G. K. Chesterton uses the concept of the Penumbra to explain the muddled view many have of the teachings of Christianity. For those who don't know what a Penumbra is, it is a half shadow created when most but not all of a light source is blocked out. For those who like to watch eclipses, they are very familiar with this concept. The Umbra is the dark shadow where the moon blocks out all light, but the Penumbra is the lighter shadow where only a portion of the sun is blocked. But anyone who has stood in front of two strong but separated lamps also has seen this effect. This person will cast two light shadows (one Penumbra from each light), yet where they overlap it will be quite dark (Umbra).

We see many examples of people comparing Christianity (and its teachings) to almost every other aspect of our life. Granted, Christianity was so radical and all-encompassing that it is almost impossible for us to conceive a life without Christian influence. This is where a solid understanding of history can help. But most people think "history" is the time covered between when one's grandparents were born and one's own birth. Most people, arguably, know more about dinosaurs (which is considered exciting "science," not boring history) than they do about their parent's youth. The mysterious gap between dinosaurs and one's grandparents is simply "myth."

In the time of myth, pagan heroes bravely fought off all sorts of evil monsters while steam-punk scientists worked miracles of science to better the lives of everyone. Druids were able to cure all ailments naturally in their temples, while all the latest medical wonders meant hospital visits were always painless and of the outpatient kind. At least until either Moses or Peter (we really don't know which for sure) found some random book abandoned on a hilltop and decided the fairy tales in it meant something. Next, they found some silly fools to believe in their crazy theory and then everything went bad quick.

Perhaps the gentle reader thinks I exaggerate. Perhaps I am, but not by much. Pagans claim everything Christians do was stolen from them. Scientists claim Christians are retarding their discoveries. Muslims claim that organized medical care was made by them (never mind the fact that Islam is a simplified version of Christianity). All kinds of modern social injustices are blamed on Christianity and some are going so far as to declare that Christianity brought about (or at least endorsed) slavery.

These beliefs are only possible in the comfort of the Penumbra, where the Light and the Dark intertwine. Because of this mix of Light and Dark, the assumption is made that everything must be the same. If one looks closely at what I wrote above, what we see is this: Christianity is not really being attacked for what it does, it is being attacked because Christianity claims to be different. It's acceptable for Christianity to have rituals; it is unacceptable to assume that any rituals are uniquely Christian. It's acceptable to have beliefs that contradict science; it is unacceptable to assume that Christianity can know truths science can't. It's acceptable that most of the hospitals in the world happen to be Christian-run; it is unacceptable to assume Christianity knows any better on how to heal. It's acceptable that social injustices take place; it is unacceptable to assume Christianity has done anything about it. But if one would either move into the Light or the Dark, then one could clearly see just how different Christianity is.

The Light is that the most fundamental ritual of Christianity is to sacrifice oneself for others; the Dark of paganism is the ritual to sacrifice others for oneself. It was the Light of teaching of a God who ensured the universe was stable and orderly (a necessity for science to develop), not the Darkness of the fickle pagan gods before it. The Light is that Jesus began his ministry by caring for the sick, and that he spent more than half his public ministry continuing to do so, while the Dark before Him sent the ill off to fend for themselves in the wilderness. It was the Light of calling all men equal before a loving Jehovah that ended slavery, not the Darkness of pagan gods looking at humans as their own slaves.

These are but a few specific examples. I hope to address more sweeping concerns in this mini-series. I have identified five myths that can only exist in the Penumbra that I wish to address over the course of six short papers:

The biologist's claim that DNA is just another molecule.

The evolutionist's claim that man is just another animal.

The psychologist's claim that religion is just a reaction to emotions and dreams

The anthropologist's claim that Christianity is just another religion, which is echoed by the pagans who claim that Christianity is merely a stolen collection of their ideas.

The historian's claim that Jesus was just another great philosopher.

The first three papers will discuss Evolution. The Evolutionary process implies that some modification had taken place to something to create a new thing. These modifications can enhance existing characteristics, create new ones, or remove unnecessary characteristics. But even when new characteristics are added in the process, there is a certain threshold where too much of a difference is no longer credible. For example, it is not hard to believe that the horse and the zebra are closely related even though the fur patterns, size and temperament are quite different between them. On the other hand, one does not expect an amoeba to divide into two new cells and then have each new cell grow into an elephant. At some point, we need to realize that there are changes that too radical to be credible. Either some steps are missing, or some external influence must have taken place.

Let us begin with life coming from non-life. According to current science, about 800 million years ago, when the universe itself was only about 13.7 billion years old, life came out of non-life when the first single-celled organisms were created in some primordial goo. These organisms were quite simple compared to life as we know it today. No doubt they were affected by the same laws of physics and dissolved their nourishment using the same principals of chemistry that we recognize today. But there is one thing they did that no non-living thing ever did. They could manipulate the world around them, and the laws of physics and the principals of chemistry had to respond to this manipulation (which I will call Will). Anything that can float can be pushed downstream, but it takes Will to swim upstream. Anything can roll downhill if the slope is steep enough, but it takes a Will to climb. Anything can react chemically to what it is exposed to, but it takes Will to accept or reject what it comes in contact with. The only thing currently known by science that could bridge this gap between non-living and living is the virus. But, as a predator whose prey is the living, it seems unlikely to me that the virus could have predated the living.

There are many missing steps for life to Evolve out of non-life despite having a very highly developed branch of science devoted to this aspect. It is the Light of Jehovah providing this external influence to nature that broke through the Dark of a universe of mere atoms.

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Original Publication Date: 1 July 2021