



James C. Peterson

# Anomalies Welcome

There is satisfaction in a theory that predicts future outcomes accurately and the most assured theories do. There is beauty in discovering how what seemed to be disparate parts actually work together. We find ourselves enjoying with wonder what we have come to know, as much as wondering at what we do not know yet. How many times have I found myself humming the doxology at the lab bench in response to what I am seeing or while reading about a new discovery in another field?

When data does not follow expectations, we first look for annoying noise from imperfect measurement or from a sideshow distracting from the phenomenon under study. When it persists, we report it honestly, because it is, and because we realize that the stubborn piece that refuses to fit may turn out to be a key. Such an anomaly may be the clue, the observation leading to an insight, that we have not understood what we were looking at as well as we thought we did. Part of what I love about science is the tradition of being fearlessly intrigued by such anomalies. When anomalies occur, they are often disruptive. They may be perceived as undermining other careful work, maybe even a career. Yet they may be golden. They may present an opportunity to understand better—which is, after all, the point.

I think of intricate mathematical models that predicted exactly where a particular light would be in the sky at a given time on a future night. They were precise, accurate, and geocentric. The anomaly of retrograde motion in the wandering stars (the planets) was one of the clues that led Copernicus to a heliocentric model. I think of Marcion, selecting only the holy books that supported his view that any god who created the material world would be hateful and inferior to the true God. In response, churches across the world of their day had to reflect

on their experience of God's anointing certain books and what they knew of who authored those books until they agreed on a particular list of books that God had given as trustworthy scripture. The Christian canon was recognized in response to the anomaly of a false canon. Anomalies challenge us to think in new ways that may lead to a better apprehension of the truth.

Anomalies have triggered articles in this issue:

- Jim Bradley thinks about apparently random phenomena that are commonplace in the natural sciences. What is to be made of these for those who perceive God as sovereignly choosing to control everything?
- Rodney Scott and Raymond Phinney find what we have learned of embryo twinning, mosaics, and widespread observations of neurobiology to be challenges to common assumptions about the soul.
- Denis Lamoureux finds the exhaustively studied Charles Darwin to be often misrepresented. Citing Darwin's letters to his friends, diary entries, and even his most public books, Lamoureux finds Darwin referring to how nature shows the design of its Creator. Lamoureux thinks that if Darwin is accurately understood, these citations are not inconsistencies in Darwin's thought; rather, a point of encouragement for a consistent approach that encourages intellectually fulfilling Christian reflection.
- In his book review essay, Patrick Franklin distills down to four major issues the anomalies most prominent in recent studies of what it is to be a person. For example, as we observe chimpanzees making tools, the self-awareness seen in an elephant recognizing itself in a mirror, or a pod of killer whales planning and coordinating a complicated series of steps to capture prey, what is left to be distinctive about being human?

# Editorial

## *Anomalies Welcome*

Then our book reviewers bring to our attention ten books each bringing its own challenge. They address new discoveries and questions in cosmology, origins, maths, ethics, history, philosophy, theology, and the environment.

The articles and book reviews of this issue do not just note or address anomalies. They may themselves function as anomalies for those who have seen the subject matter differently. In that case the articles may be a spur to change perspective or at least to improve upon it. Carefully taking into account how new data fit one's paradigm either strengthens the paradigm or calls for a new one. The role of this journal, as of any academic journal, is not merely to repeat what is already commonplace. It is, in part, to direct us to notice anomalies and to help us to develop our understanding from addressing them. That is not always comfortable, but it should be compelling. Those who publish this journal hold to the historic and life-giving Christian faith, not because they always have, but because it continues to make the most sense. Challenges and implications are welcome and can be fruitful.

I hope that as you read this issue and those in the future that you will delight not only in supportive evidence for what has convinced you before, but also in the highlighted anomalies; that you will find here some ideas, or ways of description, that enrich and reinforce what you already think, and other ideas that lead to fresh perspectives; that, as in your scientific study, you will test and evaluate surprising concepts and ideas with rigorous fairness. If you find a new proposal here persuasive, you will have learned something. If you do not find a colleague's proposal here persuasive, please write up a better reading for the journal's blind peer review process and potential publication. We would all be better for it.

Thank God for all that we have learned and for the anomalies that remain. What does not initially seem to fit can be an opportunity to understand better science and theology and their interaction.

James C. Peterson, *Editor*

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speak truthfully to your neighbor,  
for we are all members of one body  
(Ephesians 4:25, NIV).*

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