

The Progress (or Extinction?) of Modern Creationism: A Critical Review of Crossway's *Theistic Evolution*

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Abstract

The evangelical debate over creation, evolution, and intelligent design continues well into the twenty-first century. As part of this ongoing drama, Crossway recently released a thousand-page critique of theistic evolution in a book by that title. The volume's many authors aim to settle the conflict once and for all by a three-pronged analysis—scientific, philosophical, and theological. This article is an extended, critical review of *Theistic Evolution* (2017) giving special attention to modernism and biblical-theological dimensions. The last portion weighs in heavily on the ever-present confusion regarding miracles and divine action in Christian theological discourse. While primary attention is given to the creationist-ID case, the review also identifies fresh correctives for evolutionary creation model(s) (primarily of the American variety) and offers an appraisal of the debate at large.

Introduction

Few Christians today are unaffected, in one way or another, by the debate on origins, biblical interpretation, and various “creationist” movements. This is just as true today as it was during the Scopes Trial of the early 1900s.¹ Far from cooling down, the debate has escalated to epic proportions. The year 2017 alone saw the publication of substantial, multi-authored works such as *Four Views on*

1 For useful accounts of how creationism became part of the current culture-war fabric, see Karl Giberson, *Saving Darwin* (New York: Harper One, 2009) and Ronald Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006) in conjunction with George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 8th edition (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2018); Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017); Mark Noll and Luke Harlow (eds.), *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design (Zondervan),² *Adam and the Genome* (Brazos),³ *Old Earth or Evolutionary Creation?* (IVP Academic),⁴ *Evolution and the Fall* (Eerdmans),⁵ and Crossway's thousand-page *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*.⁶ This isn't even to mention the hurricane of public events, conferences, debates, and otherwise that have occurred in the same general period. 2018-19 is also continuing the trend.⁷

From a practical and social perspective, all of this means extra pressure on truth-seekers, students, and teachers to make up their minds and join one "tribe" or another. Combined with what appear to be a number of fundamental confusions regarding undergirding philosophies and linguistic systems, the subject seems bound to cause increasing frustration amongst parties, whether they are directly involved or gazing from a distance.

Yet, clarity occasionally emerges out of the fog of war. In that case, the polemics, size and energy of *Theistic Evolution* stands out among others. What follows is a hopefully helpful critical review of this book, which begins by looking at strengths and positive contributions, and then moves on into various criticisms. Due to the nature of this review and publication, my focus will primarily be ideological, historical, exegetical, and theological. Those who want a more scientific review will have to look elsewhere.⁸

Preliminary Remarks

Before reviewing the book, a few preliminary observations should be made to help orient the reader.

First of all, *Theistic Evolution* is the third major work of its kind in recent

2 J. B. Stump, ed., *Four Views of Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2017).

3 Scot McKnight and Dennis Venema, *Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture after Genetic Science* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2017)

4 Kenneth Keathley, J. B. Stump, and Joe Aguirre, eds., *Old Earth or Evolutionary Creation?: Discussing Origins with Reasons to Believe and BioLogos* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017).

5 William Cavanaugh and James K. A. Smith, eds., *Evolution and the Fall* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

6 2016 was also an active year. See Denis Lamoureux, *Evolution: Scripture and Nature Say Yes!* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016); Kathryn Applegate and J. B. Stump, eds., *How I Changed My Mind About Evolution: Evangelicals Reflect on Faith and Science* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), among others.

7 See Stanley Rosenberg, et. al., *Finding Ourselves after Darwin: Conversations on the Image of God, Original Sin, and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018); Kyle Greenwood, ed., *Since the Beginning: Interpreting Genesis 1 and 2 through the Ages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018); Andrew Torrance and Thomas McCall, eds., *Knowing Creation: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy, and Science*, 1 vol. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018); Vern Poythress, *Interpreting Eden* (Wheaton: Crossway). Cf. the somewhat related, James K. A. Smith and Michael Gulker, eds., *All Things Hold Together in Christ: A Conversation on Faith, Science, and Virtue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

8 Special thanks to Crossway for providing me with a complimentary copy for this review.

times. The first two are *Should Christians Embrace Evolution?: Biblical and Scientific Responses* (2009) and *God and Evolution* (2010).⁹ Both are collections of articles written by different authors which, as a whole, argue against evolutionary creation¹⁰ using both scientific and theological critiques. *Theistic Evolution* is generally the same type of book, only more comprehensive.

Second, the contemporary theologian's experience of reading books on this subject is, admittedly, a bit awkward. Perusing (for example) *Four Views on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design* is like taking a strange journey back into time. All four of the contributors generally write and argue as if the past 350 years of theology had never happened. Yes, there is obvious reference to more recent theories and concepts (like Darwinism). But generally speaking, the modes of thought, terminology, biblical scholarship, and theological categories and concepts do not advance past early modernism and post-reformation scholasticism in any significant manner.¹¹ The authors seem unaware (or simply do not care) about the demise of classical theism and ongoing revolution in the idea of God.¹² It is therefore challenging for the contemporary theologian to get excited about a debate where all the major premises stem from a potentially flawed (if not simply outdated) framework. The platter of options typically offered in this debate is thoroughly entrenched in modernism and the Enlightenment project. Readers who question such a framework (thus proposing "fifth," "sixth," etc., perspectives) generally aren't able to join the conversation.¹³ This leads to a third feature.

I question many of the premises of modernism, and therefore write as a

9 See Norman C. Nevin, ed., *Should Christians Embrace Evolution? Biblical and Scientific Responses* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2009) and Jay Richards, ed., *God and Evolution* (Seattle: Discovery Institute Press, 2010).

10 By default, I will use "evolutionary creation," only using "theistic evolution" when speaking from the perspective of critics. Other than this distinction, the two terms are generally used synonymously for this article.

11 E.g., models of creation, various philosophies of epistemology, conceptual frameworks and metaphors for God's agency, the relationship of "transcendence and immanence," interpretational history, etc. There are some exceptions to this trend (most noticeably by evolutionary creationists, who stress the literary origins and context of the scriptures), but they remain exceptions.

12 See, for example, Langdon Gilkey, "God," in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, ed. Peter Hodgson and Robert King (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 88–113; Schubert Ogden, "The Reality of God," in *The Reality of God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 1–70; Theodore Jennings, *Beyond Theism: A Grammar of God-Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 13–28; Gordon Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Sallie McFague, *Models of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987); Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 19–21.

13 Some involved in this debate (like Stump, the editor of the *Four Views* volume) are aware that only the major streams are presented and that others aren't (i.e., cherry-nut and maple-pecan didn't make it on the ice-cream menu). Richards (editor of *God and Evolution*) shows some vague familiarity with newer theologies but seems to have a hard time grasping that theology itself is a product of temporal, located human thought (including Western conceptions of God). Nevin (editor of *Should Christians Embrace Evolution?*) shows even less openness to the possibility that classical theism and western monotheism is one perspective among many.

cautious, “post-modern Christian.” I will give attention to the central, historical-philosophical frameworks behind *Theistic Evolution* and contemporary evolutionary creation thought because that (in my view) is where the debate really lies. Indeed, as noted below, the “turning point” in my own story was realizing that the ID movement (and its creationist variants)—*not* only (some variants of) evolutionary creation—has fallen prey to contemporary trends of modern, secular philosophies. Hence the “*modern* creationism” in the title of this article. “There is no view from nowhere,” as the saying goes. We need to start acting like it.

This leads to a final (and obvious) focal point of orientation: the perspective taken in this review is inevitably situated. In fact, this review is somewhat of a personal milestone (which will hopefully add to both its depth and meaning). I remember, as a teenager, traveling hours to the Black Hills to see “Dr. Dino” (Kent Hovind) and hear popular arguments for young-earth creationism, challenging my biology teacher in high school over this “essential” issue, and then entering college to realize it wasn’t really that essential after all. Later on, still a lover of chemistry and physics (yet a theology major), I took Evolutionary Biology and Origins during my last semester at college and labored away at a paper about the orchestration of nature needed to induce genetic drift. Around that time, news was making the rounds about the firing of (what would have been) my Old Testament seminary professor because of his views on this debate.

The journey continued into another phase of unrestrained curiosity. After reading a dozen or so more books on the subject, I started presenting at American Scientific Affiliation meetings as a faculty member. It was humbling to be surrounded by qualified scientists and exciting to hear about new research. Yet, I also felt alone as a theologian, confused about the pseudo-deist theological ethos in general, and turned off at the distasteful hallway criticisms of creationists and ID advocates.¹⁴ It was a phase of life with tremendous growth but also lots of doubts. Like countless others, I left the naïve views of my youth but wasn’t sure what to do next.¹⁵ All the while, I was married to a biology geek and therapist to bounce ideas off of, hiding from heresy hunts at one church and organizational affiliation or another,¹⁶ and quietly following the debate—despite condescending calls to study other things, “let others handle this,” and “stick with your area” (whatever that was).

14 Some of my mixed responses to these experiences were published in “Resuming the Conversation,” *God and Nature Magazine* (Winter 2015).

15 Among other things, reading N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), Guillermo Gonzalez, *The Privileged Planet* (Washington D.C.: Regnery, 2004) and works about the post-fundamentalist / “post-conservative” journey, proved helpful in various ways.

16 My luck ran out in Fall 2018, where I was fired (a month after being promoted to Dean) explicitly because of my dissenting views on the holy triad of conservative evangelicalism (male authority in all spheres of life, biblicism, and young earth creationism).

Fast-forward to the present, I write on this subject as one who is (a) deeply concerned about the spiritual harm and anti-intellectualism inspired by religious fundamentalism (characteristic of most creationist movements), (b) generally convinced that ID has legitimate critiques of some mainstream scientific ideas¹⁷ and has some interesting philosophical/academic proposals,¹⁸ but ultimately operates from an unworkable theoretical framework (especially theologically), and (c) sees early American “biologos” projects as rough and confused,¹⁹ but recent ones as workable models and the most persuasive.²⁰

Positive Steps Forward

We begin our review with positive remarks.

As one approaches *Theistic Evolution*, it becomes evident that it is a product of considerable energy and labor.²¹ There are 31 chapters and over two-dozen contributors, all credentialed researchers/professors in their fields. Although there is (sadly) no interaction with *Four Views*, many essays manage to include some reference to publications from 2017 (e.g., McKnight and Venema’s *Adam and the Genome*). The book follows the order of the subtitle, having three sections of (1) Scientific Critique, (2) Philosophical Critique, and (3) Theological Critique. As a whole, the volume generally favors a literal interpretation of Genesis (and therefore a historical Adam and Eve as the first humans), a modern metaphysic characterized by various dualisms (e.g., “natural”/“supernatural”; zero-sum divine agency, etc.), and thoroughly integrates the specific ideology and arguments of ID. “Theistic evolution” is viewed with serious alarm and as a growing heresy in Christianity. The authors try hard to pull readers away from this dangerous cliff.

17 In other words, there are holes in the standard “Neo-Darwinian Synthesis” and in the purported evolutionary “tree of life” models of early paleontology. Of course, many contend that theologians either (a) have no right to have an opinion on these matters (therefore allowing some agnosticism) and/or (b) must “trust the relevant experts” (disallowing any agnosticism and demanding intellectual assent). I think there is a legitimate logic behind each of these responses, but also problems if they are not rightly qualified.

18 E.g., the breaking down of modern scientific compartmentalizations of disciplines; the “design inference,” etc.

19 E.g., the work of Francis Collins, Howard Van Till, Denis Lamoureux, and others.

20 E.g., D. Haarsma’s essay in *Four Views*, Sarah Ritchie’s contributions in the “Divine Agency” blog series at biologos.com, some of Denis Alexanders work, and the biblical-theological contributions of N. T. Wright and J. Richard Middleton on the subject.

21 This is aside from the visual and physical elements of the book itself: the thin, flexible, and flat spine was a wise choice by the printers (no worry about cracking for this large piece). There was a mild, audible loosening of the flat fore-edge textblock from the case after a full read, but nothing seriously concerning. The primarily black and white cover is bold enough (no dust jacket; an extremely modest French groove), as is the choice of black, contrastive end paper. The formatting, signatures, and nose between the pages are nondescript. Likewise with the main text font, although the titles and subtitles manage to escape with a surprisingly pleasant, bold sans serif. I located two apparent typos: footnote 53 (“216–12”; not sure what this means); and “defenses of the tradition [*sic*] Christian position” (558).

Though most are not original to the book, the beneficial contributions found in *Theistic Evolution* are numerous. Many authors rightly highlight the power and influence of scientism in the present, Western, cultural milieu. “Given our society’s tendency to put science in the place of authority,” writes Gauger, “we may be tempted to accept what we are told as proven established science” (433).²² Since the “scientific consensus” has been repeatedly wrong in the past, this is an important observation to keep in mind when embroiled in any scientific debate. Shaw continues this line of thought into academia, saying that “[t]he common view that scientists are free thinkers who are open to all new ideas and can pursue such without hindrances is not what occurs in reality” (528). Similarly, he argues that peer review is no guarantee of truth, and that political power-plays are at work.

Different authors address other starting points. Moreland asserts that “[w]hen it comes to the task of defining or giving the essential characteristics of science, that task belongs to philosophers and historians of science, and not to scientists themselves” (556). This is a highly controversial statement that is likely to offend many practicing scientists. Nevertheless, it is a proposal worth pondering, especially given the modern university’s tendency to compartmentalize and specialize. (Who has the “bird’s-eye-view” over the whole natural sciences division, and how much weight should that person/position have? What “degree” would that even entail?). Meyer and Nelson also carefully point out the shifting “criteria” as to what counts as “scientific” (e.g., “testable,” “falsifiable,” “observable”) (571–74). The *evolution of science* itself is therefore an important phenomenon for any person or group who want the authority of “science.”

Theistic Evolution also contains some legitimate critiques on particular issues. For example, Currid ably dismantles the somewhat oversimplified dichotomy of Walton’s “functional origins” and “material origins” interpretation of Genesis.²³ Currid concludes, perhaps legitimately, that “[t]o interpret Genesis 1 as merely about functions and not about origins is a failure to account for some of the very prominent features of the narrative.”²⁴

22 Since this article is a review, simple page numbers within the text will be provided for convenience when directly citing *Theistic Evolution*.

23 John Currid, “Theistic Evolution is Incompatible with the Teachings of the Old Testament,” 850, in response to John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2009), 1–16. A further critique of Walton’s view that is not undertaken in *Theistic Evolution* might target Walton’s crass description of “the ancients,” “the ancient world,” and “ancient near eastern thought,” which functions poorly over a thousand years of history, multiple cultures, worldviews, languages, etc. These oversimplifications distort the historical-theological picture (i.e., the “ancient thought” of Egypt in the 1300s BCE is not simply the same “ancient thought” of the Persians in the 400s BCE, etc.), and would be as sloppy as saying “Americans believe _____ about _____,” without taking into account historical change. This may not substantially alter Walton’s larger argument but it is noteworthy.

24 Currid, “Theistic Evolution,” 851.

There are likely other positive contributions in the book in the science section. But, as noted in the introduction, these fall outside the scope of this particular review.

Critique Area 1: Contradictions and Incoherence

There are a number of areas and aspects of *Theistic Evolution* that appear contradictory and internally incoherent. The authors make conflicting claims within the same volume about the same issues. Some of these incidents are more serious than others.

In Moreland's essay, the need to carefully define (and *think about how to* define) various terms, such as "science" and otherwise, is apparent. As already noted above, readers are told that defining "the essential characteristics of science" is not a task belonging "to scientists themselves" (556). Dilley's article also follows this route in the same section, studiously beginning his discussion with the preface, "Before turning to the main argument, a few definitions are necessary" (595). It is somewhat confusing, then, that wedged between both of these articles is the following declaration by Meyer and Nelson: "fruitful science does not need definitions: it needs creativity, hard work, and evidence most of all" (591).

More perplexing is that the book cannot seem to clearly define "methodological naturalism" (henceforth "MN") and whether (or to what extent) theistic evolutionists are truly committed to it. This is notable because the concept of MN is mentioned in almost every chapter of the book, and much of its critique hinge on this connection: theistic evolution operates on the basis of MN, and MN has serious problems, which means there are serious problems with theistic evolution. However, these connections are not so straightforward.

Regarding definitions, Meyer says that, "Methodological naturalism asserts that, to qualify as scientific, a theory must explain by strictly physical or material causes—that is, non-intelligent or non-purposive causes" (562). Dilley, however, says MN ultimately means that "natural explanations, rather than theological ones, belong in science" (595). Perhaps this is a crass summary of Meyer's definition, but it is problematic (or at least confusing) for a number of reasons.²⁵ Apparently not satisfied with this definition, Dilley says a couple pages later, "If

25 For example, it would seem possible to involve purpose and intelligence in something without it necessarily being theological. (In fact, ID proponents regularly insist that "intelligent design" is ultimately agnostic and need not necessarily be attributed to theism. How genuine this claim is, especially given Meyer's new book defending theism, remains dubious.) Second of all, "causes" are very different than "explanations" (to identify a cause of something isn't necessarily to explain it; this is a faulty assumption in modern thought, which will be explained more below). Third, what is meant by "strictly" physical and material causes? Is there such thing as *non*-strictly physical and material causes? This adjectival qualifier is consistently used throughout *Theistic Evolution* (along with "purely" or "natural causes *alone*") but never really explained.

methodological naturalism means anything at all, it means that God-talk is barred within science in toto . . . when scientists engage in scientific work *as* scientific work, they are to avoid religious language” (597–98). This would suggest that neither causes, or explanations, or boundaries are actually as much the issue of MN *as language* games.²⁶ Compounded with the fact that readers are also told that “methodological naturalism allows a complementary relationship between science and theology,”²⁷ locating the domain and boundaries of “methodological naturalism” in *Theistic Evolution* is a challenge, indeed.²⁸

The confusion is amplified with regard to the second issue: are theistic evolutionists guilty of operating under MN, and to what degree or in what sense? At the beginning of the volume, Meyer more or less manipulates a quote by Darrel Falk²⁹ to say that Falk affirms MN. Even though Falk’s position clearly does not fit the neat categories erected by the authors of *Theistic Evolution*, Meyer insists that, despite being “admirably clear,” Falk’s perspective on God’s agency “is just another way of expressing a commitment—perhaps a distinctly Christian commitment—to methodological naturalism” (565). However, it is questionable why one would insist on placing thinkers inside this terminology/ideology since Meyer and Nelson later argue that theistic evolutionists affirm things that are *outside* “the domain of methodological naturalism,” anyway (585).

Dilley also exhibits the same confused determination. Within the same page, Biologos³⁰ is said to have language “not precise” on the issue, and yet precise enough to assert that “Biologos. . . *accepts* methodological naturalism,” and he even speaks of “Biologos’ *allegiance* to methodological naturalism” (602; emphasis mine). By the time one reaches the end of Dilley’s article, Biologos is in danger of rank idolatry, for “theistic evolutionists cannot serve both God and methodological naturalism” (610). And yet Dilley then turns around and says just a few pages later (613) that Francis Collins’ “discourse clearly *violates* methodological naturalism”! Thus, readers are essentially told that the Biologos group are *possibly* methodological naturalists who are also *religiously* *allegiant* methodological naturalists who substantially *compromise* methodological naturalism.³¹

Perhaps “methodological naturalism” is an unnecessary construct that

26 I am using “language games” in a more generic sense (i.e., the linguistic turn as a whole) than the technical meaning given to it by Wittgenstein.

27 Ibid., 597.

28 For a clearer critique of MN, see Thomas Torrance, “Not Knowing Creation” in *Knowing Creation*.

29 This quote will be re-cited later in this review.

30 “Biologos” in the book and in this review may refer to the organization (www.biologos.com), to the specific views of the organization, or to any broad theory that attempts to harmonize Christianity and some version of evolutionary theory.

31 Moreland (636), also seems to define “naturalism” as roughly the same as “methodological naturalism”: “The component of naturalism, then, is the belief that scientific knowledge is the only kind of knowledge there is, or that it is an immeasurably superior kind of knowledge.”

confuses more than it clarifies.³² What if a person interpreted Biologos (and any other person/group) on their own terms instead of constructing categories in which to peg them?³³ If evolutionary creation really has some innovative proposals (as the authors of *Theistic Evolution* maintain), one would expect certain frameworks and categories to break down anyway.

In any case, it is also not clear what is meant by “theistic evolution” in the book. The authors appear unable of conceiving that God’s activity may be known and observable in the world apart from things “empirically detectable.” But on the other hand, this scope of activity is broadened in some definitions to *any* type of detectability. Thus, one definition (the formal definition set out in the introduction) of theistic evolution is, “God created matter and after that did not guide or intervene or act directly to cause *any empirically detectable change* in the natural behavior of matter until all living things had evolved by purely natural processes” (67). Similarly, Dilley says that in theistic evolution, “God’s design of biological phenomena (or history) is not *empirically detectable* using the rigorous methods of science.”³⁴ On the other hand, Moreland later says that “the most pervasive definition of theistic evolution is that the general, naturalistic theory of evolution is true, and God is allowed somehow or another to be involved in the process as long as there is *no way to detect his involvement*.”³⁵ Obviously, there is a massive difference between saying “God is not detectable” and “God is not empirically detectable through science.” There many of ways in which human beings can

32 Cf. Denis Alexander and Robert White, *Science, Faith, and Ethics: Grid or Gridlock?* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 20–21: “Christians have sometimes muddled the waters by trying to distinguish between what they have term ‘methodological naturalism’ and ‘ontological naturalism.’”

33 Cf. “scientific concordism,” another problematic, theoretical framework wherein Denis Lamoureux, *Evolution: Scripture and Nature Say Yes!* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 27, means “the belief that there is an alignment between the Bible and the facts of science.” Lamoureux categorically denies such “concordism.” The problem here is that there are so many exceptions to such “concordism” that it fails to be a meaningful category. If “scientific facts” are observations of the natural world in literal and/or descriptive language, then it is unclear why dozens of biblical passages that perform this function do not qualify (e.g., the stars in the sky are numerous, eating quail is eating meat, eagles fly, there is a river flowing outside the gate of Philippi, putting vinegar on a wound hurts, etc.). Thus, Haarsma, *Four Views*, 146, can legitimately say, “Genetics shows that we are one human family, as taught throughout the Bible.” If there is any “scientific concordism” that *could* be categorically denied, it would be one in which scientific facts *distinctive to post-biblical eras* (e.g., heliocentrism) are not found in the scriptures, not that there exist no scientific facts in the scriptures whatsoever. Cf. McLeish, “The Science-and-Religion Delusion,” in *Knowing Creation*, 321: “It is just not possible to define a moment in the history of thought that marks a temporal boundary between the ‘prescientific’ and the ‘scientific.’ The longing to understand, to go beneath the superficialities of the world in thought, to reconstruct the workings of the universe in our minds, is a cultural activity as old as any other.”

34 Dilley, 598–99 (cf. 626); emphasis mine. One also wonders what exactly is meant by the “rigorous methods of science,” given Meyer’s article on the shifting meaning of this enterprise and criteria for what qualifies as “scientific” at all (561–92).

35 Moreland, 643 (cf. 650); emphasis mine. Yet, Moreland then qualifies with “*scientifically* detectable” on p. 651 (emphasis mine), wondering if this merely includes empiricism and may extend beyond it to other means of knowledge, or simply means empiricism alone.

“detect” or come to know that another person or being in the world has acted, none of which necessarily need to be “empirical.” But the authors do not seem aware of either this possibility or delineation.³⁶

There also appears to be some confusion between detecting God’s (or anyone’s) activity (Moreland) from God’s *design* (Meyer, Dilley). If, for example, I want to know if someone came to my office yesterday while I was gone, I’ll ask a colleague next door or talk to the student directly in order to find out. But neither of these methods have anything to do with empiricism or “detecting design.” Furthermore, “detecting design” may or may not say something about the immediacy or process of how the design came into being. If I walk out to the patio and see a poem sitting on the table, perhaps the author was there and wrote it an hour ago with a pen, or maybe it was printed ten years ago and was placed there last week without my knowledge, or maybe someone else wrote it on the author’s behalf a century earlier and was only recently available for copying. The “design” is evident in the poem, but that in and of itself says little about how the poem on the table came to be. Similarly, ID theorists—and the authors of *Theistic Evolution*—regularly conflate “detecting design” with specific knowledge of how “God acted.”³⁷ As it will be discussed below, God’s activity is both diverse and mysterious, and whether or not any of it is “empirical” neither removes the possibility of God’s action nor inflicts doubt on behalf of the knower of such action. That is, *there is such a thing as non-empirical knowledge*.³⁸ (The fact that this even has to be stated reveals the predominance of modernism.)

At one point, readers are told that in dealing with the Genesis text, “genre is important, although in considering such questions, one must always beware of false dichotomy.”³⁹ This is good advice. But the authors of *Theistic Evolution* may have missed it since a false dichotomy between two genre categories in Genesis (“historical narrative” vs. all other options) is regularly erected.⁴⁰

36 The situation only gets more complicated with Grudem, who says “according to theistic evolution, God did not *act* directly, discretely, or discernibly in time to create plants, animals, or man. Indeed, theistic evolution insists that after the creation of the universe at the Big Bang, God did not *actively make* anything, but merely upheld (or observed) the ongoing natural processes that were themselves directly responsible for the origin of all life forms” (74). Grudem (along with Meyers, 45) does not seem to realize that evolutionary creationists simply have a different concept of what it means for God to “actively make” something. In many non-creationist models, “creation” and “evolution” are one and the same.

37 Perhaps it is no wonder, then, that David Bentley Hart says in *The Experience of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 38: “As either a scientific or a philosophical project, Intelligent Design theory is a deeply problematic undertaking; and, from a theological or metaphysical perspective, it is a massive distraction.”

38 In fact, “most of the things we know to be true, often quite indubitably, do not fall within the realm of what can be tested by empirical methods; they are by their nature episodic, experiential, local, personal, intuitive, or purely logical” (Hart, *The Experience of God*, 71).

39 Reeves, “Bringing Home the Bacon,” 712.

40 See Grudem, “Biblical and Theological Introduction,” 63–64; *idem.*, “Theistic Evolution

On a number of fronts, one also notices a selective use of “mystery,” “materialism,” and the limited capacities of human reason and rationality. These negative concepts are summoned to service at rather convenient times so that one is left wondering if there aren’t perhaps double-standards operating beneath the surface. For example, Axe observes that “after all the effort we humans have put into understanding how life works, we’re left with a grand mystery” (88) and “[w]e humans pride ourselves in our rational faculties, but the truth is that we aren’t as rational as we pretend to be” (103). He states this only to confidently claim in the same essay, “Life in all its forms is obviously the work of genius, and clueless causes are so far removed from genius as the east is from the west” (99), among other such things.⁴¹ The position seems to be, then, that theistic evolutionists need to be reminded about human fallibility and limitations of knowledge, but those criticizing theistic evolutionists do not need this reminder.⁴²

At other points in the book, evolutionary creationists bear the charge of “materialism” for arguing that the physical world (and its various processes) reveals God’s handiwork.⁴³ But at the same time, a premium is placed on empirical, scientific knowledge (which is primarily oriented around the “material world”) when it comes to God’s action in creation.⁴⁴ In fact, the same kinds of claims about God’s revelation through the world is made by ID advocates regarding astronomy, but are strangely exempt from the charge of “materialism”—even while arguing side-by-side with theistic evolutionists about “physical laws” giving rise to the solar system and the earth.⁴⁵ In other words, if ID advocates, the authors of

Undermines Twelve Creation Events,” 783–820; Currid, “Theistic Evolution is Incompatible with the Teachings of the Old Testament,” 858.

41 Cf. Similar sentiments in Axe’s *Undeniable* (New York: HarperOne, 2016). To respond to this claim, one could seemingly make a similar objection to Paul: shame and foolishness is as far away from honor and wisdom as the east is from the west. Yet, the cross transforms our entire way of thinking about these categories; this kind of paradoxical theology is a hallmark of Jesus, Paul, and early Christianity. It would perhaps not be a surprise, then, that ultimately at the heart of all randomness (i.e., genetic mutation, quantum mechanics, etc.) lies the heart of all purpose and intentionality.

42 Cf. Moreland’s claim that knowledge doesn’t mean certainty (639), while he then turns around to critique evolutionary creationists because they undermine the certainty of biblical knowledge (642).

43 The terms “materialism” or “materialistic” is used over 30 times in the volume—mostly (if not entirely) negative and attributed to evolution.

44 In addition to the quote of Meyer on p. 222, see 669.

45 See Meyer, 34, and related discussions on “self-organization” via “physical” or “natural laws,” 232–34, 270–71. Also note the main argument of Gonzalez, *The Privileged Planet*, which was (ironically) launched by the Discovery Institute. Three times (220, 225, 228) Meyer negatively cites Lamoreaux’s metaphor of “the deck is stacked” for life’s outcome without realizing this is the same language used *in favor* of ID when it comes to fine-tuning, astronomy, and the formation of our universe (being “rigged for life”). Erkki Vesa Rope Kojonen, *Intelligent Design: A Philosophical and Theological Analysis* (dissertation for University of Helsinki, 2014), 298, remarks, “The ID theorists emphasize only the aspect of God as a designer, and sometimes create the impression that God’s activity could not be detected without gaps in natural processes. This

Theistic Evolution, and theistic evolutionists can all make the same argument that the planets and stars “evolved from physical laws” (a scientific way of saying “this is one aspect of how God create it”) without being charged with materialism (or heresy), is it really justified to start bringing the charge of materialism upon the onset of cellular function and DNA information?⁴⁶

It should also be noted that this internal incoherence within ID expands into other areas outside the book, such as the theses propounded in Wiker and Witt’s *A Meaningful World*.⁴⁷ In a fascinating discussion about the discovery of elements and the periodic table, the authors talk about the role of aesthetics in discovery, the presumption of order, and, given that “[h]uman beings live on the level of effects and strive to discover the causes,”⁴⁸ how amazing it is that everything necessary to obtain the periodic table is within the grasp of human observation and knowledge. It would seem that the same God-given dynamics and anthropological inclinations are at work in the scientist’s search for the knowable “mechanisms” or “natural causes” behind the origin of life—even if such searches are premature. But, here, the ID movement and authors of *Theistic Evolution* (ironically) declare in advance that this is a waste of time, and that the answers are already known.⁴⁹

On a different front, it is unclear how the authors of *Theistic Evolution* understand the basic elements of Gen 1–3, beyond a raw, literal, historical reading. Some authors warm-up to the idea of Genesis being a polemic (853–56), while others are cool on this approach (718). What is clear is that there is no actual exegesis of Gen 1–3. This is perhaps the most baffling omission in the whole book: *a study of the literary origins, occasion, dating, audience, and authorship of Genesis (or any of the biblical canonical writings, for that matter) is absent*.⁵⁰

is puzzling, since the ID theorists also believe that the laws of nature are designed.” Cf. Haarsma, *Four Views*, 222 n. 2.

46 At this point, it is clear that the life/non-life distinction is absolutely vital for the pro-ID argument to work (more on this below).

47 Benjamin Wiker and Jonathan Witt, *A Meaningful World: How the Arts and Sciences Reveal the Genius of Nature* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2006). Jonathan Witt is a Senior Fellow with Discovery Institute’s Center for Science and Culture.

48 Wiker and Witt, *A Meaningful World*, 145.

49 For example, Meyer, 227, says, “And yet, some scientists claim that we must await the discovery of new natural laws to explain the origin of biological information . . . we will not discover such a law.” This is a confusing argument since Meyer himself has claimed to know a law that explains the origin of information—the law of intelligent design (i.e., intelligence is *always* behind complex, functionally-specific information). But, if this is the case, why are not other scientists allowed to even entertain the possibility that some *other* knowable process is responsible—whether closely related to a “physical law” or not, and whether or not it is a single process or a series of intermediary “laws” that stand between such information and intelligence? In other words, to pit the argument as “physical laws” vs. “intelligent design” is a false dichotomy and a premature conclusion; there may be a whole host of other things that come to the table over the next two centuries of discovery that need not fit in one of these two categories.

50 Unless one includes Currid’s brief dismissal of a post-exilic occasion (874–75).

These basic elements of biblical study are apparently viewed by the contributors as unneeded or unimportant details that add little to the general thrust of the text.⁵¹ This leaves curious students of the Bible at a loss for how they are to interpret the Genesis text like any other piece of biblical (or nonbiblical) literature.

There are also puzzling standards regarding the tone and charity of argumentation. The authors charge theistic evolutionists of “outlandish rhetoric” (367) and using “ridicule to bully skeptics into submission” (367). Thus, “Our friends in the theistic evolution community would be wise to follow suit—or at least tone down the rhetoric” (401), and the Biologos people in particular should “should slow down, take a deep breath, and form integrative teams” (558). But, then authors in the same volume turn around and charge theistic evolutionists of “tucking their tails between their legs at the first sign of conflict between the Bible and science” (647), becoming the church’s “grave diggers” (639, 649), functioning as “intellectual pacifism that lulls people to sleep while the barbarians are at the gates” (645), and being “an embarrassment” (722).

Critique Area #2: Pseudo-Scholarship and Uncritical Thought

Theistic Evolution also contains cases of poor scholarship and illogical reasoning. This is especially true in the “theological” section of the book. But before going on to those chapters, a few more observations need to be made regarding aforementioned controversies.

Meyer concludes at a key juncture in his article that “[a]s Robert Boyle (1627–1691) often argued, the job of the scientist (or what he calls the ‘natural philosopher’) is not to assume beforehand what God must have done, but to study the world to find out what God actually has done” (222).” He further concludes (quoting Sean Carroll) that “[m]ethodological naturalism . . . amounts to assuming part of the answer ahead of time.”⁵² However, this seems to miss a key fact: *all scientists do this out of necessity*. All people possess some assumptions about what is possible and impossible and carry this filter(s) everywhere they go.⁵³ Claiming to have knowledge about God means knowing (in some sense) what God would do

51 The same is true for *God and Evolution* and *Should Christians Believe in Evolution?*. The closest the authors get in the latter volume is a one-paragraph referral to an obscure book written by a Southern Baptist professor. At least for these volumes and *Theistic Evolution*, then, this would appear to be the sum total of what critics of evolutionary creation have to offer regarding Genesis and biblical scholarship.

52 Meyer, 586. Cf. Dilley’s criticism of Collin’s regarding the formation of the eye on p. 613. I tend to think both Dilley and Collins are incorrect for both assuming to know what a good or bad design of the eye (or any bodily feature) really is; both cases presume a privileged position of presumed knowledge that might easily be premature.

53 This is what happens by presupposing (for example) the laws of logic in any discourse (e.g., A cannot be A and non-A at same time and same sense, etc.). This is true in theology, as (for instance) “God does not lie” (Titus 1:2), or “tempt” anyone (Jas 1:13–14) or do anything contrary to God’s own revealed character.

in certain situations.⁵⁴ The authors of *Theistic Evolution* make very specific claims about what God must have done precisely to conform with what they believe aligns to God's own character (i.e., God didn't use "natural mechanisms").⁵⁵

More importantly, all persons have *a determining criterion for deciding what qualifies* as "what God actually has done." ID theorists are upfront for their determining criteria: God *didn't actually do* a, b, and c in natural history (as evolutionary creationists and Darwinists claim) because of various reasons (e.g., it contradicts the Bible, church tradition, science, and goes against God's character, etc.). In the most extraordinary statement of the book (which will be explored more thoroughly below), Meyer says "I think the question of when God acted should remain a matter for empirical investigation and should not be determined by our aesthetic or theological preferences altogether" (222). Clearly, there *is* a filter for determining how to know if God has acted—and here it is scientific empiricism (not theology, experience, revelation, communal memory, or anything else).⁵⁶

In a different article, Meyer, Nelson, and Gauger argue that some recent evolutionary mechanisms fail to explain certain phenomena. They write, "each of these proposed new mechanisms still fails to explain the origin of the genetic and/or epigenetic info necessary to produce new forms of life . . . [so] why say that these mechanisms represent God's way of creating new forms of life?"⁵⁷ Conceding all the assumptions of this argument for the moment, readers might ask: but don't *some* "mechanisms" represent God's way of doing *something*? And if so, why is ID exempt from the charge of "materialism" and "naturalism"? ID proponents fiercely argue that natural selection and mutation are insufficient for certain outcomes (and see it as competing with God's immediate intervention). But, for what outcomes natural selection and mutation *are* responsible for (i.e., even the

54 See William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking About God Went Wrong* (Louisville: WJK, 1996), 190–95; Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 36–37; Alistair McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Wiley and Blackwell, 2017), 12–13; 137–44.

55 The same general criticism would apply to the following argument: "Shouldn't the *evidence*, rather than an abstract rule like methodological naturalism, decide the outcome of a scientific investigation?" (Nelson and Meyer, 566). This seems to be a category mistake, since evidence only has meaning within a framework of interpretation (which is what MN supposedly is); this would make as much sense as saying, "shouldn't the *finger prints* determine the trial and not the laws of jurisprudence?" Or maybe, "shouldn't the *ingredients* determine what the pie tastes like and not the recipe?" Even if evidence and MN were comparable categories, evidence remains meaningless without a larger context and system of interpretation, so appealing to it (as if others aren't doing this) gets the conversation nowhere.

56 On a different, though related, the historical-situatedness of various claims is often not considered. For example, in a point repeated by ID advocates, we read: "But do laws of nature generate information?" (Meyer, 226). What is actually being asked is, "Do the *regularities we know about at this point in history* generate information?" Important qualifications like these easily get lost in the debate.

57 Meyer, Gauger, and Nelson, "Theistic Evolution and the Extended Evolutionary Synthesis," 261.

slightest genetic drift), why is *this* not viewed in competition with God's intervention? These are good questions readers of *Theistic Evolution* might ponder.

We now move on to the actual "theological" section of the book.

Grudem is set to carry the "theological" weight of *Theistic Evolution* with his "Biblical and Theological Introduction" (61) and chapter 27, titled (in typical Grudem-esque-numerical fashion) "Theistic Evolution Undermines Twelve Creation Events and Several Crucial Christian Doctrines."⁵⁸ The introduction contains a number of problematic assertions. "From the standpoint of theology," we read, "the debate is primarily about the proper interpretation of the first three chapters of the Bible" (61). As noted earlier, one would expect a scholarly discussion about the first three chapters of the Bible if this were the case, but it cannot be found in *Theistic Evolution*. Regardless, the point of this statement would be contested by many theologians, especially as it only makes sense within a literal reading of Genesis (i.e., the debate is probably *not* about the first three chapters of Genesis). It also tends to confuse the study of the Bible with theology (which, while related, are distinct enterprises). Even within a creationist framework, it is not clear why other issues—like epistemology, philosophy, theology, ethics, and everything else being debated—are *ipso facto* subordinate to an interpretation of *any* three chapters of the Bible.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, this hermeneutical reductionism continues farther: "Without the foundation laid down in those three chapters, the rest of the Bible would make no sense" (62). Given that (a) there are multiple creation-themed portions of the Bible (e.g., Prov 8; Job 26 and 28; Ps 104; Is 42), (b) Genesis is not at all the most cited OT book in the NT,⁶⁰ and (c) Gen 1–3 may have more to do with the rise and fall of Israel than with the chemical/cosmological creation of the cosmos, this would appear to be an overstatement.

Grudem then notes that the contributors of the book aren't going to "frame the discussion of this book in terms of whether the Bible's teachings about creation should be interpreted 'literally'" (63) because this is a loose and potentially confusing term. Strangely, then, the rest of the chapter—and all of chapter 27—assumes and establishes what can only be described as a strictly literalist

58 Cf. the titles of Wayne Grudem, "Does κεφαλή ('Head') Mean 'Source' Or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples," *Trinity Journal* 6:1 (Spring 1985:38–59); "Complete List of Eighty-Two Examples of *Authenteō* ('to exercise authority') in Ancient Greek Literature, by H. Scott Baldwin," in Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More than 100 Disputed Questions* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012); "79 factors that will help nations escape from poverty and move toward prosperity," from waynegrudem.com, based on Wayne Grudem and Barry Asmus, *The Poverty of Nations: A Sustainable Solution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013). In all of these cases, the statistics are irrelevant to the arguments being made. The assumption is there, nevertheless, that big numbers indicate truth or significance.

59 Grudem is, of course, reiterating the sentiment of Dyson Hague, "The Doctrinal Value of the First Chapters of Genesis," in Torrey et. al., eds., *The Fundamentals: The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990), 101.

60 The most commonly cited OT books in the NT are the Psalms, Deuteronomy, and Isaiah.

interpretation. The other authors in the “theological” section of the book do the same.⁶¹ It therefore seems that the contributors want to avoid the charge of fundamentalist, literalist biblicism, but too many of their arguments depend on it, so it must (functionally) be implemented any way.

By the time one comes to chapter 27, it becomes apparent that there is no difference between topical proof-texting and theology—nor a difference between one’s own interpretation and what the “Bible says.”⁶² The chapter sets out to summarize twelve beliefs of theistic evolutionists “that conflict with the teachings of the Bible.” Each one, however, depends on a strictly literalist reading of Genesis. None involve any discussion of the original contexts (cultural, literary, historical, textual, etc.) of the texts that are cited or contain any signs of secondary biblical scholarship. They interact with virtually no primary or secondary theological sources, ancient or recent. Grudem’s own interpretations are continually conflated with “the truthfulness of the Bible,” which he argues is the first “significant Christian doctrine that . . . [is] undermined or denied by theistic evolution” (821).⁶³ It is argued that theistic evolutionists also fail to realize that their views undermine “belief in the goodness of God” (834) and “will lead to scant praise for God’s wisdom” (832). Once again, Grudem interacts with no literature that specifically addresses these kinds of objections⁶⁴ and writes as if the audience is hunting for apologetic ammunition instead of carefully assessing the arguments. In short, the intelligibility of Grudem’s chapter appears to depend upon the audience’s (a) loyalty to Grudem’s starting points and (b) general unfamiliarity with the general disciplines of systematic theology and biblical studies.⁶⁵

61 See Currid “Theistic Evolution”; Guy Waters, “Theistic Evolution.”

62 This is no surprise, as his own *Systematic Theology* is (despite being a best-seller) not a systematic theology, but a selective theological dictionary of topically-organized proof-texts. This has long been noted and need not be elaborated on here.

63 Pages 823–26 consist of making a statement (that depends on a literal simplistic reading) and then asking the readership whether they are true or not, over and over again, as if this were in any way an argument, a case study in doing theology, or some sort of compelling reasoning.

64 There are entire videos produced by Biologos (<https://www.youtube.com/user/biologosfoundation>) that give praise for God’s wisdom in creation (e.g., in supernovas, biological complexity, etc.). Most books written by evolutionary creationists also conform to this pattern.

65 Predictably, “The real issue,” he argues, isn’t even theology or interpretation or academics, but “the truthfulness of the Bible” (823) and “the watershed issue of biblical inerrancy” (823). Grudem quotes a substantial portion of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and then singles out John Walton as a particularly guilty party (827). It is noteworthy that the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) is the first of a two-part production by the “International Council on Biblical Inerrancy,” the second of which is the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics (1982). Both documents reveal the young-earth creationist (and flood-geology) orientation of the Council (and of the driving figures, Norman Geisler and R.C. Sproul). Of interest is Article XII in the Inerrancy Statement and Article XV, XIX, and XXII in the Hermeneutics Statement. It is also noteworthy that Grudem appears unaware of over a dozen Christian books that specifically critique this modernist (and highly problematic) bibliology. See, for example, Craig Allert, *A High View of Scripture?: The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Carlos Bovell, *Inerrancy and the Spiritual Formation of Younger*

The next chapter is “Theistic Evolution is Incompatible with the Teachings of the Old Testament” by Currid. The question is raised, “why does Genesis 1–3 contain so many elements that appear to be literal history if in fact it was borrowing from an ancient Near-Eastern myth?” (851). One might note in response that (a) not all evolutionary creationists (or general Old Testament scholars who aren’t creationists, for that matter) argue for literary dependence between Genesis and other creation accounts (one way or another), and (b) “history” is not necessarily binary, as all kinds of literature contain “historical” elements without being “history” or “historical narrative.” In fact, Gen 1–3 (or even 1–11) is probably best thought of as “historical fiction” or “parabolic history.”⁶⁶ None of the authors of *Theistic Evolution* appear aware of this category (whether for Genesis or other books, like Job, Jonah, etc.) even when surveying the options,⁶⁷ but insist on “historical narrative” as the only legitimate option.

Currid also argues that if Gen 1 is “polemical” (or anti-“mythical”), it must be historical because it wouldn’t be a polemic without being historical (853–56). But this simply isn’t the case. A polemical interpretation isn’t necessarily

Evangelicals (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007); *idem*, *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Authority of Scripture: Historical, Biblical, and Theoretical Perspectives* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011); *idem*, *Rehabilitating Inerrancy in a Culture of Fear* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012); James Dunn, *The Living Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); *idem*, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (New York: HarperOne, 2014); Christopher Hays and Christopher Ansberry, eds., *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicalism is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2012); Kenton Sparks, *Sacred Word, Broken Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); *idem*, *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Thom Stark, *The Human Faces of God: What Scripture Reveals When It Gets God Wrong (And Why Inerrancy Tries to Hide It)* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011). Cf. Ben Witherington, *The Living Word: Rethinking the Theology of the Bible* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009). For an excellent introduction to bibliography, see John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Toronto: Clements, 2004), and an excellent introduction to the Bible, see Andrew Arterbury, W. H. Bellinger, Derek Dodson, *Engaging the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014) and Michael Gorman, ed., *Scripture and Its Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

66 See John Goldingay, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 70–71: “Genesis 1 is history in that it speaks of real people and events (God, creating, orderliness, goodness, expectations not met, God’s design not being realized), but it does so in pictures. It speaks of God’s historical intention and God’s historical act of creation, but its story takes parabolic form. . . . You cannot ask, for instance, where Cain got his wife from; to do so is to treat the parable as the kind of allegory in which every detail has something corresponding to it in the literal events that the parable represents. If Genesis 1–11 is parabolic, when does the Torah make a transition from parabolic history to literal history?” For a thoughtful answer to this question and other related ones, see John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Gospel*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 859–83.

67 E.g., “poetry and allegory,” “figurative literature,” “literary,” (856–58). While somewhat “poetic,” it is an overstatement to simply assert that Gen 1 is “poetry” (especially given the comparative poetic literature the other Hebrew scriptures furnish). Cf. Kyle Greenwood, *Scripture and Cosmology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 106.

anti-“mythical,” but anti-*pagan*. It is quite possible the authors/scribes responsible for our current Genesis text weren’t concerned about bashing the ahistoricity of “myth,” but were concerned about what the competing creation accounts otherwise implied. In fact, Currid’s argument brings the genre and literary-types of Genesis and the competing narratives *closer* together instead of further apart, for it is a shared literary form and subject matter that would allow Gen 1 to function as such a decisive refutation. In doing polemics, an author does not need to refute poetry with song or wisdom literature with lament, or respond to apocalyptic literature with an epistle, or (in this case) mythology with a historical account. In the same way, it would make more sense for the scribes to critique competing mythologies of creation (which may or may not have historical elements)⁶⁸ with a creation account of the *same* literary genre, not a different one. A successful polemic *might* be contingent on the historicity of the story, or it might not be.

It is also argued that “repetitive formulas do not necessarily signify nonhistorical, figurative accounts” (860). This is true. However, these formulas do signify *something*, namely a literary feature; scribes were consciously aware of arranging material into a pattern for reasons that may have very little to do with history or chronological sequence.⁶⁹ In the end, when Currid says, “Genesis 1 has an elevated style, yet it is still historical narrative” (861), it would have been much more accurate to say, “Genesis 1 has highly elevated literary features, so the burden of proof is on the one who insists that it is ‘ordinary historical narrative,’ though it may turn out to have historical elements.”

68 Currid denies this, saying “non-Israelite accounts are legendary stories that have no determinable basis in fact or history. They are . . . simply ahistorical” (861). But this need not be the case, and, in fact, some historical element would seem a deductive corollary in Currid’s view given what the creation accounts have in common—such as particular similarities (there are over two dozen specific similarities between the *Atrahasis Epic* and Gen 1–9 alone) and particular differences of the same subject matter (e.g., *Enuma Elish* vs. Gen 2–9).

One must also be reminded about the contemporary (600–500s BCE) literary example of the Homeric poems. No scholar until the late 1800s believed the city of Troy or Mycenae in Homer were historical. But one Englishman (Frank Calvert) believed Troy was real and proved it when Heinrich Schliemann dug it up in the 1870s (followed by Mycenae). For these reasons and others, one should at least be open to the *possibility* of a historic Adam and Eve, an ancient place on the globe called “Eden,” etc., though this may not ultimately prove to be the case.

69 For an excellent introduction to how the Old Testament was written, see Karel Van Der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), in conjunction with Konrad Schmid, *The Old Testament: A Literary History*, trans. Linda Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012). Note, however, that it is easy to swing too far in the opposite direction, as in Denis Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), who argues that the various patterns and literary features of Genesis indicate that it is “contrived” and therefore not “real” (this is false dichotomy, of course). For example, he says “the ages and time periods in this genealogy [Gen 5] are contrived, not actual” (213); “Obviously, the temporal referents in Gen 11 are contrived and artificial” (236); “the origin of the chosen line in Scripture is contrived and not literally or historically accurate” (238), etc. This would be like saying that because a history book organizes the American Civil War into a narrative of ten chapters about five families over five generations (clearly contrived), we can’t even be sure the Civil War “literally” happened. This is absurd.

Currid's arguments for harmonizing the two creation accounts in Gen 1–2 appears highly contingent on Hebrew grammar (most creationist arguments—whether from Young-Earth or Old-Earth perspectives—tend to be as well).⁷⁰ But it must be remembered that Jesus and the early church probably used the Greek Septuagint, not the Hebrew Bible.⁷¹ This may or may not affect particular points, but the fact that a *translation* served as “the word of God” for Jesus, the apostles, and the church for many generations should give pause before hanging entire arguments on Hebrew grammar and word studies of a particular text form.

In a similar line, it is argued that the *toledoth* in Genesis “is disjunctive, indicating that a new topic is being addressed” (870). But this would seem to work *against*, not in favor, of Currid's argument that the second creation account (in Gen 2) is a logical continuation and expansion of the first.

Finally, in a sweeping dismissal of Enns' *The Evolution of Adam*,⁷² Currid states, “The assumption that all of Israel's history until the exile occurred prior to the composition of Genesis 2–3, and that the description of human origins is merely a reflective echo, is exactly that . . . merely an assumption” (875). This is simply untrue. Scholars date Genesis (at least as a general literary composition, and not necessarily all of its source material) to the 500s–400s BCE for reasons that have nothing to do with theories of evolution or mere “assumptions.” It has to do with an apparent literary unity of Genesis/Deuteronomy through 2 Kings,⁷³ references in this material (including Pentateuch) to historical events/places/characters/terminology that are situated in the 700s–500s (as opposed to strictly

70 Consider, for example, the decades of useless lexical research regarding the Hebrew term “day” (יָמִים).

71 Introductions to the Bible often note this. But in particular, see Timothy Law, *When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

72 Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2012).

73 The “Deuteronomistic History” perspective largely originates with Martin Noth (1902–1968), though Schmid more recently in *Old Testament*, 118–20, gives excellent arguments in favor of an Exodus 2–2 Kings literary unit. Cf. Thomas Dozeman, Thomas Römer, and Konrad Schmid, *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch?: Identifying Literary Works in Genesis Through Kings* (Society of Biblical Literature. Ancient Israel and Its Literature) (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011). So persuasive is the literary unity of the Pentateuch with the “Former Prophets” that the seminal work by Jan Gertz, et. al, *The formation of the Pentateuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016) features a section on it (“Do the Pentateuchal Sources Extend into the Former Prophets?”). In brief, my own view is that Genesis–2 Kings is a single literary unit composed by scribes in the 500s–560s BCE, using a variety of (already) written and oral sources (that may or may not go back to Moses himself; arguments for this ancient connection, like those of Richard Hess, should be considered) of new composition, revision, and direct quotation, but of primarily a southern and northern tradition of Israel's history. If this is the case, however, Gen 1–3 would serve a rather excellent introduction to the entire unit, since it is the story of Israel condensed into a single, vivid, parabolic form. In other words, in this view, Gen 1–3 is, as an introduction to the rest of what follows, the theatrical, parabolic microcosm of the history of Israel (Genesis 4–2 Kings) culminating in final exile. Whether there is any literal historicity to the specific persons or events is irrelevant in this case (though if there was, would be fascinating).

the second millennium BCE), and other evidences of an exilic or post-exilic date. In short, this conclusion about Gen 1–3 is drawn from source, redaction, and literary criticism (standard introductions to the Old Testament and good study Bibles point this out—basic sources and ideas that, again, do not appear anywhere in *Theistic Evolution*).⁷⁴ Currid, like the rest of the contributors, does not engage the arguments of Enns’ 2012 *The Evolution of Adam* or any similar literature that actually discusses the author, occasion, date, literary origins and history, and audience of Genesis.

The next two chapters (28–29 on New Testament and historical theology) are very similar to the approach and quality of Grudem’s chapter. In chapter 28, Waters goes through all the NT texts that mentions Adam and argues that they must be historical and literal—regardless if this conclusion is logically entailed, exegetically sustained, or supported by other means. It is inconceivable for Waters that Paul could appeal to contemporary ideas and characters to communicate effectively.⁷⁵ Today, we might talk about going home to “the Shire” (a literary fiction used to describe a quaint home town, drawn from *The Lord of the Rings*) or about a person who is a “Scrooge” (a fictitious, literary character used to describe a living, breathing miser in our family, drawn from *A Christmas Carol*). Waters argues that this is simply impossible. No NT author can utilize a generally accepted literary phenomenon, event, character, or idea in reference to something “real.” The whole chapter is plagued by this fundamental error. Other problems include the same type of error applied to typology, a very narrow understanding of sin (924–25), and citation of commentaries that do not actually align with Waters’ own literalist conclusions.

Allison’s chapter fares no better in a true case of pseudo-scholarship. A paltry four sources are cited to conclude that “most” of “early Christians interpreted Genesis 1 literally” (931). On pages 945–46, a select group of recent, denominational confessions are quoted in two pages to draw the remarkable conclusion: “*theistic evolution is incompatible with all the historical doctrinal standards that*

74 E.g., Michael Coogan and Cynthia Chapman, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); David Carr, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2010); Christine Hayes, *Introduction to the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Andrew Hill and John Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); Harrelson, Walter, ed. *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2003); Green, Joel, ed. *The CEB Study Bible* (Common English Bible, 2013).

75 Consider the whole host of second-temple Jewish ideas that was the worldview of the New Testament (e.g., the legendary “rock that followed them” in 1 Cor 10:4, etc.). Cf. Richard Bauckham, *The Jewish World Around the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Philip Esler, *The Early Christian World*, Routledge Worlds vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 2017); the first three volumes in the “Christian Origins and the Question of God” series by N. T. Wright (Minneapolis: Fortress Press). This is not even to mention Greek thought implemented by early Christians.

address these specific questions [creation, providence, Adam and Eve, sin, the fall]" (946; emphasis original). The fact that Allison shows no awareness of the hundreds of creeds and confessions throughout church history⁷⁶—and excludes a number of documents and doctrinal statements that *do* address several of these matters⁷⁷—makes this conclusion all the more incredulous.

It also does not seem to make much difference for the chapter's arguments how limited the relevance to pre-Darwinian doctrinal statements would be. While not wholly anachronistic, there are severe limitations to drawing such conclusions on "incompatibility" (i.e., "these theological documents go against 19th and 20th century theories of biological origins"), especially since it is impossible to know how exactly pre-Darwinian theologians would have received ideas like universal common descent and biological evolution. Similar obstacles apply to even recent documents, which are not necessarily aimed at addressing evolution even if they mention creation, Adam and Eve, sin, etc.

Critique Area #3: Uncritical Adoption of Modernist Philosophy

A third—and the most important—area of concern is how *Theistic Evolution* rests on an uncritical adoption of modernist ideas.

Before exploring these, it should be mentioned that there are many elements in the book that are explicitly condemnatory of modern thought. Most of these were already documented above (e.g., the problem of scientism, power plays behind scientific research, non-neutrality of peer-review, anti-religious sentiments in academia, etc.). However, the more foundational elements of modernism appear intact. In fact, it seems the primary reason there exists any critique of modern ideas is to *make room for ID-creationism*, not because there is necessarily a problem with these ideas themselves (i.e., a larger problem with the Enlightenment project in general).

First of all, the epistemological framework behind *Theistic Evolution* is (realist) foundationalism.⁷⁸ This philosophy, largely credited to Descartes and most recently projected into Christian theology through the work of Alvin Plantinga, sees truth-building as a linear series of facts and propositions that extend from

76 See Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, 4 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). Cf. John Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: WJK, 1982).

77 E.g., "The Confession of 1967" (PCUSA), "A Brief Statement of Faith" (PCUSA), "New Hampshire Confession" (1833, Baptist), "Abstract Principles of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary" (1858), Augsburg Confession of Faith (1530, Lutheran), Second Helvetic Confession (1562), Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675), the Thirty-Nine Articles (1801, Anglican), "Articles of Religion" (1784, Methodist), "Statement of Faith" (1959, UCC), etc.

78 Note that one of the books' editors, J. P. Moreland, recently authored a pro-foundationalist volume entitled *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018).

universal, unquestionable principles (the “foundation”). “Truth” is more or less “correspondence” with “reality” (knowledge being “true belief”), and for the Christian, biblical revelation stands at the very bottom of all truth and knowledge.⁷⁹ It is difficult to quote specific examples at this point, though some essays bring out these ideas stronger than others (e.g., Moreland’s and Grudem’s chapters). It is also not possible to summarize problems with realist foundationalism. Fortunately, many others have already done so.⁸⁰

Extending from this epistemology, contributors of the book also rely on a simple, representational view of language. Certain forms of language are privileged, which terminates in propositionalism. As if the 20th century linguistic turn had never happened, language is generally viewed as a passive, neutral medium by which to communicate truths, facts, and realities. Language is not a filter, much less a worldview in and of itself, but rather a “tool” in the hands of knowers.⁸¹ Naturally, literal, measurable, and numerical language forms are privileged above all others (e.g., metaphorical, figurative, analogical). In this view, to have quantified an experience is to have truly understood it, and to have identified the cause of an event (especially physical cause), is to have understood the event.⁸² Thus, the “natural sciences” have a functional monopoly on truth while the “soft sciences” should attempt to approximate the certainties of these “hard” sciences as much as possible.⁸³ Discourse tends to reduce down to information, propositions,

79 There are Christian foundationalist variants that would put something other than the Bible at the “bottom” of all truth (e.g., Christ-event; inner work of Holy Spirit, etc.). In any case, Plantinga argued that belief in God is “properly basic” (i.e., foundational and not needing further justification).

80 From a distinctly Christian perspective, see Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Post-Modern Context* (Louisville: WJK, 2001); Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Post-Modernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); John Franke, *Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009); Timothy Phillips and Dennis Okholm, eds. *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), Part IV; Kevin Vanhoozer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Post Modern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Part I; Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*.

81 Occasionally, the contributors in *Theistic Evolution* give attention to rhetoric and how language is used in a social context—but only in criticism of theistic evolution, and not with reference to themselves.

82 Note the perceptive challenge of Jürgen Moltmann, *The Living God and the Fullness of Life* (Louisville: WJK, 2015), 185: “The modern world began with the rise of the exact sciences. The sciences became exact through the ‘reduction of science to mathematics’ (*reduction scientiae ad mathematicum*). The concern that guided perception was freedom from natural forces that were not understood, and the mastery over them. For Descartes, it was the concern to make the human being ‘the lord and possessor of nature’; for the devout Francis Bacon it was the restoration of the likeness to God by way of lordship over the earth (*dominium terrae*). How can power over nature be acquired through knowledge? Through the application of the old Roman method, *divide et impera*—‘divide and rule.’ If natural formations are split up into their individual parts, and one perceives how they are put together and function, they can be ‘dominated,’ and a separate formation can be constructed from their individual parts. But has one thereby perceived the truth of nature, or merely overpowered it because it was weaker?”

83 Hence the popular but terribly biased phrase, “It’s not a pure science but . . .” (as if there was such thing as a “pure science.”) Two vivid, contemporary examples of this aggressive empiricism are (a) the “evidence-based” movement in therapy and counseling (i.e., medicine and psychiatry

and assertion; some genres (e.g., the didactic, historical narrative) are given priority over others (parable, poetry, etc.).⁸⁴ Metaphor, analogy, and the literary are viewed as important, but nevertheless inferior “carriers of truth.” All of this is encased in an attitude of confidence, certainty, and absolutism.

In the context of Christian theology, this amounts to religious fundamentalism.⁸⁵ The above features manifest themselves in propositionalist theology, biblicism, a conflation of one’s reading of the Bible with “reality,” an attitude of scorn towards non-literal readings of the Bible (because less *literal* is supposedly less *truthful*), and an elevation of modern methods of knowledge (e.g., empiricism). This is precisely what one finds in *Theistic Evolution* in almost every chapter.⁸⁶

As a case in point, “theology” is defined by Dilley as “propositions about any supernatural being” (599). This is a strictly modern definition of theology and

overtaking the practice of counseling, the invention of the DSM, etc.) and (b) neoclassical economics. Narrative therapy has largely arisen in response to the former, and heterodox and Austrian economics (with its focus on “praxeology”) in response to the latter.

- 84 Or, as Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 5, puts it, “biblical propositionalism would seem to presuppose the quintessentially modern form of epistemology, namely, foundationalism.” He later notes (293), “foundationalism privileges a certain type of information—propositional truths abstracted from Scripture—to the detriment of the diverse literary genres in and through which that information is canonically processed. Second, foundationalism privileges a certain type of procedure for generating knowledge that abstracts the knower from the process as well. For all intents and purposes, the particulars—the particular kinds of texts, the particular location and identity of the exegete—play no significant role in the getting of knowledge.”
- 85 Sathianathan Clarke, *Competing Religious Fundamentalisms* (Louisville: WJK, 2017), 154, provides a definition for Islam, Hindu, and Christian fundamentalism: “Religious fundamentalism is a communal mind-set [separatism, in/out dynamics] steeped in a revealed Word-vision [biblicism, literal interpretation], corroborated by a definitive ethical system of world-ways for human living, and calibrated by an aggressive that labors toward the goal that such a global order will govern the social, political, economic, cultural, and religious lives of all human beings.” Cf. Josie McSkimming, *Leaving Christian Fundamentalism and the Reconstruction of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 16: “fundamentalism refers to a discernible pattern of religious militancy by which self-styled ‘true believers’ attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviors” George Mardsen, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1, tries to put it in a single sentence: “A fundamentalist is an evangelical who is angry about something.” His classic work on this subject is *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, which sees the creation-evolution debate and literal Bible interpretation as an essential feature of evangelical fundamentalism. However, the most decisive critiques of evangelical fundamentalism come from James Barr. Other than his three volumes on this subject, see John Barton, ed., *The Collected Essays of James Barr* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2. I mention all of this because (a) some critics of evolutionary creation “play dumb” on the entire subject (e.g., Richards, *God and Evolution*, 51), and (b) some recent scholars question the cross-religious existence of religious fundamentalism (e.g., David Harrington Watt, *Antifundamentalism in Modern America* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2017).
- 86 This approach is also, in part, common in some works by evolutionary creationists, such as Lamoureux’s *Evolutionary Creation*. There, instead of the modern fundamentalist biblicist approach (i.e., Bible is storehouse of facts), Lamoureux takes the flip side—a “spiritual truth” perspective, where “the primary purpose of the Book of God’s Words is to deliver spiritual Truth” (15, cf. 19, 32, 50–51, 110, 146–47, 157, 161, 172, 173, 184, 258, 292, 475). This is also true with confident claims about “reality.” The “reality” column on p. 242 of *Evolutionary Creation* is vivid example.

uncritically stated. It is so particular, in fact, that it can be found almost nowhere else.⁸⁷ It is also problematic for many reasons.⁸⁸ “The main defect of proposition-alism,” notes Vanhoozer, “is that it reduces the variety of speech actions in the canon to one type: the assertion. This results in a monologic conception of theology, and of truth.”⁸⁹ Thus, in Christian theology, the Bible is reduced down to “a storehouse of facts,” to use Hodge’s notorious analogy.⁹⁰ Moreland embodies this approach, partly in his claim (for example) that the problem with theistic

87 Perhaps that is why no one is cited with reference to it. In any case, one should compare and contrast this grotesque definition of theology with those of actual theologians and works of theology—especially exceptional works, such as Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 1–8; *idem.*, *Renewing the Center* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 211, 214; John Franke, *The Character of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 31, 44, 166; McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 86; Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 30; Philip Clayton, *Transforming Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 2; Dorothy Soelle, *Thinking About God* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016); Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: WJK, 2005), 265; Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 32; William Placher, ed., *Essentials of Christian Theology* (Louisville: WJK, 2003), 1, 32; Paul Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 8; George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Louisville: WJK, 2009, repr.), 99; Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977), 72–74; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, Trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 3–13; Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), xi–xix; Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 1–2; Thomas Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York: HarperOne, 1992), 169–211; Richard Plantinga, Thomas Thompson, and Matthew Lundberg, *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3–6; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: A Selection*, introduction by Helmut Gollwitzer (New York: T&T Clark, 1961), 1–4; Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 3–4; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000), 121. Contrast these definitions with those of inferior (i.e., uncritical) fundamentalist works, whether in Reformed works such as Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), xxv; R. C. Sproul, *Everyone’s a Theologian* (Reformation Trust Publishing, 2014), 11–12, 25; Robert Culver, *Systematic Theology* (Fearn: Mentor, 2005), 29; John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 76; or in American evangelical works, such as Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 23; Bruce Riley Ashford and Keith Whitfield, “Theological Method” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel Akin (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2014); Charles Swindoll and Roy Zuck, eds., *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003); Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 8; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 21.

88 See Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 256–93.

89 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 266.

90 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999, orig. 1865), § 5: “The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is his storehouse of facts; and his method of ascertaining what the Bible teaches is the same as that which the natural philosopher adopts to ascertain what nature teaches.” D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 72, argues that “Probably too much is being made of this sentence,” because it doesn’t take into consideration Hodge’s full method and the context of this quote (which is “not bibliography”). But Carson misses the point: the fact that Hodge is comfortable drawing this analogy at all, without qualification, *does* say something about his “bibliology” whether he is meaning to or not.

evolution is that “the Bible is no longer regarded by many as a genuine source of knowledge” (633).

However, given that most of the Bible does not come to us in the literal, the propositional, or the factual but rather in the narrativ and metaphorical,⁹¹ this perspective (ironically) wreaks havoc on any kind of theology that tries to be based on the Bible.⁹² One assumes that the goal of reading the Bible is simply to gather true information. So, when the genre of a text (e.g., Gen 1–3) clearly is not meant to transmit raw information (e.g., a “report of events”), one is forced to read it that way, even if the results are absurd or in plain conflict with other sources of information. This invisible chaos lurking underneath *Theistic Evolution* is evident in the constant use of the phrase “Bible teachings” or “the Bible teaches.”⁹³ Again: *most of the Bible does not exist in didactic form, nor are the “teachings” the most valuable or even the most important aspect of what the Bible does for the Christian and for the world.*⁹⁴ Rather, the scriptures are an organic whole and must be treated as such.

What we can say . . . is that it was not until the modern period (and really, not until the late modern period) that a significant minority of believers became convinced that the truth of their faith depended upon an absolutely literal—an absolutely “factual”—interpretation of scripture, and felt compelled to stake everything on so ludicrous a wager. Now the Bible came to be seen as what it obviously is not: a collection of ‘inerrant’ oracles and historical reports, each true in the same way as every other, each subject to only one level of

91 Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 70; Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1980); Janet Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (New York: Clarendon, 1987); Paul Chilton and Monika Kopytowska, eds., *Religion, Language, and the Human Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Erin Kidd and Jakob Karl Rinderknecht, eds., *Putting God on the Map: Theology and Conceptual Mapping* (Landham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018). Cf. E. Janet Warren, *Cleansing the Cosmos* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), ch. 2.

92 In trying to navigate between fundamentalism and the post-modern approach of Grenz and Franke, Vanhoozer argues: “Scripture is neither a textbook of propositional truths that serves as the foundation for knowledge nor a narrative that relies on its position in the church’s web of belief for its meaning and truth. Scripture is rather a canonical atlas: a collection of maps that variously render the way, the truth, and the life . . . A map is an interpretative framework, not a foundation of basic facts. The proof: there is no such thing as a universal, all-purpose map. . . . Unlike a building, a map has no foundation. A map is an imagined whole [and yet] . . . a certain textual fixedness. A map is an interpretative framework that seeks to represent objective reality but does so only thanks to subjective selections. This is what makes the map such an apt metaphor for a postfoundationalist rationality that strives to hold on to the ideal of objective truth while acknowledging the provisional and perspectival nature of human subjectivity” (*The Drama of Doctrine*, 294, 296, 297).

93 This privileging of the didactic is explicit in *Theistic Evolution* not only in the reoccurring phrases, but in titles and subtitles regarding the Bible’s “teachings.”

94 See N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (New York: HarperOne, 2013); Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*; Gorman, *Scripture and Its Interpretation*. One should also remember that books don’t “say” or “teach” anything, *persons* do.

interpretation, and all perfectly in agreement with one another. As I say, this was largely the result of a cultural impoverishment, but it also followed from the triumph of a distinctly modern concept of what constitutes reliable knowledge; it was the strange misapplication of the rigorous but quite limited methods of the modern empirical sciences to questions properly belonging to the realms of logic and of spiritual experience.⁹⁵

Other aspects of propositionalist biblicism have already been examined above (inerrantism; equating one's interpretation of the Bible with reality; a forceful, literalist interpretation of biblical texts, etc.).⁹⁶ In *Theistic Evolution*, those who disagree with the authors simply aren't permitting the Bible "to speak for itself" (926).

Three other particular features of modern thought emerge as one reads *Theistic Evolution*: (1) a triumphalist tone of certainty and absolute truth; (2) the elevation of empiricism and its encroachment on theology; (3) dualisms, dualisms, and more dualisms.

Triumphalist Tone

Theistic Evolution exhibits a forceful, optimistic, and triumphalist tone of certainty and absolutism. This is despite inherent limitations of current human knowledge, others' genuine search for truth, and a recognition that other committed Christians respectfully disagree.

Axe establishes the book's cadence by observing that "Jesus called his followers to surrender their lives, their pride, their earthly security and, at times, their possessions—right down to the shirts on their backs. He never, however, called them to surrender to the truth" (103, cf. 94). Similarly, "As theists, we have the one true explanation for this world we inhabit . . . it is *the* explanation" (104).

In a different article, Tour mocks how scientists have tried to create life:

[T]he world's best synthetic chemists, biochemists, and evolutionary biologists have combined forces to form a team—a dream team . . . Money is no object. They have at their disposal the most advanced analytical facilities, the complete scientific literature, a synthetic and natural coupling agents, and all the reagents their hearts could desire. (190)

And with poor results, Tour concludes: "Take your time, folks, take a few billion years. Nothing? Well, well, well" (190).

⁹⁵ Hart, *The Experience of God*, 27

⁹⁶ For more examples of simplistic biblicism, see 642, 706, 710, 722, 926.

Chapter 11 by Casey Luskin is “Comprehensive Critique” of universal common decent (UCD). UCD has been a scientific consensus for over a half-century. One would expect a “comprehensive critique” of UCD to take the form of perhaps a series of volumes by different biologists and paleontologists. But, here, a single, forty-page article is viewed worthy of the title.⁹⁷ Luskin offers pious wisdom to his readers, nevertheless, that “the pursuit of truth is of the utmost importance.”

Likewise, Meyer and Nelson stress, “we recall that the goal of science is *truth*” (559; emphasis original) and “The search for truth should override any custom or convention” (567). Moreland triumphantly claims that “beyond a reasonable doubt . . . ID theory is far more reasonable than theistic evolution” (559). With the truth so obvious, the pressure is on for anyone studying this subject: “theistic evolutionists must make their choice . . . what matters, in short, is which [theory] is *true*” (631). As it is evident by now, the authors of *Theistic Evolution* do not see it as a possibility that one’s search for truth could lead to a different conclusion than their own.

They later argue that “[For God-of-gaps arguments] to have force, theistic evolutionists must show that we have genuine gaps in our knowledge of materialistic causes of the origin of new forms of life—i.e., that we have grounds for thinking that present ‘gaps’ will ultimately be filled with knowledge of any actual natural process or mechanism capable of biological innovation” (590). In other words, the burden of proof is placed not on the person claiming to have knowledge about the origin of life (ID theorists), but on the one claiming a *lack* of knowledge.⁹⁸ This demonstrates at least some degree of epistemological arrogance (especially given the notoriously challenging subject matter—the origin of life itself!).

Many such myopic demands and black-and-white claims of triumphant finality are coupled with credentialing reminders, warfare/fortress mentalities, and repulsion at the idea that theology might change. “Theistic evolution is intellectual pacifism that lulls people to sleep while the barbarians are at the gates” (645) Moreland declares. He goes on to make clear just who the cowards and the heroes are:

When science appears to conflict with Scripture, we shouldn’t immediately lay our intellectual arms down and wait for scientists

97 After all, it was already declared in the volume that “the case for UCD rests in part upon factual claims that have evaporated” (Meyer, 361).

98 Note also Meyer’s claim to know the limits of “self-organization” on 232–34 and 270–71. It would seem obvious that something as recently studied as self-organization and emergence has plenty of time to mature and develop, and that no human being today truly knows the boundaries of such phenomena any more than one can say, “we’ve mastered physics” (especially with artificial intelligence on the horizon). Perhaps contemporary evolutionary biologists’ confidence in claiming to know the abilities of natural selection and genetic mutation has given ID theorists a similar license to make such unrealistic claims of knowledge.

to tell us what we can allow the Bible to say and how we need to revise Scripture. No, we should be patient, acknowledge the problem, and press into service Christian intellectuals who are highly qualified academically, who have respect for the fact that Scripture presents us with knowledge, not just truth to be accepted by blind faith . . . The ID movement is such a set of intellectuals. (647)

Indeed, ID proponents aren't "tucking their tails between their legs at the first sign of conflict between the Bible and science" (647). Instead, they represent "a very vibrant, intellectually sophisticated interdisciplinary intelligent design movement" (650). This formidable force offers a stable alternative to a changing world and changing views:

[T]his sort of revisionism—changing biblical interpretations that have held steady for two thousand years at just the time when there is politically correct pressure to do so, especially when that pressure comes from science—gives off the message that biblical teaching is pretty tentative If the church has been mistaken about one of the central teachings for two thousand years, why should we trust the church regarding its teachings about extramarital sex, homosexuality, or the role of women in the church? (642, 648)

Like change, uncertainties are also viewed with serious suspicion. Reeves criticizes evolutionary creationists for not believing that the Bible is clear (717) on some matters, and mocks Walton simply for appealing to a New Testament scholar (N. T. Wright) in order to assist him in interpreting the New Testament (719).⁹⁹ "We now have a Bible that has lost its authority," Reeves concludes, "is market by obscurity rather than clarity, and is certainly insufficient for a true understanding of the world" (729). Since Reeves makes all of these claims in the context of an explicitly "Reformed" theology (712, 717), one is tempted to point out that this argument was largely used *against* the Reformers—who by their translating of the Bible and alternative interpretations threatened what Rome believed was a stable foundation of "clarity," "authority," and true understanding of the world.

At any rate, the most off-putting aspect of *Theistic Evolution's* tone are the

99 This jab is particularly distasteful since it perversely utilizes another Christian scholar's humility as evidence of (alleged) biblical criticism. This is by no means the only example where embodied acknowledgement of human limitation is twisted by a religious fundamentalist into proof that opposing viewpoints favor an imaginary anti-Christian agnosticism. This subject, with relation to some of Grudem's claims, was the particular focus of a subsection in Jamin Hübner, "Revisiting the Clarity of Scripture in 1 Timothy 2:12," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59/1 (2016): 99–117. For more on this epistemic humility issue and the "incomprehensibility of God," see "Divine Action" and the large quote of Kaufman below.

regular taunts and jabs directed toward the audience. Many of the book's chapters end with high-pressure questions about entertaining evolutionary creation as a possibility. The incriminating implications of evolutionary creationists are obvious:

[W]hy would any Christian want to flirt with theistic evolution? . . . why would a believer want to embrace something that undermines the plausibility of Christianity?" (Moreland, 650–51)

[D]o Christians today really want to accept a theory that decrees that God is not allowed to speak to us about these vast areas of human knowledge? (Grudem, 823–24)

We [Christians] have the one true explanation for the world . . . why would we choose to deprive people of this? (Axe, 104)

Surely someone is willing to scale the wall [of the extended evolutionary synthesis] to see what might lie on the other side. And why, specifically, should theistic evolutionists—who already presumably believe there is something on the other side of the wall—remain behind it? (Meyer, Nelson, Gauger, 287)

With the fossil evidence for human evolution so weak, why should our theistic evolutionist brothers and sisters insist that the church must adopt their viewpoint? (Luskin, 473)

Elevation of Empiricism

The authors of *Theistic Evolution* demonstrate their commitment to modern empiricism in many ways. The reductionistic focus on the DNA argument for ID is obvious enough (e.g., 261). But there are more subtle manifestations. One example from Meyer will have to suffice for the purposes of this article:

Others like to think of God as more actively involved in the process of creation. They find it appealing to think of God's activity like a great composer who first establishes a theme at the beginning of his work and then adds new variations to that original theme at episodic intervals thereafter. As a Christian, however, I affirm that God acted entirely freely, and was under no compulsion to act in a way that either appeals to or affirms our aesthetic sensibilities. So I think the question of when God acted should remain a matter for empirical investigation and should not be determined by our aesthetic or theological preferences altogether. (222)

There are a host of problems with this paragraph.¹⁰⁰ It is also perhaps the most remarkable quote in the entire book for one simple reason: it is asserted that divine action should be primarily determined by “empirical investigation.”¹⁰¹

The kinds of problems that this radically modern and reductionist approach create should be obvious—especially in the context of the church. Imagine that a wayward brother in the faith finally leaves his alcohol addiction and shows up to church Sunday morning—and continues partaking in the community as a committed follower of Jesus. The church family had been praying for him for months, against the all odds that he would ever return sober. So they praise God that prayers have been answered and that God has acted. But, if Meyer’s thesis is taken seriously, this is a mistake, because this kind of thinking needs to be corrected by some sort of “empirical investigation,” for only in that case can we *really know* that God has acted.

This perspective also creates problems within the biblical narrative. It’s the time of the judges, and some Israelites under the leadership of Deborah are facing various temptations. To encourage them, the elders retell the Exodus story, how God saved their ancestors from slavery by mighty acts (i.e., the plagues) and that this God is still working today. But, just then, an ID advocate from the future arrives on the scene to let them know that whether God has actually acted or not in the Exodus is a matter for empirical investigation. The Israelites look at each other, baffled. The Exodus events can’t be recreated. They happened years ago, might *possibly* have left *some* archeological remains, but now primarily exist in the memories of the community and in the lives that they live in response to those historic events. This has been sufficient for them, so why should it be insufficient now? In a strange twist, Meyer seems to see the pseudo-positivist attitude of doubting Thomas (i.e., “I need immediate, empirical proof to believe”) as exemplary.

Such privileging of the empirical, if applied consistently, would mean the death of religion and theology itself—along with most of the humanities and large chunks of the social sciences. Yes, the applications of empirical investigation and other methods of the natural sciences may have real import and significance for other areas and kinds of knowledge. But to cage entire swaths of human experience and monopolize the very knowability of God’s presence itself to those wearing lab coats is truly a grotesque form of scientism. As one theologian observed:

100 It is about as baffling as Francis Collins’ claim in *The Language of God* (New York: Free, 2006), 52, that “The only thing that will kill the possibility of miracles more quickly than a committed materialist is the claiming of miracle status for everyday events for which natural explanations are readily at hand.” See the next section for more on the meaning of “miracles.”

101 Contrast this basic idea, for example, with the short (and perhaps overstating) comment of Abraham, *Divine Agency and Divine Action*, 1:222: “Science can supply defeaters about silly claims about a six-day creation; it cannot and does not tell us what God has done.”

[B]oth atheistic critics of ID and proponents of ID often argue as if there can be no rational belief in the createdness of nature if science does not give us ground for such a belief. . . . It is in its critique of theistic evolutionism that I believe ID comes closest to succumbing to temptation of scientism.¹⁰²

Indeed, ID's (possibly legitimate) argument that God's action *may* be "empirically detectable" has morphed into the (problematic) argument that God's action *must* be "empirically detectable."¹⁰³

Another major problem with Meyer's argument is that it contradicts other ID arguments. This was already observed above: aesthetics *is* an indicator of "when God acted," at least in the (an?) ID model. Where is the complaint about Wiker and Witt's arguments, which demonstrate just how much science and knowledge of God is specifically aligned with our "aesthetic sensibilities"? Did God *have* to act in this way? It is not clear why evolutionary creationists are more guilty than Wiker, Witt, and other ID proponents when suggesting discernible, aesthetic patterns in God's creation. Point: aesthetics has frequently been an indicator (and even a form) of truth.

Third, one wonders what fitting metaphor would substitute for a symphony regarding creation (whether according to Gen 1–3 or any scientific model), since it is viewed as either invalid or inferior.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps analogy and metaphor are not appropriate at all in describing God and creation against the (evidently) superior language form of the literal and measurable. This again, would essentially mean the end of theology if maintained consistently.

Fourth and finally, one should not miss Meyer's qualifier "as a Christian." All of his claims are framed in such a way as to identify them as exclusively Christian. But, as we have seen, there is little that is distinctly Christian about Meyer's

102 Erkki Vesa Rope Kojonen, *The Intelligent Design Debate and the Temptation of Scientism* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 6, 8. The underlying problem, he argues in his earlier dissertation, is that "the ID theorists do not adequately respond to the arguments for separating between Darwinian evolutionary biology as a scientific discipline and Darwinism as a worldview. Here the views of the ID theorists even come close to scientism, because they argue that theistic evolutionism should differ from the Darwinian worldview on the level of science, before it can differ in any meaningful way" (Kojonen, "Intelligent Design," 298).

103 Cf. Hart, *The Experience of God*, 72, in his description of modern science: "what began as a principled refusal of metaphysical speculation, for the sake of specific empirical inquiries, has now been mistaken for a comprehensive knowledge of the metaphysical shape of reality; the art of humble questioning has been mistaken for the sure possession of ultimate conclusions." Hence, Christian perspectives that differ with Meyer can be little more than "a re-affirmation of some materialistic version of evolutionary theory restated using theological terminology" (Meyer, 48). Without adherence to a modern understanding of miracles and divine interventions, so the argument goes, one cannot even legitimately talk of God's action or deep involvement.

104 Or, what would ID look like *within* the musical metaphor? (Perhaps a big intro followed by silence, until the earth-shaking gong of genetic information injection, followed by more silence until the Exodus . . .)

theological perspective—whether with respect to God’s freedom (though not “free” to create through evolution?) or otherwise. In actuality, the suggestion that God’s action is best or primarily known through empiricism is rather *novel* in the larger picture of Christian thought.

Superficial Dualisms and Dichotomies

One of the most characteristic features of modern thought are dualisms and dichotomies. Prominent examples include the “natural” vs. “supernatural” realms, Cartesian dualism (body-soul anthropology), “material” vs. “immaterial” phenomena, “fact” vs. “values,” and of course, “science vs. religion.” Modern thinking is not restricted to a particular set of dualisms but exhibits a wide-range of dualistic thinking in general.

The table below identifies a handful of the explicit dualisms, dichotomies,¹⁰⁵ and contrasts found in *Theistic Evolution*,¹⁰⁶ revealing the prominence of this feature:

Dualism/Dichotomy	Reference
“confrontational view” / “non-confrontational view”	Axe, 92
“natural selection” / “God”	Axe, 100
“natural selection” / “intelligent design”	Maftti, 163
“material processes” / “intelligent design”	Meyer, 228ff.
“laws of nature” and “natural laws” / “intelligent design”	Meyer, 225–28
“intrinsic MN” / “pragmatic MN”	Dilley, 598
“Methodological Naturalism” / “Non-Methodological Naturalism”	Dilley, 604
“natural” / “supernatural”	Collins, 663–65
“open” / “closed” system	Collins, 666
“nomothetic” / “historical”	Collins, 668
“natural” / “supernatural”	Moreland, 643–45, 648
“upper-story” / “lower-story”	Moreland, 646–48
“body” / “soul”	Moreland, 654–55
“small-scale design” / “large-scale system design”	Collins, 673
What God “will do” / “has done” (citing Boyle)	Meyer, 222
What God “will do” / “has done” (citing Helm)	Collins, 675
“random mutation” / “God’s commands”	Grudem, 828
“natural evil” / “moral evil”	DeWeese, 683–85

But, none of this should be surprising to readers since, according to Moreland, “Christianity is a dualist, interactional religion” (652) to begin with.

In this line of thinking, it generally isn’t seen as possible that these constructs are just that—heuristic constructs and simplifications. “The map is not the

105 Other than those relating to divine action (see below), perhaps the most prominent are those false dichotomies that associate design with that which cannot be explained. As noted in Alexander and White, *Science, Faith, and Ethics*, 108, “We do not normally refer to things as being ‘designed’ on the grounds that we do not have any explanation for how they came into being.”

106 Some of the entries in the table are not neatly contrasted in an immediate pair by the author but are promoted, nonetheless.

territory,” as the saying goes. But in *Theistic Evolution*, it almost seems as if the map *really is* the territory, so to dispute one is to dispute the other.¹⁰⁷

The most problematic manifestation of this trend is the selectively either/or mentality when it comes to divine action. Either God acts, or human beings, nature, or “physical causes” (whatever that means) do. Since this is one of the most confusing and important aspects of the debate, a separate section is devoted to it below.

Divine Action: The Heart of the Debate

In a word, the authors of *Theistic Evolution*—much like some of the evolutionary creationists they’re criticizing—adopt a view of divine action that is dominant in modern and Greek (Epicurean) philosophy that strongly differs from both a biblical and a “traditional” Christian theological perspective. The general features of this view are as follows.

First, *divine action is viewed as a zero-sum dualism*. Either God does something, or a “natural mechanism” or “physical cause” does.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, when it comes to creation activity, evolutionary (or “natural”) mechanisms are largely viewed as *competition* to God instead of being (a) *one way of describing* phenomena/events (in a multi-aspectual universe)¹⁰⁹ or (b) a *means* of God’s action when it comes to creation. “Naturalist theism” or “theistic naturalism”—where God ordinarily works through the observable world—is viewed as oxymoronic. This general perspective is an extension of the natural/supernatural dualism above: the “natural world” (where everyday things happen) is to be *contrasted* with the “supernatural world” (where God, spiritual things, and miracles primarily exist).

107 For one brief and critical look at this problem, see Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 325–26; Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*; Placher, *Essentials*.

108 This view is captured in Francis Collins, *The Language of God*, 52: “Anyone who claims the blooming of a flower is a miracle is treading upon a growing understanding of plant biology, which is well on the way to elucidating all the steps between seed germination and the blossoming of a beautiful and sweet-smelling rose, all directed by that plant’s DNA instruction book.” Collins (and other evolutionary creationists) unfortunately adopt the modern, Humean, technical meaning of “miracle” (a divine intervention or violation of nature; see, David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, L. A. Selby Bigge, ed. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1902], pp. 114–16). The idea and language of “miracles” is addressed more below.

109 Thus, Haarsma, *Four Views*, 132, is right to emphasize, “A scientific explanation does not eliminate God. For the Christians, a scientific explanation glorifies God by revealing his handiwork.” According to Placher’s thesis, this issue is symptomatic of a larger dissonance: the new scientific universe, being calculated, literal, and rational, “had no symbolically appropriate place for God” (*The Domestication of Transcendence*, 131); the change in linguistic preference/semantics (away from the metaphorical and analogical—the bread and butter of theology) resulted in an ideological change of thought (towards the literal and propositional—away from the theological). In other words, when language systems change, thought systems change. Eliminating Christian theology only requires eliminating religious language, which is what happened when “scientific” semantics and systems became the privileged form of discourse.

The universe is not really God's play-ground, God's "temple" (Ps 104:1–4; 148), or the "theatre of God's glory" (Calvin).¹¹⁰

Examples of this problematic perspective are easily found in *Theistic Evolution*. Grudem says that, in theistic evolution, "new forms of life are the result of random mutation, not God's commands" (828). Likewise, Axe says, "Credit for the invention of living things with all their marvelous features, thus, rightfully goes not to natural selection but to the one who invented them: God" (100). Similarly, Collins concludes that "Since natural selection and random mutations can account for the origins of biological systems (and their appearances of design), theistic evolutionists steadfastly deny the need to propose an actual designing intelligence" (47).¹¹¹ Maftti argues the same: "Darwin and his followers explicitly claim that chance variation and the law of natural selection have created all species of living organisms. If so, design is ruled out. In contrast, if design is the cause of the creation of species, then chance and law are ruled out as the creators of species" (163; cf. 433). According to Grudem, "theistic evolution *takes away that evidence for God* [referring to Rom 1] *completely* . . . the existence of all living things can be explained solely from the properties of matter itself" (830).

Second, in this modern perspective there is an *acute emphasis on God's transcendence—which is contrasted with God's immanence—such that God and God's action is primarily known by empirical "interventions" and "miracles."*¹¹² The primary understanding of God's relationship to the world is not an organic or deeply involved relationship, but aligns with an exclusively Western monarchical/political view where God rules from the throne by decree and hierarchical administration. Immanence is viewed as a *contrast* (not comparison or complement) to God's transcendence. God is not primarily known by the regularities in nature, historical faithfulness to covenants, by the new world and community created by Jesus, or any other number of sources, but by the one-time creation event and supernatural miracles scattered in biblical texts and at certain points in earth's primitive history (e.g., origin of cellular life).¹¹³ The whole model of creation is, to

110 *Institutes*, 1.5.8; 2.6.1. See also, W. David O. Taylor, ed., *The Theater of God's Glory: Calvin, Creation, and the Liturgical Arts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

111 To be more accurate, Collins should have said "steadfastly deny the need to propose miraculous interventions," not propose "designing intelligence." Evolutionary creationists have always affirmed that God is the intelligent Designer of the universe, but not with the qualifications that ID theorists demand.

112 This entire discussion is plagued by confusion surrounding "intervention," "miracle," and "special divine action," all of which may or may not be referring to the same thing. Combined with many other landmines, one can readily agree with Abraham, *Divine Agency and Divine Action*, 1:209: "The story of the debate about divine action over the last half century has essentially been one of conceptual muddles and dead-ends."

113 The apologetic method employed by ID and *Theistic Evolution* contributors is generally "evidential" (cf. the work of Josh McDowell, Gary Habermas). This is not the only valid approach. See Steven B. Cowan, ed. *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

borrow from one theologian, a “production model” which “emphasizes the beginnings of creation rather than its continuing, ongoing character; it can speak of divine transcendence only in an external way, making it difficult to affirm the immanence of God; and it is intellectual or aesthetic, implying a dualistic hierarchy of mind and body.”¹¹⁴ In that way, the authors of *Theistic Evolution* are unwittingly building off of Newton’s mechanical metaphysic.¹¹⁵

Thus, we read in *Theistic Evolution* that “God acted in a scientifically detectable way” (Dilley, 626); God supernaturally intervenes (739), and operates in the category of “supernatural” where God can “‘infuse’ special operations of his power into this web at anytime, e.g., by adding objects, directly causing events,” (664–65), for “[i]t is inherent in the traditional Christian metaphysic that ‘miracles’—or better, ‘supernatural events’—are possible” (666). Meyer therefore sees the world as operating on its own by default—not unlike his secular scientist contemporaries. He says, “I see no reason to *assume* that the designing intelligence responsible for life and the universe (whom I personally believe was God) necessarily confined his activity to the very beginning of the universe” (221).¹¹⁶ God intervened later in history to create life.¹¹⁷

Meyer and Nelson similarly argue, “Theistic evolutionists and mainstream evolutionary biologists assume that all living systems necessarily were produced by some naturalistic process, and that their origins will, thus, ultimately have a

114 McFague, *The Body of God*, 151. This is in contrast to what she calls “procreative model,” which is dynamic instead of static, and (building off Rom 8:22) sees creation as one long process of giving birth.

115 “If the world is understood as a closed causal system, as it was widely taken to be throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, then divine action appears to be restricted in ordering that system initially in creation and intervening within it later on in miracle” (Thomas Tracy, “Introduction” in *The God Who Acts: Philosophical and Theological Explorations*, ed. Thomas Tracy [Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State Press, 1994], 2).

116 As noted in the introduction, many evolutionary creationists also (unfortunately) buy into this construction. Meyer’s criticism here is directed towards a view that is adequately summarized in Karl Giberson and Francis Collins, *The Language of Science and Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 67: “The model for divinely guided evolution that we are proposing here thus requires no ‘intrusions from outside’ for its account of God’s creation process, except for the origins of the natural laws guiding the process.” I would argue with church tradition—and especially in conjunction with the theses of McFague, Janzen, and Tanner—that the concept of “from outside” itself needs to be problematized or at least reevaluated. The same goes for “additional direct intelligent *input*” (Lennox cited in Grudem, 833, emphasis mine).

117 The old-earth creationist model of Hugh Ross is very similar, only with multiple acts of intervention other than the miraculous injection of biological information. “Concerning life’s progression,” he summarizes, “old earth creationists consider mass speciation events as divine interventions, occasion in which God introduces diverse species appropriate for Earth’s changing conditions and in optimal ecological relationships” (Hugh Ross, “A Progressive Creationist Perspective,” in *Four Views*, 72). Ross also proposes three kinds of miracles (74), which (as argued below) is actually a step in the right direction insofar as it breaks up the simplistic, binary dualism of modern thought, but is still problematic in its basic orientation. A better alternative are the three kinds of “signs” (or “miracles”) in James McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 186–89.

completely naturalistic or materialistic explanation” (589)—the use of “completely” is here to stress that it is *godless*. Regarding this confrontation-by-supernatural-miracles/interventions, Axe believes in light of the biblical narrative that “God himself seems to endorse this perspective” (103).¹¹⁸ Likewise, Moreland concludes that “if we come to church as theistic evolutionists, a supernatural, intervening God and a knowledge-based Bible are less at home in our worldview, and indeed, may fairly be called *ad hoc*” (652)—assuming the entire time, of course, that “a supernatural, intervening God and a knowledge-based Bible” are not located, Western, and modern theological construction, but simply eternal, absolute, timeless truth to which all Christians must adhere.

What is problematic about this perspective of God, creation, and divine action? And what might be a constructive response?

Alternative Perspectives Should Be Genuinely Assessed, Not Dismissed

First of all, the options should be seriously weighed.

Axe and Collins very briefly acknowledge an alternative(s) to the zero-sum view of divine action, but only as lip service. This results in considerable incoherence. Axe, for instance, says,

[C]auses and effects that scientists justifiably consider to be random or accidental may also be instances of God-ordained events. The two are not mutually exclusive. I certainly agree with this. But [some] things are not at all inconsistent with God’s presence, but neither do they *confront* us with his presence. (90)

But one may ask at this point: *what truly confronts us with God’s presence?* The stars in the sky? A symphonic melody communicating transcendent beauties? A prophet from God screaming in one’s face about how we’ve prostituted ourselves to pagan deities? A preacher on Sunday morning speaking words of forgiveness to those who need it? Apparently not. *Theistic Evolution* makes it clear that what confronts us with God’s presence is *whatever the ID scientists tell us confronts us with God’s presence*—which is typically the origin of biological information and a select handful of other events that make the empirical cut. There is otherwise no sound basis talking about God’s action (cf. Meyer, 222). In this fashion, the pluriform divine speech that saturates the cosmos, from one corner to the next, is muffled in order to showcase (indeed, idolize) the sound emanating from under the microscope.

118 Contrast with, for example, Darrel Faulk, *Coming to Peace with Science* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 206: “Although God clearly desires that all humankind will be drawn to him, I am not sure that God is in the habit of using the ‘magic’ of miracles to draw humankind to God’s being. I do not see this as being God’s style.”

Similarly, Collins acknowledges that in scripture, “ordinary pregnancy [to use one example] is God’s action (see Ps 39:13–15; Jer 1:5), as is Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John, and Mary’s with Jesus (Luke 1:35–37)” (661). Regarding the slaying of the Assyrians (2 Kgs 19) and the possibly parallel account of Herodotus (where mass death was due to a mice infestation), Collins asks, “Are they competing alternatives? Certainly not: a ‘supernatural’ event can use means (mice), and if the mice were a ‘natural’ occurrence, it is still, to the eye of faith, God’s act” (664). Collins even says, “it is never correct to refer to the miraculous as having God more ‘directly’ or ‘immediately’ involved.” (663). But, just when one thinks progress is being made, Collins breaks his own rule on the very next page (saying that God “directly” causes events) and spends the rest of the chapter arguing in favor of the competing perspective!

This blatant contradiction leaves one marveling. But it demonstrates that the ID movement—and the theological framework undergirding *Theistic Evolution*—would crumble without a competitive view of divine action. If God’s action cannot be monopolistically attributed to specific “interventions” and “miracles,” then it can be more broadly attributed to a variety of other phenomena witnessed in the world—including evolution. But because evolution is discounted from the start, all else must conform as a consequence.

We should note that this problematic perspective goes all the way back the 17th century scientist Robert Boyle (whom Meyer and others cite favorably in *Theistic Evolution*).¹¹⁹

Notice the picture that Boyle presupposed; God as First Cause set the universe running according to fixed laws, and thereafter intervenes only rarely to perform the occasional miracle. Given such a picture, miracles now had evidentiary value. As long as our mystified wonder defined a miracle, it had no more status as “evidence” for the truth of faith than any other event, properly understood. But if the defining characteristic of a miracle was that it violated the laws of nature, then a properly established miracle constituted good evidence that something beyond the (newly defined) natural order.¹²⁰

Thus, God’s action became confined to the empirical in the context of a modern apologetic argument.

This issue goes back even further to Greek philosophy and an early “founder” of modernism—Lucretius (and his disciple Epicurus).¹²¹ N. T. Wright makes note

119 Note that some evolutionary creationists also favorably cite Boyle to support their position.

120 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 37.

121 See Steven Greenblatt, *Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012).

This is all the more concerning when ID theorists themselves identify Epicureanism as providing “the prototype of the meaningless universe—godless, governed by chance, purposeless” (Wiker and

of this and points out the liability of going along with it in the context of modern science:

Let's leave aside the problems that some still suggest are latent within a Darwinian account the way the world is. Supposing it all works, it does not follow that the Epicurean worldview [where] . . . causation [is] a zero-sum game, so that *either* God *or* observable physical causes were involved. As soon as you challenge that rather naïve assumption, all sorts of other options are open . . . [Creationism and evolutionism both] inherit and operate within the deeply damaged vision of the creator and the cosmos that they get from Deism, and which shares its worst features with Epicureanism: that some things happen naturally, while other things only happen because God makes them happen.¹²²

Those who insist on the zero-sum perspective have an awkward biblical-theological problem on their hands. If summer changes into winter and no catastrophic flood is in sight, believers are justified in saying "God is faithful," and if an east wind parted the Red Sea, the Israelites are justified in saying "God parted the Red Sea," and if quail come in time to feed the hungry Israelites, they are justified in saying "God brought us quail," and if spears, swords and pagan armies from the first millennium BC destroy Jerusalem, the prophets are justified in saying "God judged Jerusalem," and if hydrogen and helium (in conformity with simple regularities of attraction, repulsion, etc.) "creates" the cosmos, we are justified in saying, "God created the cosmos." But if biological evolution (in conformity with various mechanisms, some that we're currently aware of and some that we're not)¹²³ "creates" life, *no one is ever justified in saying "God created life."* Why not? Because the creation of cellular life is apparently a special exception in the entire enterprise of God's creative activity.

Aside from this inconsistency, another problem of this conclusion is that

no absolute distinction exists between the living and the nonliving, for life is a type of organization, not an entity or substance. As Ian

Witt, *A Meaningful World*, 16). Cf. William Dembski, *No Free Lunch: Why Specified Complexity Cannot Be Purchased Without Intelligence* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 1–2.

122 N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Scripture* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 13–14.

123 Both evolutionary creationists (convinced that "natural selection" is the "primary driver of evolution" [Haarsma, *Four Views*, 143–44]) and their critics (those subscribing to Neo-Darwinism or the view that evolutionary creation is "a convoluted and scientifically vacuous explanation," [Meyer, *Theistic Evolution*, ch. 2]) seem to adopt a "we've arrived" posture. They might benefit from Kojonen's observation: "if we believe that in some debate one side has all the good arguments, and the other side is fully mistaken, there is no harm in stating that conclusion. What I am saying is that in my experience we often reach this kind of conclusion prematurely" (*The Intelligent Design Debate*, 8).

Barbour reminds us, the chemical elements in our hands and brains were forged in the furnaces of stars. On the other hand, the higher levels should not be reduced to or understood entirely in terms of the lower levels, as reductionists claim.¹²⁴

“Life” vs. “nonlife” is a human construct—a heurism. It is as subjective as the classification of organisms—whether based on genetics, function, or location. This is not to say it is absolutely arbitrary, for different constructs exist for different reasons, some are more helpful than others, and some more easily reflect human experience than others.¹²⁵ But neither is the life/non-life construct absolute.

Ultimately, non-evolutionary creationists must demonstrate why anyone (including God) should single out DNA in such a way that it alters general theological method. Few Christians have ever doubted the marvel and wonder of biological life. That’s not the question. The question is whether any Christian should uphold the creation of biological life as a fundamental rift upon which epistemology, theology, and experiences of God should all be altered.

Transcendence and Immanence Should Not (Cannot) Be Contrasted

Second, contrary to popular theological belief, God’s transcendence should not be contrasted with God’s immanence. This contrast was a development of modern theology, which complements both the zero-sum game perspective on divine action and the general natural/supernatural dualism. The optimistic attitude of modernism attempted to “get God under control” and make faith “rational.” But as a result, the transcendence of God became “domesticated.”

Increasingly, Christian writers in the 17th century, since they did not want to think of God utterly beyond their comprehension, thought of God’s otherness in terms of distance and remoteness in the world. Though they did not use the terms, they were in effect contrasting *transcendence* with *immanence* . . . [this] makes divine transcendence and involvement in the world into a zero-sum game:

124 McFague, *The Body of*, 106. On the concept of “emergence,” see also, Jamin Hübner, “A Concise Theory of Emergence,” *Faith and Thought* 57 (Oct 2015): 2–17. It does no good to hang all the weight on the “breath of life” distinction in Gen 1–3. Christians are under no obligation to absolutize the categories of the biblical authors in contemporary thought any more than biologists must categorize all living things as either birds, fish, and things on the ground (Gen 1:2–25). This is particularly true given discoveries made since the biblical text was written, such as viruses (whether biological or digital), machine learning and AI, and various marine structures that blur lines between “living” and “nonliving.” For more on a non-reductionist, Christian metaphysic, see Roy Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005) in conjunction with Owen Barfield, *The Rediscovery of Meaning* (Middletown: Wesleyan, 2013, orig. 1977).

125 Cf. the periodic table of elements. There is no one way to organize atoms on a table, but the way on the periodic table is agreeably the most functional and meaningful.

the more involved or immanent, the less transcendent, and vice versa.¹²⁶

“The incomprehensibility of God”—a principle as old as theology itself—was viewed as a curse for the modern thinker instead of a blessing.¹²⁷ “Protestants . . . moved toward an un-Reformation optimism about human reason’s ability to understand what we say about God.”¹²⁸ This was manifest in the post-reformation scholasticism as embodied in English Puritanism, the thought of Francis Turretin, and lengthy dogmatic documents such as the Westminster Standards.¹²⁹ “Knowledge” became simple “correspondence with reality” (as Moreland argues in *Theistic Evolution*, along the lines of Thomas Reid). This was a move away from Calvin’s view (and the Apostle Paul’s hermeneutic)¹³⁰ that true knowledge is “not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely fits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and takes root in the heart.”¹³¹ Practically anticipating the Enlightenment’s most loyal followers (and ID theorists for that matter), Calvin further argued that “Of these things which it is neither given nor lawful to know ignorance is learned; the craving to know, as a kind of madness.”¹³² Human beings, especially Christians, must be constantly aware of their epistemic limitations. And as Calvin also argued, the “knowledge” of faith operates on a different level than simple sense perception and empirical observation.¹³³

126 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 111. Cf. Dorothy Soelle, *Thinking About God* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 190: “Transcendence is radical immanence.” Cf. John Barclay, “Introduction,” *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, ed. Simon Gathercole and John Barclay (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 7, who provides examples in the New Testament of this in action—God’s activity *increasing* (not decreasing) with human action.

127 The same went for the Trinity, deity of Christ, the historical reliability of the gospels, etc.

128 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 80.

129 There, “The pattern of decrees, rather than the activity of the Triune God, thus became the shaping principle for theology.” Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 80. Furthermore, “the primary-secondary causation distinction is a distinction beloved by Calvinists . . . it has been something of a godsend, for it permits Christian historians to posit exactly the same kind of causal process as their secular colleagues” (Abraham, *Divine Agency and Divine Action*, 1:131).

130 Todd Still and Bruce Longenecker, *Thinking Through Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 360.

131 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.9. Cf. McFague, *The Body of God*, 89: “[O]ur function as human beings on this planet is not mainly to think correct thoughts that correspond to some external set of verities, but to live appropriately and responsibly.”

132 *Institutes*, 3.23.8; cf. 3.21.2.

133 *Institutes*, 3.2.14: “When we call faith ‘knowledge’ we do not mean comprehension of the sort that is commonly concerned with those things which fall under human sense perception. For faith is so far above sense that man’s mind has to go beyond and rise above itself in order to attain it. Even where the mind has attained, it does not comprehend what it feels. But while it is persuaded of what it does not grasp, by the very certainty of its persuasion it understands more than if it perceived anything human by its own capacity . . . the knowledge of faith consists in assurance rather than in comprehension.” Only the Neo-Calvinist tradition (i.e., Kuyper and Bavinck) in Reformed theology—the true successors of Calvin’s thought—was aware of this flattening of knowledge and shift into epistemological over-confidence. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 41: “[I]n Reformed theology too,

As seen in Placher above, all of this—along with Newton’s mechanical view of the universe and other contemporary developments—forged deism and the modern transcendence-immanence dichotomy. However, this is neither necessary nor coherent.

A self-determined transcendence does not limit God’s relation with the world to one of distance. A radical transcendence does not exclude God’s positive fellowship with the world or presence within it. Only created beings, which remain themselves over and against others, risk the distinctness of their own natures by entering into intimate relations with another. God’s transcendence alone is one that may be properly exercised in the radical immanence by which God is said to be nearer to us than we are to ourselves . . . It is the mutual exclusiveness of *all* apparent antitheses, not just that of transcendence and immanence, which must give way before such a God. This means that God must not be identified with one side of an exclusive contrast, the world with the other.¹³⁴

Models of God and creation that give justice to realization are numerous and cannot all be mentioned here.¹³⁵ But, for readers of *Theistic Evolution*, it is extremely important to note that they (a) exist, (b) are actually more “traditional” in Christian theology (more on this below), (c) are not discussed, or really even mentioned, in *Theistic Evolution*. Whatever direction one goes, one must take seriously the God

the significance of God’s incomprehensibility was increasingly lost from view. While it was still taught, it existed in the abstract and exerted no influence.” Bavinck is vindicated in the fact that most theologies today under the “Protestant-Reformed” or “Reformed” label rarely address the incomprehensibility of God in a way that seriously tempers the certainties and types of claims made by the theologian.

- 134 Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 79–80. Note that McFague’s organic model, which sees the incarnation of Jesus as the microcosm of the what’s going on in the macrocosmos (the “body of God”), is also “the radicalization of both divine transcendence and immanence” (*Body of God*, 133). McFague, of course, is taking her cue from the earlier work of Grace Janzen, *God’s World God’s Body* (Louisville: WJK, 1984), 101: “It will be much more helpful if transcendence and immanence could be seen as mutually enriching concepts rather than mutually destructive.” In any case, the modern predominance over this topic has left many theologians frustrated; “It is time for Christianity to outgrow its dishonest deployments of the rhetoric of divine transcendence.” Catherine Keller, “The Flesh of God” in *Theology That Matters: Ecology, Economy, and God*, ed. Darby Ray (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 102.
- 135 Other than traditional process models, various panentheisms, the organic model of McFague, and traditional models (see Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 3rd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014], 113–16), see those discussed in William Abraham, *Divine Agency and Divine Action*, 4 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017–2019)—although, Abraham is noticeably cynical about any other views than his own. He issues particularly strong warnings for those in the wake of Robert Russell: “If we cannot attend to special divine action in theology, we will be endlessly frustrated; special divine action will not be found lodged in the mysteries, gaps, and chaos of modern physics. It would be better to declare theology a bankrupt enterprise than to bail it out with quantum theory” (Abraham, *Divine Agency and Divine Action*, 1:162).

who is “ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν” (“above all *and* through all *and* in all,” Eph 4:6, emphasis mine; cf. 1:23; Rom 15:28; Col 3:11; Acts 17:28; 1 Cor 15:28).

“Interventions” and “Miracles” Must Be Reconceived for a Post-Modern Theology Third, “interventions” and “miracles” are two terms that, because of their meta-physical baggage, are more of a liability than an asset.

There are good reasons why “divine intervention has become something of a swear word in this discussion”¹³⁶—but not for the reasons traditionally given (e.g., that God didn’t “get it right the first time”).¹³⁷ Indeed, as Abraham shrewdly observes, “It is not impious to say in this context that God is a Cosmic Repairman; the theological term for this is ‘Savior.’”¹³⁸ If God intended to “get it right the first time” (whatever this might mean), there probably shouldn’t have been an evil snake wandering around paradise. Both creation *and* redemption are not restricted to the earliest eons of the world or to the first-century, but are an ongoing process that God’s people are called to participate in. Many evolutionary creationists have emphasized this for decades and are right for doing so¹³⁹; this creative process is nothing to be ashamed of, but something that points towards God’s power, patience, and wisdom.¹⁴⁰

The reason “intervention” and “miracle” language is problematic (though not entirely and absolutely obsolete) because of what it suggests, namely, *that God is absent*.¹⁴¹ It also re-affirms that natural/supernatural dualism and transcendence/

136 Abraham, *Divine Agency and Divine Action*, 1:150.

137 This argument is repeated *ad nauseum* by evolutionary creationist works. It should probably be laid to rest. It apparently originated with the German mathematician, Gottfried Leibniz. See William Placher, ed. *Essentials of Christian Theology* (Louisville: WJK, 2003), 97.

138 Abraham, *Divine Agency and Divine Action*, 1:162.

139 This is why it is plain misrepresentation of evolutionary creation to say “God did not *actively* make anything, but merely upheld (or observed) the ongoing natural processes that were themselves directly responsible for the origin of all life forms” (Grudem, 74), that evolutionary creation is “a re-affirmation of some materialistic version of evolutionary theory restated using theological terminology” (Meyer, 48), and that the Nicene Creed “contradicts the claim of theistic evolution that God was the ‘maker’ only of the initial inanimate matter in the universe and that matter, apart from divine guidance, or intervention, eventually developed by purely natural process into ‘all things visible’” (Allison, 929). These are particularly odd claims to make since within the same book (on page 565 in this case) Meyer explicitly quotes Darrel Faulk affirming “God’s ongoing presence and activity in the universe.” This is not to say all evolutionary creationists have done a fine job explaining this issue (many haven’t), but that is no excuse for this type of plain misrepresentation.

140 Contrast with Francis Collins, who argues in *The Language of God*, 107, that, “Evolution, as a mechanism, can be and must be true. But that says nothing about the nature of its author.” Ignoring the shameless spirit of modernist inevitability in the first sentence, BioLogos’ advocates have fortunately corrected the odd claim in the second sentence. For example, Haarsma, *Four Views*, 136, 144, contends that evolutionary development *does* say something about God.

141 “[A] theory of occasional intervention implies as its correlative a theory of ordinary absence.” Aubrey Moore (1848–1890), cited in Alexander and White, *Science, Faith and Ethics*, 58. Cf. “If God ‘intervenes’ in the world, that implies that the Deity ordinarily stands apart from it.” Mark Corner, *Signs of God: Miracles and Their Interpretation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 7. Cited in

immanence contrast that simply cannot square with either the biblical narratives or contemporary critical thought. In modernism, “miracles” are in the “supernatural” realm (where God and spiritual things are), while everything else “down here” in the “natural world” is in the realm of everyday creation and “real life.” But that’s not how the biblical authors portray God’s involvement in the world or their experience of God in the world.

The dichotomy between natural and supernatural is a relatively recent one. . . . There were no “miracles” (in the sense of events deviating from that which was ‘natural’), there were only signs of the deity’s activity (sometimes favorable, sometimes not). . . . There is nothing ‘natural’ about the world in biblical theology, nor should there be in ours.¹⁴²

Hence, notable reference works plainly state that, “Prior to the 5th cent. CE, people believed that everything within the cosmos and every activity was an act of God’s intervention. The rising of the sun every morning, the breeze that came up on the sea, the nighttime panorama of moon and stars: all this was miracle.”¹⁴³

“Nature” or the “natural world”—from forests to corporate offices—is more or less “God’s home.”¹⁴⁴ It is where God acts, reveals, participates.¹⁴⁵ As Augustine

Sarah Ritchie, “Does the Success of Science Leave God Unemployed? (Part 2),” Biologos.org (May 4, 2016).

142 John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 18. Cf. Alexander and White, *Science, Faith, and Ethics*, 20: “The word ‘nature’ in current usage has picked up certain overtones derived from Enlightenment thinking which make people using the word feel as if they are referring to something quasi-autonomous—and even Christians can begin to think of nature as something independent of God. But this is the exact opposite of the biblical doctrine of creation!”

143 Wendy Cotter, “Miracle,” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2006–2009), 100.

144 To be sure, the biblical authors often speak of God dwelling “in heaven” or “in the heavens/sky” (a metaphor for “heaven”). But, again, this is not the distant, utterly separate sphere that it is often interpreted to be in modern theology. In fact, part of the goal of the church is to be the new Temple (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19), the intersecting place where heaven and earth meet, praying that God’s will be done “on earth as it is in heaven,” (Matt 6:10), that God’s “kingdom come” (Luke 11:2). In Revelation, at the consummation of the age, that union is made complete (Rev 21:1–2), and “God will be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). In addition to J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), see N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

145 Ritchie perceptively concludes the “Divine Action” series of Biologos (“Why We Can’t ‘Solve’ The Problem of Divine Action,” Biologos.org [June 27, 2016]) with the prompt: “One goal for the future, I suggest, is an examination of robust forms of ‘naturalism,’ or rather an understanding of how the ‘natural’ is inherently bound up with divine agency.” One finds something like this in the work of McFague, Clayton, and process thinkers though there is certainly more work to be done—especially in bridging the gap between exegetical/biblical theology and systematic and philosophical theology. Tracy, *The God Who Acts*, is perhaps the most directly helpful single volume on the subject of divine action. Vernon White, *The Fall of a Sparrow: A Concept of Divine Action* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1985) is a close second.

put it, “Nature is what [God] does.”¹⁴⁶ Any “intervention,” then, is not like someone from outside the house bursting in the back door, but like the owner of the house going from one room to another (though even here the analogy fails because God is not restricted to one place at a time).¹⁴⁷ Somehow, even human agency can be easily aligned with divine agency—like at key points in biblical narratives (e.g., Gen 50:20; Phil 2:12–13; Rom 12:3; cf. Acts 27).¹⁴⁸ It makes little sense to talk about how certain phenomena “defies reduction to natural causes” (Axe, 83), or even how “laws are violated.” “Laws” are observed regularities. Things that do not fit our descriptions or experience of what is regular do not automatically put them in theoretical realms outside the “natural.” To do this would commit a radical idealistic leap—suggesting that one’s understanding of the world can be no different than how the world is outside of my understanding.

There is not an independent causal continuum in which it is puzzling how God could intervene. . . . Divine action is not an interruption or in violation of the normal cause of things, but precisely *is* the normal course of things.¹⁴⁹

Or, as Augustine put it in *The City of God*, miracles are not “contrary to nature, but contrary to what is *known* of nature.”¹⁵⁰

No one ever says, “God didn’t do miraculous things for David the way God did for Moses and Elijah.” The texts as we have them assume that God is at work in *all* of this history . . . God works in history—sometimes more dramatically and sometimes through

146 Augustine, *Literal Commentary on Genesis*, 6.13.24.

147 McFague’s organic model is particularly favorable in sorting out these problems (and complements Pauline theology on agency in particular). But it has been almost entirely misrepresented and misunderstood by onlookers as either collapsing into the problems of early 20th century process theology or into some sort of pantheism. For example, in an otherwise good book, James Peterson, *Changing Human Nature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 16, carelessly brushes aside McFague’s thesis in a highly misleading two-sentence dismissal (only to then repeat one of her core points on pp. 39 and 65 with drawing the connection, while also giving a free pass to Eastern Orthodox “divinization” on p. 42). Even Abraham in his four-volume opus on the subject fails to interact with the organic model (and yet is willing to dismiss all versions of process thought—presumably with all versions of pantheism—as a “serious intellectual disease,” 1:145). In short, contemporary theologians—even those specializing on divine action—cannot seem to grasp that (a) pantheism is not simply “process theology,” and (b) the pantheism of McFague, Clayton, and Moltmann cannot simply be lumped together with the pantheism of Whitehead and Hartshorne.

148 “The two agencies thus stand in direct and not inverse proportion: the more a human agent is operative, the more (not the less) may be attributed to God.” Barclay, “Introduction,” *Divine and Human Agency in Paul*, 7.

149 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 190. Keener misses this in *Miracles*, 1:182 when demanding, “[H]ow is it logical consistency to insist that a consistent God must work *only* through the normal character of time and space?”

150 Augustine, *City of God*, 21.8.

more ordinary behavior of natural forces and human actors—and the differences do not much matter.¹⁵¹

Let me provide an illustration. Two girls in the backseat of an SUV are on their way to Yellowstone National Park. Their parents are in the front seat. They've been driving for hours on interstate. The girls are playing cards minding their own business and oblivious about what's going on around them, when suddenly a deer jumps in front of the car. They slam forward into their seatbelts to a grinding halt. At that "disruptive" point, they remember that they were hurdling through space at 80 mph. Before then, they forgot this little detail. Similarly, "The occasional event in radical violation of the normal order of things serves only to 'renew our remembrance' that God was directing every event in the normal order as well."¹⁵²

This "remembrance" is particularly meaningful when such irregularities carefully take place within a covenantal, narrative context.¹⁵³ In fact, one could go as far as to say that fully attending to the site of divine action is "worship."¹⁵⁴ It is quite frequent for those pursued by God in the biblical narratives to build an altar and worship there—because it is the site of where something significant has occurred. Of course, "worship" has always emphasized the divine presence, so this is hardly a surprise.

It is typical for modern thinkers to discard this perspective on grounds that "God can do whatever God wants," and can perform a "true" miracle by "violating natural laws." Keener argues that "a Creator would hardly be impressed with any demand that this God be subject to patterns of nature that this God initiated," as do Meyer and Collins in *Theistic Evolution* (221, 666–69).¹⁵⁵ Again, this mostly misses the point and confuses the burden of proof. The question is not what God can or has done, but *what human beings can know and what that means*.

Kaufman elaborates on this point, offering us a super-sized slice of humble pie worth quoting at length:

Our modern picture, most of us believe, takes into account many of the details of life and experience that were unknown to earlier generations—the velocity of light and the red-shift in the spectrum of certain lights in the heavens, the relativity of all measurements of time, the conservation and the convertibility [*sic*] of matter and

151 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 192.

152 Ibid., 136.

153 Cf. "Miracle" in the *CEB Bible Dictionary* (CEB Bible, 2011), 265: "Most often in the OT and NT, a miracle functions as a sign, a communication of God's relationship with humankind and history."

154 Cf. James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), 74–77.

155 Cf. Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 140–63. Licona is aware of the dispute regarding miracles but, unfortunately, uncritically maintains a modernist conception of them through his analysis.

energy, the complex atomic structure of matter, the evolution of life over many millennia here on earth, the ecological interdependence of all living forms and the threats to all of this posed by human pollution of the environment, depletion of resources, and destruction of other species; and so on. All of these are conceptions grounded on certain indecrimable differences experienced here on earth, and then extrapolated speculatively by magnificent imaginative acts into the vision of a universe billions of years old and hundreds of millions of light-years across. No one has ever moved back through these billions of years in time, to see whether presently observed patterns obtained then; nor can we move out hundreds of millions of light years in space, to see whether the regularities we observe here on earth hold there as well. *This whole picture of the world is the product of human imaginative construction.* Even such familiar reality as the sun is not known directly and immediately in experience for what it is; what we take it to be is constructed imaginatively on the basis of experienced patterns of light and heat here on earth. Today we explain these to ourselves in terms of a theory about a fiery star burning away in the skies, but most other peoples and cultures have not understood the sun in this distinctly modern way at all.

I am not suggesting there is any reason to doubt the existence and the reality of the sun, or, for that matter, of the most distant stars, or quasars, or “black holes.” I am simply pointing out that all that we know about any of these is the result of human imaginative construction, on the basis of a very close and highly systematic scrutiny of a wide range of clues that we find in our experience here on earth. The human imagination is a magnificent instrument indeed: all our knowledge depends on it; and since our experience is always heavily shaped by what we think we know, it also is significantly constituted by the activity of the imagination. Doubtless our knowledge, experience, and reflection on these matters are all “objective” in the sense that they are intended to be not merely about ourselves but about the objects and structure of the world which environs us; but what we take all this to be and to mean is inevitably the result of our own imaginative construction, and it should not claim to be anything more.¹⁵⁶

156 Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 255; emphasis mine.

This means that, contrary to modern epistemology, there generally is no raw, unmediated, unexperienced, or uninterpreted knowledge of the world.¹⁵⁷ So the greatest “law breaking” of any human experience still consists of *perceived irregularities*. If there is anything beyond that, it is, by definition, a mystery.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, human experience and knowledge is as much a part of “nature” and the “world” as anything,¹⁵⁹ and such experience and knowledge only “works” when nature is “working,” not where it *isn’t*.¹⁶⁰

What, then, can be said of “miracles”? Biologos recently stated in a mass email that “Miracles are simply cases where God chooses to work outside his usual patterns.”¹⁶¹ This is not an unfair one-sentence summary. Placher thickens it appropriately:

[T]he revelatory “mighty acts of God” might be simply that event that enables us to see with particular clarity how we had daily been surrounded by God’s mighty acts. . . . The Bible seems more firmly to say that some particular events are clues to the meaning of the whole.¹⁶²

157 Cf. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 192: “Finite human beings cannot experience God’s works without mediation. We always experience miracles through a created agency.”

158 To speak to Collins’ argument, “*lacunae ignorantiae causā*” (gaps due to ignorance) have a direct relationship to the concept of “*lacunae naturae causā*” (gaps due to nature), namely, that the former can be known and expected but the latter can only be speculative—and if speculative, no fit for (at least evidentialist and classical) Christian apologetics. Should time permit, on the other hand, one could explore the different kinds of mysteries—some of which, in fact, may have apologetic value.

159 “We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature” (Susan Griffin in McFague, *The Body of God*, 26).

160 To the extent that God is “transcendent” and exists “above and beyond” creation—and therefore poses a “distance” that needs to be “bridged,” this is the entire point of “revelation,” “divine accommodation,” and the “incarnation” in Christian theology. But this should be no surprise; classical Christian theists have always taught that the transcendent is knowable by way of metaphor, analogy, and faith. “If God is really transcendent, then there is no epistemological path from us to God, and everything we know about God comes at God’s initiative.” Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 186. Placher then goes on to insightfully describe the role of narratives in knowing God. Hart, *The Experience of God*, 314, provides a similar answer but draws attention to meditation instead of narrative: “God, according to all the great spiritual traditions, cannot be comprehended by the finite mind but can nevertheless be known in an intimate encounter with his presence—one that requires considerable discipline of the mind and will to achieve, but one also implicit in all ordinary experience (if only one is attentive enough to notice).”

161 “Does modern science make miracles impossible?” *Biologos* email essay (sent to subscribers Mar 29, 2018).

162 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 191. Cf. Abraham, *Divine Agency and Divine Action*, 1:44: that “some of an agent’s actions are more revelatory of an agent than other acts . . . is surely entirely correct.” Cf. McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 2:186: “Miracles, in short, are signs, divine actions within creation in which the presence of God shines forth in power for (creative, and especially) redemptive ends (cf. John 20:30f).” Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*, 192, also remarks: “Ultimately, miracles thus receive their meaning not from the past but from the future, new creation.”

And more systematically:

(1) Some historical events can provide a luminous key to understanding all things.¹⁶³ (2) They do not happen to do so for many people, but there is something about the events themselves such that in them was special disclosure of the transcendent beginning and end of all things, we call God. (3) When we ask how God was acting differently in such events, however, we quickly realize that we lack the categories to describe such differences.¹⁶⁴

Because of its ideological baggage, the term “miracle” itself need not have any place in Christian discourse.¹⁶⁵ The question “do you believe in miracles?” or “are miracles possible?” tend to stem from a series of false premises.¹⁶⁶ As such, one can legitimately recite and genuinely believe in every single word of the Nicene

163 Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*, 192, goes further and suggests that one of these (the resurrection) is the key to understanding the trajectory of all such “miracles”: “Christ’s resurrection as the most profound divine action known to us reveals the ultimate meaning of the miracle. Rather than going against nature, it transcends and lifts up the natural. It points to the eschatological consummation when, according to the biblical promises, creation ‘will be set free from its bondage to decay’ (Rom 8:21). In the resurrection even death will be defeated (1 Cor 15:55).”

164 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 193. I would qualify this last assertion, as noted above, by adding a covenantal, narrative dimension which would perhaps provide those categories in describing the differences. Hence, Denis Alexander, *Rebuilding the Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 457, concludes: “This understanding emphasizes not the violation of ‘laws of nature’, though this may be involved, but rather the purposeful and non-capricious actions of a God in bringing the miracle about within a significant historical-religious context. In this view God is the creator who actively sustains the whole created order and miracles are discernible as unusual actions of God.” In any case, it is misleading to say, “There is never a hint in the Bible that certain types of event in the natural world are any more or any less the activity of God than other events” (Alexander and White, *Science, Faith, and Ethics*, 101), especially as there are plenty of psalms and reflections in the Bible that distance God from some events and bring God closer to others.

165 Alexander and White, *Science, Faith, and Ethics*, 21, also (rightly) suggest the same for the term “naturalism”: “Since the word ‘naturalism’ is redundant for Christians it is best simply to drop using it altogether in reference to their involvement in science.” In any case, a major semantic problem for systematians in this whole debacle is the confusion between “special divine action” (Abraham) and “miracle.” Also note that “[t]he English term miracle is derived from Latin *miraculum* (a ‘marvel’), but *miraculum* is never used in the Vulgate (the Latin translation of the OT and NT by Jerome in the late 4th cent. CE)” (Wendy Cotter, “Miracle,” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2006–2009], 99).

166 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 1:116, goes as far as to say that “The supernaturalistic theory of miracles makes God a sorcerer and a cause of ‘possession’; it confuses God with demonic structures in the mind and in reality.” While I perhaps wouldn’t go that far, his more interesting claim is that “One can say that ecstasy in the miracle of the mind, and miracle is the ecstasy or reality” (117). What he then says turns the modern Christian perspective (as embodied in, say, Licona, Meyer, and mainstream apologists) upside down: “Since neither ecstasy nor miracle destroys the structure of cognitive reason, scientific analysis, psychological and physical, as well as historical investigation are possible and necessary. Research can and must proceed without restriction Scientific explanation and historical criticism protect revelation; they cannot dissolve it, for revelation belongs to a dimension of reality for which scientific and historical analysis are inadequate.” That is, it is not the supernatural character of miracles that makes them observable and important, but their coherent in-this-world structure.

Creed and yet deny all “miracles.”¹⁶⁷ It should be noted, after all, that primary biblical language of miracle equivalents is not “miracles” but rather “signs and wonders” and “mighty deeds” (τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα, Deut 6:22; Dan 4:2–3; Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12; cf 2 Cor 12:12).¹⁶⁸ Christians—especially in talking about divine action in the context of creation, evolution, etc.—might be wise to follow suite and return to this more accurate and uncharged language.¹⁶⁹

The “Traditional” Christian Metaphysic is Pre-Modern, Not Modern

John Collins specifically rejects the observations just made above. After providing a chapter supporting the natural/supernatural dualism and the modern perspective on miracles, he says:

I conclude, then, that those who insist that all events are in principle “natural” have taken a position that is inadequate in all the relevant dimensions. . . . By contrast, the traditional Christian metaphysic gives us a sound way of thinking about God’s activity *in every event*. That is, we have no right to declare a priori that we may expect to find created natural factors alone to be adequate for everything. (677)

Collins claims that his perspective is the “traditional Christian metaphysic.” But this is not the case.

Readers are given hints that Collins’ view has problems when the primary line of evidence for the “traditional way of describing God’s actions” (661) is found in the opinion of one obscure Lutheran theologian (Heinrich Schmid). (How is this a reliable gauge of “traditional” Christian theology?) The larger difficulties become clear, however, when facing church history itself.

Space does not permit a full delineation of this subject. One might turn to any number of systematic theologies to discover how inaccurate this claim to

167 Furthermore, one might ask: if, for example, a red algae in the Nile spontaneously arose during the time of Egypt’s judgement, is this really any less “miraculous” if it could not be explained as such? One could argue the same for the origin of life: no matter which account is given—the secular atheists “materialist” account or the young earth creationist’s divine interventionist account—what occurred was absolutely bizarre and unique. Gaining knowledge of the “how” does nothing to trivialize the profundity of such events. (This may actually be one of the most persuasive arguments in favor of Jesus’ resurrection: Jesus’ resurrection is, in principle, no more bizarre than the first life.)

168 The distribution of the rendering “miracle” in English translations yields no apparent pattern. It appears 37 times in the KJV, 30 in the NIV, 11 in the NRSV, 12 in the ESV, 76 in the NLT, 23 in the CEB, 48 in the REB. I hope to see future translations lower this count as much as possible for accuracy reasons alone.

169 J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1993), 57–58, instinctively gives primacy to biblical language and concepts, but then unconsciously defaults to the modern perspective, where “the God who made the world can *still* intrude creatively into it” (emphasis mine).

“traditional theology” is.¹⁷⁰ However, chapters of Placher’s *The Domestication of Transcendence* helpfully provide some of the broad contours. He uses Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin as the template for his discussion regarding God’s action in the world and how transcendence became “domesticated” in modernity.¹⁷¹

For Aquinas, “God does not ‘intervene’ in the world as if God had for the most part been watching from the sidelines.”¹⁷² As Aquinas himself noted, “God acts in every agent immediately, without prejudice to the action of the will and of nature.”¹⁷³ Thus, “divine shaping of my will is not an interference in the natural order; it is the natural order.”¹⁷⁴ In Aquinas, God is always presented as a mystery, not the center or solution of a metaphysical system. This is because, by definition, God is mysterious. Whether literal or metaphorical, our language of God must therefore not be univocal.¹⁷⁵ In contrast to popular sentiments about Aquinas’s scholasticism, all theology must be done with this tremendous humility. In fact, “We cannot know what God is.”¹⁷⁶ “From God’s perspective, the pieces *do* fit together, and one can see God at work in the trials of our lives. But no human theologian can occupy that perspective, and so, even make such confident claims to reach beyond faith.”¹⁷⁷

Calvin, similarly, “was willing to leave questions unanswered, ‘necessary consequences’ underived, and apparent inconsistencies suspended in tension.”¹⁷⁸ “Like Aquinas on the nature of our language about God,” Placher continues, “Calvin counseled against claiming to know too much, or claiming to say what we know more clearly than we can.”¹⁷⁹ And again, like Aquinas, “Calvin’s God does not ‘intervene’ in the world, as if generally elsewhere but entering the picture from time to time. God is always present and thoroughly engaged.”¹⁸⁰ Hence,

170 E.g., Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 303: “[A] miracle is not a violation of natural law, since God is no less involved with maintaining the ordinary order of the natural created world.”

171 For brevity, what follows are some observations surrounding Aquinas’ and Calvin’s perspectives. In case you’re wondering, Luther’s general views on divine action aren’t much different than Aquinas and Calvin—at least in Placher’s assessment.

172 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 114. For an enlightening article on Thomas Aquinas and evolution, see William Carol, “Creation, Evolution, and Thomas Aquinas,” *Revue des Questions Scientifiques* 171:4 (2000): 319–47.

173 Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, 3.7.

174 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 120.

175 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 72.

176 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 21.

177 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 51.

178 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 53. The “necessary consequence” phrase comes from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.6, though Placher may be referring to some earlier reference of which I am unaware.

179 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 54.

180 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 117. There is some confusion over this particular point in interpreting Aquinas. See Karl Heim, *Christian Faith and Natural Science* (New York: Harper and Bros, 1953), 171, cited in McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 2:185, where Hume is said (by McClendon) to pick up on the “Thomist” conception of miracle. Aquinas himself,

Calvin said that “there are as many miracles of divine power as there are kinds of things in the universe, indeed, as there are things either great or small.”¹⁸¹ (This is undoubtedly heresy to the authors of *Theistic Evolution*.) And where “carnal reason ascribes all such happenings to chance,” Calvin continues in *The Institutes*, Christians “will look further afield for a cause and will consider that all events are governed by God’s secret plan.”¹⁸² But *how* exactly does this work? Calvin’s answer likely will not satisfy the modern mind’s lust for knowledge and certainty: “His wonderful method of governing the universe is rightly called an abyss.”¹⁸³

Placher’s final conclusion is that

For Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin, and many other premodern Christian theologians, God’s transcendence was not “contrastive.” Emphasizing God’s transcendence did not make God less immanent. On the contrary, the wholly other God, precisely because of a radical transcendence, could also be most present to all of creatures. Since God was not one of the things in the world, it makes no sense to locate God in one place, with creatures in another, such that one could ask about the distance between them. Since God was not one agent among others, but operated on a different level of agency, it makes no sense to ask which things God had done and which things had been done by someone or something else. At the beginning of the modern era, however, theologians began to worry about just where to put God in the universe.¹⁸⁴

Many contemporary theologians agree. For instance, David Hart, the classical theist and Eastern Orthodox philosopher, contends that

it would have offended against many Christian philosophers’ understanding of divine transcendence to imagine that God really made the world through a succession of cosmic interventions: they assumed that God’s creative act is eternal, not temporal, occurring not a discrete instant in the past, but rather pervading all of time.¹⁸⁵

Indeed, in contrast to the supposedly “traditional Christian metaphysic” of *Theistic*

however, seems to have put the primary emphasis on knowledge in his own definition: “a miracle is so called as being full of wonder, as having a cause absolutely hidden from all: and this cause is God. Wherefore those things which God does outside those causes which we know, are called miracles.” Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa of the Summa*, ed. Peter Kreeft (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1990), 239.

181 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 135.

182 Cited in Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 117.

183 Cited in Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 117–18.

184 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 8.

185 Hart, *The Experience of God*, 25–26.

Evolution, “all the classical theological arguments regarding the order of the world assume just the opposite: that God’s creative power can be seen in the rational coherence of nature as a perfect whole; that the universe was not simply a factitious product of a supreme intellect, but the unfolding of an omnipresent divine wisdom or logos.”¹⁸⁶

Regularities Reveal God’s Glory as Much as Irregularities

A fifth problem with the view of divine action in *Theistic Evolution* is the assertion that God’s glory, wisdom, power, etc., is primarily seen in the extraordinary (i.e., “miracles”). On the contrary, Christian theology has always located God’s revelation and attributes in “the things that have been made” (Rom 1:20)—such as “ordinary” stars in the sky, the changing of seasons, “the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock” (Prov 30:19a), chemistry, music, the laws of logic and math, indeed, our very existence. The entire spectrum of human experience—from the ordinary to the extraordinary, from “special” to “general” revelation, point to God. If God truly created *everything*, this would hardly be a surprise.¹⁸⁷

But, as already noted above, a modern critique of evolutionary creation requires compartmentalization; special status must be attributed to the categories of “divine intervention” and “miracles.” “For the most part,” Axe writes, “people appeal to supernatural explanations only when they’ve become convinced that there *cannot* be a natural explanation . . . we acknowledge the real possibilities of being confronted by God’s activity *over and above* his role as the sustainer of the created order” (102). “Moreover,” he continues, “God himself seems to endorse this perspective by using miracles both to reveal his specific will and to demonstrate his authority over the created order” (103).

In response, this perspective (as noted above) comes from a dualistic metaphysic that is problematic to begin with. The supernatural/natural construct is not fundamentally Christian, but modern. And while it may approximate something of human experience, its simplistic, binary orientation—along with a dozen other problems we can’t cover here—make it difficult to accept.

Second of all, there is no question that (for example) Yahweh and Jesus perform all kinds of signs, wonders, and mighty acts that do, in fact, lead people to believe and have (further) knowledge of God. But, in Jesus’ case, many of these are specific to his messianic task (first-century monotheistic Jews had a particular hurdle to get over in drawing the line from Yahweh to Jesus of Nazareth). Certain

186 Hart, *The Experience of God* 38. Thus, “[i]n Christian theology there is no ‘two-tier’ universe that one can split into the ‘designed’ portion and the ‘undesigned’ portion” (Alexander and White, *Science, Faith, and Ethics*, 109).

187 Cf. Alexander and White, *Science, Faith, and Ethics*, 20: “If God is the creator of all that is, then there is nothing that a scientist can describe that is not created by God.”

signs, wonders, and mighty deeds were helpful in that regard.¹⁸⁸ With respect to the more general signs and wonders (before and after the Christ-event), as Placher notes, these are more of *reminders* about God's work and presence. Whether or not water flowed from a rock during Israel's desert wandering, they knew God was there working. Yes, sometimes an "intervention" or "act of God" (a well-placed irregularity) is necessary to rejuvenate a person's faith,¹⁸⁹ but for the one who genuinely trusts God, it usually isn't necessary at all.

Third, there is a false dichotomy hidden in Axe's argument, namely, the dichotomy between (a) modern, supernatural miracles/interventions (according to ID theorists) and (b) God as generic sustainer of created order. One does not have to adopt (a) if it can be shown that (b) is inadequate/incomplete. ID theorists like Axe constantly see evolutionary creationists as deists because ID advocates can't imagine how God is truly acting if not via a "supernatural miracle." But, as I have labored to show, that would be the fault of ID theorists (not evolutionary creationists) for having a strongly modern and theologically unsound perspective on God and creation.

Conclusion

There are many more aspects of divine action that have not been addressed—such as causation (which should be revisited),¹⁹⁰ other models (e.g., econometric)¹⁹¹ and

188 This is not to suggest that this was their only purpose. It can easily be argued that the marvelous work done by Jesus must continue in the life of the church (just as it did in Acts and thereafter)—and not just for further vindication that Jesus was the Christ, but that it says something about God (e.g., God is restoring the world, intends to heal creation, etc.). A full picture of this in action throughout church history does not easily fit the superficial "confrontational" and "non-confrontational" paradigm of Axe.

189 I am witness to at least one of those occasions in my personal journey and know many other Christians who have had similar experiences.

190 E.g., one might expand or update Aristotle's in light of all the new disciplines; the same event can have a "physical cause," "biological cause," "economic cause," "psychological cause," "social cause," "religious cause," and "theological cause," all without being in competition. Moltmann goes as far as to say "it is advisable to eliminate the concept of causality from the doctrine of creation, and indeed we have to stop thinking in terms of causes at all. . . . Creating the world is something different from causing it" (Jürgen Moltmann, *God and Creation* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985], 14).

191 "Miracles" can be conceived as not only perceived irregularities, but *improbable events with narrative significance*. If one was, for example, to aggregate all of the universe's events onto a single frequency distribution (i.e., bell curve), the two-tails would exhibit the more "miraculous" and the center, high-frequency events "ordinary." In this simple model, on the very far end of one tail would be the creation of the world and on the other (say) the resurrection of Jesus. The plagues of Egypt and fall of Jerusalem within the generation of Jesus' disciples a little further up, scoring a full-court basketball shot further up, until eventually one approaches the most frequent and quotidian events. Licona in *The Resurrection of Jesus* does not discuss this option in his interaction with Hume, nor does Alexander in *Rebuilding the Matrix*. Robert Larmer, *The Legitimacy of Miracle* (Lanham: Lexington, 2013), 3, approximates it in the first part of his narrow definition ("a miracle is an unusual and religiously significant event which reveals and furthers God's purposes, is beyond the power of physical nature to produce, and is caused by an agent who transcends

challenges of “miracles,”¹⁹² more issues regarding language,¹⁹³ and the like. But it’s time to draw this review to a close.

There are serious questions as to whether a book like *Theistic Evolution* will persuade more “fence-sitters” toward the perspective of the contributors, or away from it. If even half of what has been observed in this review is accurate, then there are good reasons to doubt the basic premises of the creationist-ID model—especially regarding its “case closed” disposition. As I noted in the beginning, no perspective has all the answers and there is still plenty to be learned.

However, what has also emerged from this review is that the deficiencies of the most recent evolutionary creation perspectives are not those identified by its most prominent critics. The issues are not the broad, sweeping claims about how evolutionary creation undermines cardinal doctrines, threatens the viability of Christianity, and accommodates to secular, atheistic philosophies. Instead, the problems appear to be more marginal and linguistic in nature, not having yet plumbed the debts of rich theological resources, and the need to adjust various angles of interpretation on one topic or another. Ironically, the real biblical-theological

physical nature”), but is still entrapped in the language of modern thought and stale models of western monotheism.

192 It doesn’t seem as if evolutionary creationists *or* their critics have fully rid themselves of the “god of the gaps” dilemma so long as either (a) “miracles” are viewed as a binary category or (b) some miracles (e.g., incarnation, resurrection, etc.) are given categorical, metaphysical prominence over others (e.g., water being turned into wine, the feeding of the 5,000, etc.). As already noted above by Placher, this is inevitable in one sense, but potentially problematic on another—for there is a right and wrong way to speak of such events/signs/miracles. As a case in point, Collins says that for “creation, exodus, virgin birth, resurrection of Jesus” it “would be incorrect and misleading to insist that only natural factors are valid for describing what happened in those events; it would also be empirically inadequate” (669). Similarly, in the aforementioned Biologos email on miracles, we read that “The more we know about the processes of decay that set in after death, the less likely it appears that Jesus could have risen from the dead by any natural means. Rather, science strengthens the case that if Jesus did indeed rise from the dead, the event must have occurred without, above, or against his ordinary providential working.” Here, both evolutionary creationists and ID theorists make more or less the same argument: our current knowledge of the “natural” world shows that x, y, and z (fill in the blank) couldn’t possibly have happened. To Biologos’ credit, the contrast provided is not one of natural mechanism vs. “God’s intervention” but what is “not ordinary,” wisely leaving room for interpretation. As noted in McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 2:187, “the great historic signs [‘miracles’] cannot be located by the test of ‘breaking’ natural law.” Collins, however, especially in grouping the exodus with the incarnation and resurrection (since east winds and locust plagues seem rather “natural”) in a “*lacunae ignorantiae causā*” (gaps due to ignorance) vs. “*lacunae naturae causā*” (gaps due to nature) reductionist dualism, is in a much more problematic situation.

193 For example, Keener, *Miracles*, 1:184–85, notes: “Scientific language is adequate (and designed) for depicting natural phenomena, but we employ a different order of language to describe human relationships . . . Human experience necessitates metaphysical as well as scientific language; the languages describe different aspects of existence and are not intrinsically contradictory. . . . ‘The so-called conflict between science and miracles,’ Ian Ramsey observes, ‘is a pseudo-conflict which only arises when complete adequacy is claimed for the language of science.’” This is an important observation, but even this is an oversimplification: scientific language is not simply pitted against “metaphysical language” (another modernist dualism); rather, there is a *plurality of discourses* throughout human knowledge and experience (e.g., economic, ethical, social, religious, etc.).

problems lie at the feet of those who claim a monopoly on God's truth and church tradition—along with immunity from the Enlightenment's most intoxicating ideas. The modern creationist movement and its pairing with Intelligent Design is by all means a product of its time and must be treated as such. In the end, this critique of evolutionary creation "should be abandoned or substantially modified even by proponents of ID."¹⁹⁴

However, sometimes the instincts and worship of the church—not intellectual argument—is the best indicator of sound theology. Liturgies in particular can be faithful carriers of such a tradition (that is, after all, why they exist). And, as providence had it, the same week I began this article, the following liturgy was given at church, and that is how this article will close:

(Inspired by Psalm 111)

One: By this I have known the presence of the Lord.

All: in the rising of the sun, in the smile of another's face

One: in the touch of a hand or the sound of a laugh

All: in the scent of a flower holding the promise of Spring

One: By this I have known the power of the Lord:

All: in the healing of hurts, in the forgiveness of sin,

One: in the giving of gifts beyond all expectation

All: in the shower of love that comes from God's Son

One: Let us give thanks to the Lord with all of our heart!

All: Let us worship our God, whose presence and power endures forever!¹⁹⁵

194 Erkki Vesa Rope Kojoven, "Tensions in Intelligent Design's Critique of Theistic Evolution," *Zygon: A Journal of Religion and Science* 48 (May 2013):251–73. Abraham, *Divine Agency and Divine Action*, 1:146, is less generous: "those who have turned to science for help on divine action would not be seen dead supporting the Intelligent Design Movement."

195 Cf. Abraham, *Divine Agency and Divine Action*, 1:85: "The kind of theism that really matters to the theologian involves a rich narrative of the activity of God in creation, in Israel, in Jesus Christ, in our own lives, in the church, and in the future. This is not the kind of claim that can be picked up and adjudicated by taking each item and testing it . . . according to some common epistemic measure . . . our own understanding of divine action may depend on our own engagement with divine reality."