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Nature as Art

Perhaps one of the most astounding forms of art is nature itself. For example, the snowflake, even as small as it is, consists of an exquisite pattern of frozen water. Many of the exhibits found in the Milwaukee Public Museum demonstrate a similar sort of natural beauty. Through my visit to the museum January 19, I was not only reminded of the beauty of God's creation, but of the tendency within mankind to alienate himself from God and worship nature in place of Him who created nature.

As seems to be commonplace among MSOE students studying some flavor of engineering, I am not very intrigued by or interested in what is typically referred to as fine arts experiences. Thus, when presented with my options for attending a fine arts event in order to complete the "Arts Experience Paper," I saw attending the Milwaukee Public Museum as the most viable experience for me. From my perspective, there was a better chance I would find an exhibit that interested me at the public museum, where there is a wider variety of exhibits than at, say, the art museum, which limits its displays to artwork. I did not know what to expect when visiting, but I was fairly confident that I would not have to observe a variety of boring, obscure, or pornographic paintings like those I saw on field trips to the Art Institute of Chicago my last two years of high school.

As I walked around the museum with my classmate Andrew Kundert, I noted that several of the exhibits involved the display of preserved animals in a depiction of their

natural habitat. Having grown up in a suburb 30 miles west of Chicago and currently living in downtown Milwaukee, this was a refreshing sight to see. Rarely am I able to see such accurate depictions of nature's beauty up close, in so wide a variety of species, as I was able to do at the museum. All the sights were wonderful to see, but one I especially liked was set in the Grand Canyon. There was a bobcat or some other species in the cat family lying in wait as some deer approached his hiding spot. While the thought of the predator killing the seemingly innocent passersby was slightly disturbing, the desert scenery in the display brought a sense of peace to me. Though I've never experienced it in real life, the Grand Canyon is an amazing aspect of nature.

The purpose of the nature scenes in the museum is multifold, as two creators are involved in their existence. First, there is the creator of the display, namely the museum. The purpose of a museum, by definition, is to put on displays that are both informative and interesting to its visitors. Thus, each display is an extension of and an attempt to accomplish this goal. While many of the exhibits at the museum gave me little enjoyment, the museum did an excellent job of capturing the beauty of nature in its representation of the outdoors. I able to experience not only the splendor of animals in their natural habitats and the grandeur of the Grand Canyon, but also the snowy Arctic, tree-filled forests, and grassy plains within an hour or two without leaving Milwaukee.

The representations of nature were so accurate and stunning that they reminded me of the true Creator of nature – God. As a Christian, I attribute the existence of all nature to God. Nature is not simply the result of several billion random chance occurrences, but is the result of God's handiwork and creativity. God's purpose in nature is not only to provide us with something to enjoy, but to reflect His own glory and beauty

and thus reveal aspects of Himself to mankind. As the Biblical King David writes, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1 ESV).

God, as a perfect, all-powerful, all-knowing Being cannot fail in accomplishing his purposes. Thus, every reason for which he has created nature will be and is fulfilled. Romans 1:20 explains, “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (ESV). While God reveals Himself to mankind through nature, He does not force people to acknowledge His presence and work in the world. To exemplify this, the writer of Romans continues, explaining, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Romans 1:21 ESV).

Man’s failure to obey God and acknowledge Him as Lord and Creator creates a barrier between mankind and God, much like the wall between the narrator of Frost’s “Mending Wall” and his neighbor. This separation between God and man results in eternal punishment in Hell after one dies. Fortunately, because of His deep love for mankind, God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the wrongdoings of all who have ever lived and have yet to live. Anyone who believes in Him will be saved from the punishment for his sins, namely eternal death in Hell, and will instead live forever with God in Heaven after he dies physically.

The narrator of Frost’s poem makes no effort to make amends with his neighbor. In the same way, humans have no desire to make themselves right with God. This apathy

closely resembles that of Bartleby, of Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener*. Bartleby is a poor man who has very little. He lands himself a job working as a scrivener and works diligently for his boss. Over time, though, Bartleby begins to follow his own way, rather than his boss's and simply "prefer[s] not to" meet the demands of the shop owner.

Similarly, Adam and Eve, the first people God created, lived in a perfect Garden and had all they needed and wanted. They followed God for a while but then disobeyed Him and lost the privilege of living in the Garden. Their decision resulted in separation from God, not only for them but for all future generations. Just as Bartleby refuses monetary and other sorts of assistance from his boss, mankind has a chance to be saved from this separation from God, from their poor, sinful state, but many refuse this hand up.

While the depictions of nature in the Milwaukee Public Museum are intriguing to experience and accomplish the museum's purpose in creating them, they do little good to the observer unless he acknowledges the Creator of all nature. Until doing so, people will find themselves constantly striving for a peace they cannot gain on their own. Because God has revealed Himself to mankind through His creation, no person can claim ignorance if he does not accept God's free gift of eternal life. As the Bible challenges, "choose this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:14 ESV).