

"The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science." (Albert Einstein, *What I Believe*)

Beauty is subtle, often completely unnoticed, or observed only in hindsight. Most beauty is also mysterious, appealing to natural human curiosity, begging us to ask questions. The beauty of extraordinarily green moss, wandering sand dunes, Sydney Carton's sacrifice in Charles Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, and monarch butterflies draws me in and leads me to ask the questions "How?" and "Why?" and to look for beauty in everyday settings all around me.

Moss is usually considered a nuisance, if given any thought at all. It grows on the sides of trees and through the cracks in pavement and on patios where exasperated homeowners pull it out year after year. However, if it were not for moss and other plants, many experiments and discoveries in science would not exist. This inconspicuous plant, though a nuisance, is home to enormously diverse species of little creatures, and almost every patch of moss is different. Some moss has little flowers growing from it; other moss has smooth, carpet-like qualities. All moss has a mysterious ability to spread everywhere almost overnight. I remember my father coming home from work one day when I was six or seven to find me crouched in our back yard, staring at a patch of seemingly ordinary moss. To me, the moss that day was a beautiful velvety nepeta color, a green that represents growth and love.

Butterflies are subtle, inconspicuous, and wonderfully beautiful when noticed, just the opposite of bothersome moss. Still, how a tiny insect that weighs no more than a couple grams flies from the northern United States to the forests of Mexico fascinates me. The clouds of monarchs are said to cover everything in a blanket of orange and black during migration season. Each insect knows exactly when to start traveling and where to go, though there are no parents to guide the way and no monarch butterfly has ever been to the wintering habitat twice. Even when

scientists capture and move the butterflies in the middle of migration, the insects re-orient themselves in the correct direction. Monarch butterflies live for less than a year, yet each spring flocks of them make their way up the same path to the United States. Butterfly lovers have begun making special gardens for migrating butterflies to breed, lay eggs, and eat. These way stations are beautiful as well as functional, promoting the overall beauty and mystery of the insects.

Sand dunes, quite unlike butterflies, do not immediately evoke feelings of beauty or mystery. However, Mount Baldy, a sand dune along the coastline of Lake Michigan, is not a normal sand dune. It rises almost seven hundred feet from the water's edge, and it *moves*. All sand moves a little because of human traffic or because of wind, but Mount Baldy is a little over-enthusiastic in its travels. The entire dune rolls over itself, moving over four hundred feet since the late 1930s, and burying part of the black oak forest that stands behind it in the process. Scientists expect the dune to bury its own parking lot within the next seven years. That's not the only concern, however. The black oaks that the dune covered have decomposed, leaving mysterious tunnels throughout the dune. Scientists are trying to research how the tunnels could withstand the pressure from surrounding sand enough to not collapse inward.

Sand dunes are supposed to be completely harmless. They are soft mounds of sand for beachgoers to trek up and slide down, to sit on and enjoy the sunshine. Who would suspect that in the midst of a family hike up Mount Baldy, the sand dune would swallow six-year-old Nathan, concealing him for the next three-and-a-half hours? A recent article in the *Smithsonian* magazine detailed this incident. In fact, the title of the article was "The Mystery of Why This Dangerous Sand Dune Swallowed a Boy" (Sabar). Somehow, after the rescuers pulled the boy's body out of the sand and rushed him to the hospital, doctors were able to revive him. Most people, according

to the article, suffocate within ten minutes when buried in sand. To the rescuers and to Nathan's parents, his body certainly looked dead; it was stone cold and he had no pulse. Two weeks later, however, Nathan walked out of the hospital mostly healed. Nathan's parents, who are deeply religious, attributed the miracle to an act of God.

Nathan's story inspires us because we are drawn to mystery. Literature depicts many instances of beauty, mystery, and truth. The ultimate example of mystery is giving one's life out of love for another person. Self-sacrifice defies all logical and scientific reasoning, so why does love prompt us to act thus? Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* portrays one such phenomenon. Throughout the novel, Sydney Carton appears to be the underdog, a generally inconspicuous person who is not considered particularly special. As a functioning alcoholic, he is the undesirable moss of the novel. What's more, his undying love for Lucie is overshadowed by that of Charles Darnay. When Darnay becomes a victim of the Reign of Terror, however, Carton surreptitiously seizes his chance to make his love for Lucie matter. In a beautiful act of selflessness, Carton takes Darnay's place in the group of "traitors" to be executed, thus saving Lucie's husband and ensuring that the Manette family's life remains happy and secure.

Much like taking time to watch moss grow, pausing to look at the inconspicuous aspects of nature or literature often yields unexpected moments of mystery and beauty. Little things that first appear to be nuisances become fascinating when reconsidered. Mysterious beauty drives human life forward with passion toward goodness instead of imperiling humanity to a monotonous existence of stagnation.

Rebuttal

“To understand God's thoughts we must study statistics, for these are the measure of his purpose.” (Florence Nightingale)

- Tracking and studying statistics keeps us grounded in reality
- Studying statistics from a long period of history reveals what has happened and where we might be headed, a view that is more like God’s perspective than the typical “in the moment” human perspective.
- Poverty statistics help us to focus on causes and solutions
 - Such as the number of wells dug in Africa for cleaner, more accessible water
 - What are the causes of world hunger? Would building more schools in impoverished places help?
- The studies of statistics regarding rivers like the Colorado have helped with rehabilitation of these rivers.
 - Revealed God’s intention for human to be the caretakers of the earth.
- Research of diseases such as cancer has helped advance available treatments
 - Vaccines for cancer help the immune system target cancer cells
 - We can see God’s plan for salvation in the progression of scientific knowledge.