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Jacob Klapwijk

Excerpt

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Introduction

How delightfully simple it would be if the word “evolution” did not refer to anything but facts: the factual descent of biological species and their mutual relationships. Then we could leave the evolution debate to the professional insights of biologists, geneticists, biophysicists, and paleontologists with nary another thought.

Things are different. The problem of evolution does not only concern the phylogenetic succession of species. It also touches the world where the species originated, the becoming of the planet Earth, and the origin of stars and galaxies. It even has to do with the Big Bang and the early inception of time and space. For life did not originate in complete isolation. It gathered itself out of cosmic energy and organic molecules. It nestled itself in an expansive time–space reality. Vexing questions arise here. How could life make a place for itself in a world of energy and radiation? How was it able to survive in the midst of a shattering surplus of matter?

Evolution, beyond the cosmic past, also has to do with the continuation of the story: the self-maintenance of the species on earth and their expansion in the biosphere. Life manifested itself in bacteria and algae, moulds and sponges, plants and animals, in short, in an overwhelming array of new life forms. Yes, it organized itself in a taxonomic diversity of increasingly complex kingdoms. Nettlesome questions arise again. Whence this newness, this abundant wealth of life forms? What explains the fundamental difference between the kingdoms?

The evolution problem finally brings us to the phenomenon of human beings. Who is *Homo sapiens*? Having come forth from the irresistible drive of life, we humans appeared on the world stage at the eleventh hour. As creatures with self-consciousness we have

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begun to think about ourselves and the evolutionary past of our existence. The genesis of *Homo sapiens* is not only related to hominids of millions of years ago but also has to do with the birth of technology, science, art, morals, and religion. Perhaps we have here the most vexing question. Are humans exceptional creatures on earth? Or can we still see them as representatives of the animal kingdom?

All these questions make clear to us that, while the theory of evolution is based on facts, facts as hard as nails, it is clearly not limited to that. A full-fledged theory of evolution not only requires knowledge of the facts but also mastery of what these facts imply. For how do we string together the evolutionary facts into a believable story? Natural scientists, geologists, biophysicists, and neurologists bring information forward. Social scientists and historians place these insights into a larger framework. But even then, science does not have a monopoly on the truth. To the contrary, we as people are convinced of all kinds of things outside of science. And there is always a degree of uncertainty and provisionality that clings to scientific propositions.

The respectability of science is beyond doubt. But we do have to ask ourselves whether science is the exclusive source of knowledge out of which insight into the mysteries of life wells up. Do we not have to draw from extra-scientific sources also? Do we not have to listen to what the traditions of the nations, the wisdom literature of the past, and the origin narratives of the religions tell us? In this book I particularly want to pay attention to the creation account of the Bible. In the final analysis it is this story that has functioned as a standard orientation point for all of Western culture for nearly two thousand years. Do creation and evolution exclude each other or is this a misunderstanding that short-sighted Christians and equally short-sighted seculars attempt to convince us of?

Once again, the life sciences bring forward impressive evolutionary facts but these facts need to be put together. They need to be incorporated into a convincing, coherent story without ideological prejudice. Step by step, we go on a search for this unknown story. Thus the present study is no biological treatise, no presentation of hard research results, as published in *Science* or *Nature*. Nor is it a biological textbook in which all evolutionary facts have

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been thrown together, as one can find in Peter H. Raven's voluminous work, *Biology*. This book, esteemed reader, is different. It offers reflection, philosophical reflection on the possible meaning of all these things. It reflects on what the evolutionary facts could mean for us, taking note of what scientific specialists have brought to light, and taking note of what extra-scientific sources of wisdom bring forth.

Is philosophy sufficiently equipped for such a search for meaning? My answer can be short. Let us honor philosophy as the mother of all sciences, as has been done since the days of Confucius, Laozi, Buddha, Parmenides, and Plato. As such, she shows a twofold sensitivity. On the one hand she has a feeling for all that goes on in all those theoretical disciplines to which she gave birth, even if the offspring subsequently has gone its own way. On the other hand, she draws from the pre-theoretical intuitions and practices that one encounters in daily life experience, a circuit of knowledge from which she stepped forward in an ancient past. By way of this twofold cognitive interest, philosophy may indeed be in an appropriate position to present the exciting story of humankind and of the evolution of species in a scientifically justifiable manner. I am going to make an attempt.

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CHAPTER I

Does life on earth have a purpose?

On Saturday, October 22, in the year 4004 BC at six o'clock in the evening God created heaven and earth, and in the days that followed, he created plants, animals, and human beings. This was the opinion of Archbishop Ussher, memorable seventeenth-century Irish church historian.¹ The bishop based his calculations on biblical genealogies. Ussher was not the first or only theological calculator. Over time, more than 140 biblical scholars have attempted to reconstruct, on the basis of holy writ, the date on which God called the world into being.² I have always found it a charming touch of these chronologians that they situated the origin of the world in the autumn. From the start, fruit must have been available to the first human pair, including, significantly, Eve's "apple." Thus, their piety shaped their pondering.³

I A QUEST FOR MEANING

Is belief in the biblical creation story in agreement with science or, to be more specific, with the modern theory of evolution? When

¹ James Ussher, Anglican Archbishop of Armagh in Ireland (1581–1656), published his calculations in *The Annals of the World Deduced from the Origin of Time* (London: E. Tyler, 1658). See M. Gorst, *Aeons: The Search for the Beginning of Time* (London: Fourth Estate, 2001), ch. 2; D. Young, *Christianity and the Age of the Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982).

² Genealogies in the Bible are related to history. They do not serve chronological calculations but witness to matters of faith. They have often been adapted to become stylized symbols (Matt. 1:17). Thus Joseph can be called "son of David" and a faithful Jew "a child of Abraham" (Matt. 1:20, 3:9). Compare the genealogies of Jesus in Matt. 1:1–17 and Luke 3:23–38, written from the point of view of Joseph and Mary respectively. In Luke 3:23 Joseph has the role of adoptive father; see P. Feine, *et al.*, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 36. In this book all references to the Bible are from the New International Version, unless otherwise indicated.

³ That the forbidden fruit was an apple is not mentioned anywhere in Scripture. The misunderstanding arose because the Latin word "malum" means apple as well as evil.

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Darwin first published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, it caused a storm of controversy in religious circles, especially in England, where the faithful widely held to Ussher's chronology.⁴ Is the idea of a chance-based origin of species through a process of change that spans hundreds of millions of years – ever since Darwin this has been the question – not in conflict with the creation account in Genesis? Is it compatible with the story in which the Lord God, “in the beginning,” created heaven and earth and all earthly creatures in a time frame of six days?

Creationism, the very symbol of conservative Christianity in the United States, and other countries too, would say yes. Evolution is in conflict with creation, with the belief in God as the almighty creator of heaven and earth. The theory of evolution assumes a gradual development and progressive modification of earlier life forms, while the Bible teaches the constancy of species, created by God in a few days “according to their kinds.”⁵ To creationists the earth is really very young, even though the fossils seem old and weathered. In their Flood Model Theory they suggest that this weathering is the understandable result of a global catastrophe: the Genesis flood at the time of Noah.⁶ This young age is in agreement with the Orthodox Jewish calendar which begins with the creation of the world in the year we know as 3760 BC.

I will not go into all these dating intricacies, often symptoms of a literalistic and intellectualistic interpretation of Scriptures. The topic that shall engage us in this book is a question of an entirely different order. It is the question: how should we think about the theory of evolution in the light of the never-ending quest of humankind for meaning? Is there purpose or meaning in life on earth, or does the theory of evolution exclude any awareness of directionality?

I want to elaborate on this question. Many people, whether they are Christians, Jews, or Muslims, believe that God has created the

⁴ Ussher's chronology continued to receive support well past the time of Darwin, e.g. in the marginal notes of the popular Scofield edition of the King James Version, first published in 1910.

⁵ God created all living beings “according to their kinds” (Gen. 1: 21, 24–25).

⁶ Such a view is proposed in J. C. Whitcomb and H. M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1962).

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world and humankind. But – so reason quite a few of them – since fossils of sable-tooth tigers, dinosaurs, and other strange creatures have been found on earth, an evolutionary process of some kind must also have taken place, at least to a certain extent. At least to a certain extent? I doubt whether creation and evolution can be combined by limiting the range of evolution. What many people don't realize is that in the Darwinian theory evolution is an aimless process of development that actually comprises all forms of life. There are no discontinuities in the tree of life. Living nature selects continuously and in all circumstances from completely random variants, devoid of any underlying plan. Is evolution, indeed, a universal process without a plan? Is life, with its abundant diversity of forms, by definition a chance product of blind natural processes? Or is there an alternative? Can evolution also give evidence of a purpose, perhaps even of a creational design? Can evolutionary developments be the world-wide expression of blind experiments and simultaneously a clear manifestation of divine intentions?

The question of purpose is crucial, especially when it concerns human origins. For if plan or intent lies at the basis of human life on earth, then this would parallel what the Bible states about humans as the crown of creation and as God's partners in history. Then we may discover in the baffling world of minerals and microbes, of plants and animals, a pathway of meaning: a development that may be considered meaningful because it is not devoid of ends and purposes and appears to be a precursor to the human search for meaning. But if life on earth is the product of pure chance, then human existence would be also. Then Darwin's theories of blind selection and chance evolution would, in the final analysis, throw overboard all our human expectations of meaning, the religious ones being the first to go.

Do not think that the quest for meaning is an exclusively religious, not to mention an exclusively Christian, interest. To the contrary, it represents a general human interest. It is a quest that even affects the place of theoretical science. To put it more strongly, the idea that life on earth would have developed without any direction, and that human existence represents the result of a lucky draw, saddles us with a thorny theoretical question. If human beings are no more than chance products of nature, then this must also be

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true for the human mind, and everything that this mind has produced, evolutionary theories and creationist counter-theories included. In this view a theory is no more than a secretion product of the brain, an aid to the survival of *Homo sapiens*, like a jaw, or a claw, or an impressive chest-beating in other creatures. The one is no better than the other, just so long as it helps in the battle for survival. In short, a theory of evolution that trumpets forth the view of an evolution that is totally due to chance has, in the final analysis, little or nothing to do with truth, and everything with imposing behavior and survival.⁷

Our big question is this: should a believer take advantage of this relativistic result of evolutionary theory and develop arguments for the opposite, that is, a creationist concept of origins that is based on the traditional notion of constancy of species? Or shall we – believing that we are pilgrims on this earth, with all of creation on the way to the kingdom of God as its blessed destination – develop an alternative view of evolution? Is it possible to reformulate Darwin’s theory of phylogenetic development of species in such a manner that it has academic respectability and nevertheless leaves room for the notion that the development of life on earth gives evidence of direction? I want to be more specific about this dilemma. Do we have to assume as self-evident that the living world is a cosmic accident? Or are there indications that, in the evolution of life forms, in spite of the blind indifference of nature, a pathway or perspective of meaning manifests itself?

2 PLANNED APPROACH

Here follows my plan of approach and the content of the following chapters. In chapter 2 I focus on creationist views of origins, and Dembski’s theory of intelligent design, comparing these views with what I, inspired by Augustine’s vision of time, defend as the biblical idea of creation. In chapter 3 I discuss Darwin’s theory of descent,

⁷ See A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 218: “what evolution guarantees (at most) is that we behave in certain ways – in such ways as to promote survival . . . It does not guarantee mostly true or verisimilitudinous beliefs.”

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and the modern synthetic theory of evolution that is grafted upon it. In chapter 4 we discover the hidden premises and category mistakes behind the evolution debate that spell the difference between a scientific theory of evolution and the ideology of evolutionary naturalism. We examine the biological concept of species and the consolidating effect of natural selection in chapter 5. In chapter 6 I introduce the theory of emergence as it was formulated by the British philosophers Conwy Lloyd Morgan and Samuel Alexander at the beginning of the last century.

The second half of this book takes a systematic turn. In chapter 7 I reformulate the theory of emergence as based on the distinction between entities and modal functions and as oriented on the key concept of idionomy; the theory is applied to the different organizational levels in living nature. In chapter 8, in a discussion with John Searle and Peter Checkland, I make clear the relevance of this theory for an understanding of the different levels of being in human culture; I introduce a general theory of emergent evolution. Chapter 9 clarifies the idea of distinct levels as a conceptual framework for the variety of theoretical disciplines; it ends in a discussion of the philosophy of mind. Chapter 10 is about the relation of faith and science, about Augustinianism and Thomism, and in particular about the hermeneutic significance of the biblical notion of creation for understanding evolution. In chapter 11 the holistic and ecological implications of the theory of emergent evolution are brought to the fore. In chapter 12 I unfold my own philosophical starting-points in a critique of the essentialist species concept of the Christian philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd. In chapter 13 we consider remaining questions to which the theory of emergent evolution calls attention. I conclude, in chapter 14, with a comparison between the meaning perspectives disclosed in the theory of emergent evolution and the closed world picture of evolutionary naturalism.

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CHAPTER 2

*Creationism, Intelligent Design, and
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Creationism presents itself, and has done so for over a century, as a biblically oriented critique of Darwinian evolution theory. It wants to expose its naturalistic and atheistic premises. Rightly so, for in the evolutionary camp we find all kinds of thinkers who give evidence of dogmatic prejudices. How creationists present themselves is another story, on which we shall focus in this chapter (section 1). As we continue, we shall turn our attention to the Intelligent Design movement (section 2), and to the scholastic tradition out of which this movement has arisen (section 3). Then we shall consider the significance of the creation account in Genesis and of creation narratives in general (section 4). Finally in this chapter, we shall reflect on the Church Father Augustine and his pioneering interpretation of time as a creature of God (section 5).

I CREATION AND CREATIONISM

Creationism I take to mean the view that the creation story in Genesis is not only a believing witness regarding God as the source of all being and the origin of all that lives, but also a scientifically reliable representation of the manner in which He brought the world and the diverse forms of life into being at the beginning of time. That the text in Genesis has also been shaped by the ancient, oriental world picture that prevailed at the time the narrative took shape, creationists will only admit with much hesitation and reserve.

Creationism is accustomed to use the Bible as an encyclopedia, a reference work that supplies to believers, or at least to the exegetes among them, accurate information about all areas of life, even about basic questions that modern sciences pose. Thus it has developed a

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biblicist view of the relation between faith and science. Biblicism denotes the search for a synthesis, in the sense of a mutual adaptation and harmonization, between the biblical message and scientific knowledge. On the one hand the Bible, in this case the biblical creation account, is seen as a dependable source of information and frame of reference for science. On the other hand all kinds of scientific insights are “discovered” or (to be more precise) inserted into the Bible, after which Scripture is interpreted accordingly. Through this process of eisegesis and exegesis creationism gives rise to a mixture of biblical and scientific opinions in regard to the becoming of the world, the origin of life, and the peculiar nature of human beings. And often it is not clear which of these opinions are warranted by the authority of Scripture and which by the authority of science.¹ A widely respected authority on creationism and “creation science” is the American historian of science, Ronald L. Numbers.²

Also in the Muslim world creationist views present themselves. This creationism is not based on the text of the Bible but on the creation message of the Koran. The center of the Islamic creationism movement is located in Turkey. One of the proponents of this creationism is Harun Yahya, pseudonym of Adnan Oktar. His Bilim Araştırma Vakfı (Science Research Foundation) organizes conferences with leading American creationists. Yahya’s latest study, and imposing tome, carries the characteristic creationist title *Atlas of Creation* (2006); one can download it from the Internet. In this book, Yahya takes a forceful stand against Darwinian evolution theory and, in particular, against what he regards as its atheistic and materialistic foundations.³

In the creationist movement of Christian origin, three phases can be distinguished which, at the same time, continue to exist as three rather independent schools of thought. Originally the movement read the Genesis story as literally as possible, as if it were a set of

¹ Typical of this biblicist eisegesis and exegesis are books such as H. M. Morris, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987) and *Scientific Creationism* (El Cajon, CA: Master Books, 1985); A. A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1998).

² R. L. Numbers, *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

³ Harun Yahya, “Atlas of creation,” <http://www.harunyahya.net/V2/Lang/en>. Yahya shows himself to be an adherent of so-called Old Earth creationism.