

Letters

First, Moes argues that nonreductive physicalism (NRP) is compatible with taking humans as agents who can engage in willful and responsible actions. Moreover, Moes argues that emotions (among other things) play a pertinent role in shaping the relational nature of human beings. So, for Moes, given the NRP model, top-down causation, i.e., from mental to physical, can be shown to be the case within the *closed physical system*. The question remains: what then is at stake in Moes' NRP model? Here, we need to know that the NRP model endorses three key claims: (a) ontological monism, (b) the irreducibility of the mental to the physical, and (c) the supervenience of the mental on the physical. Of all, (b) poses the greatest problem for the NRP model: If (b) is true, then it follows that mental states (e.g., emotions) are distinct states from brain states (e.g., brain activity or the firing of neurons). That means that mental states can be neither reducible nor identifiable with brain states, in that, unlike brain states which are purely physical, mental states are nonphysical states. In fact, in this sense, it is better to call Moes a property dualist rather than a nonreductive physicalist. However, my main objection is this: If Moes accepts (b) above, then his NRP model violates the causal closure principle, according to which all physical effects have sufficient physical causes. Thus, nonphysical states are excluded from the closed physical domain. If so, how then can Moes argue that mental causation/top-down causation is possible in the NRP model? Either Moes has to let go of the *causal closure principle*, in which case he can no longer be a physicalist, or he must identify mental states with brain states, in which case he can hardly be a nonreductive physicalist. But since the NRP model is based on purely philosophical commitment to physicalism, Moes' attempt to establish willful and responsible action by appealing to neuropsychology remains a nonstarter.

Second, Jones argues that neuroscience is making significant inroads into the human brain, which is believed to be the center of human thinking, intelligence, thoughts, and so forth. Since neuroscientists are gaining an insider's view of human brains via brain imaging techniques, they may soon map out the inner thoughts of people. The question remains: why should we take Jones' remarks seriously? The main problem with Jones' argument is his failure to distinguish the asymmetry between first-person perspective and third-person perspective. We all agree that neuroscience is great in giving us a third-person description of the characteristics of the human brain. But neuroscience is utterly incapable of giving us anything whatsoever of the first-person description of the phenomenal consciousness which necessarily belongs to a subject of experience, i.e., a person. It does not matter how sophisticated the brain imaging techniques are that neuroscientists use, the subjective character of the phenomenal consciousnesses (e.g., the hurtfulness of pain) or what it is like for a person to be in a pain state, cannot be captured by looking into people's brains, unless we get a first-hand report from the people themselves to learn about the content of their thoughts or the nature of their subjective experience. Contrary to Jones, we have no good reason to be afraid of advances in neuroscience when it comes to phenomenal consciousnesses. Put differently, though neuroscientists can certainly peer into people's physical brains, they can hardly peer into people's inner thought life. We can only sympathize with Jones' argu-

ment if we assume that our identity is grounded in the physical brain, the view I categorically reject, for reasons I cannot go into here.

So, both Moes and Jones failed to recognize the distinction that holds between the philosophical assumptions they each utilized to make their case on the one hand, and the empirical data they relied on to explain human nature on the other. Thus, they seem to have implicitly shifted gear from neuroscience to neuroscientism: that is, the proper knowledge of human nature is only attainable via neuroscience.

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Reaction to September 2010 PSCF issue

I appreciated the September 2010 issue of *PSCF*. While I share the editor's concern about overemphasizing the origin debate (for the Christian community has more important issues to address), understanding creation's origins in the light of its destiny can affect our Christian walk. For once possessed and guided by the knowledge that everything came out of God and will return back into him (Rom. 11:36), we will respect every person either as a saint or as one on the way to sainthood.

Both Daniel C. Harlow and John R. Schneider view origins in the light of our destiny as they quote universalist texts (e.g., Rom. 8:18–32; 11:32–33; 1 Cor. 15:28; Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20) and take them at face value. Most of us have been conditioned to read these texts in the light of the eternal damnation passages instead of reading the latter in the light of God's revealed purpose "to unite all things in him" (Eph. 1:10).

The above authors invite us to rethink original sin, and I agree. We have misread the Fall, because we failed to see how the two creation accounts are related. God revealed himself in two books: the Scriptures and nature. Nature resembles a novel as it is created (1) by the author's word, (2) within the author's mind, and (3) out of nothing. Moreover, such a narrative includes the creation of things, and of time and space in which events unfold. This intra-narrative time and space is distinct from the time in which the author lives. Creation week refers to God's own mode of existence, not to a part of the time he created.

The first creation account shows us an architect's drawing of a beautiful edifice with the surroundings perfectly landscaped, whereas the second one displays a cluttered construction site. The first account describes a novelist composing a narrative with a happy ending; the second one takes us into the first chapters of the novel in which things are going terribly wrong. The first account tells us how much time it took the author to finish his work; the second one takes us into the intra-narrative timeframe.

Adam and Eve were fallible. They were created for eternity but had failed to eat from the tree of life that represented the Lord who alone confers eternal life. As they were created in the image of God who does not take orders, they could hardly be expected to do so either.

Thus they sinned. Schneider reaches a similar conclusion by considering our evolutionary heritage.

Humanity represents a paradox: The most independent being creates an image of himself or herself, which by its very creatureliness is most dependent. God solved that problem for "he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him." And once we are one with him, we share his will and independence.

But this is only a beginning, for "Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God," which includes the freedom to do whatever we want because God's desire has become ours. This is the perfected creation; only this creation is very good, and only this is what God viewed at the end of day six and declared to be very good (Gen. 1:31).

If you doubt, consider that if Gen. 1:20, 24 imply that day five ended with oceans teeming with swarming creatures, then day six ended with a planet densely populated by humanity, for God had commanded them to "fill the earth" and declared that "it was so."

Nothing in Genesis 1 should hinder us from pursuing studies as presented by Dennis R. Venema, according to which "our species has maintained a population size of at least several thousand individuals since our speciation from the ancestors of other apes."

As to the historicity of Adam and Eve, I agree with Daniel C. Harlow (p. 190) that a historical Adam is not essential to Paul's teaching. A literary Adam detracts nothing from my faith. And yet I prefer Collins' view of a historical "first couple," because I hope to meet them one day. Even so, a literary Adam will not wreck my enjoyment of an eternity spent in the Lord's presence.

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Response to John Collins

I refer to John Collins, "Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why it Matters" (*PSCF* 62, no. 3 [2010]: 147-65). He refers to "several scholars" who "have made proposals consistent with the criteria" of "modern humans" "between 100,000 and 40,000 years ago ... both with and without animal 'forebears'" (p. 160), and in the footnote refers to my article, "Soteriology: Adam and the Fall," *PSCF* 49, no. 4 (1997): 252-63. While I am not dogmatic on the Adamic date I would now consider the most likely date for Adam and Eve to be at about 70,000 years ago. But I would also remind readers that some time ago now I repudiated theistic evolution in favor of old earth creationism. See Gavin McGrath, "Intelligent Design from an Old Earth Creationist Perspective," *PSCF* 58, no. 3 (2006): 252-3; "The Gap [School] in Creation," *PSCF* 59, no. 4 (2007): 318-9; "Old Earth Creationists," *English Churchman* 7779 (6 and 13 Nov. 2009): 2; and "Old Earth Creation," *English Churchman* 7782 (18 and 25 Dec. 2009): 2.

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Absolute Biblical Inerrancy Is Not Biblical

According to his recent letter (*PSCF* 62, no. 4 [2010]: 302-3), John Montgomery thinks that the spiritual revelations in the Bible cannot be separated from attached scientific and historical facts. He asks: If the scientific and historical facts, which can be checked, are not accurate, why would anyone accept the spiritual revelations which cannot be checked?

The more biblical question is this: If the scientific and historical facts, which can be checked, prove to be false, why would anyone suppose they are divine revelations? Scripture itself teaches us to check alleged divine revelations of empirical facts by means of empirical data; and if they prove empirically to be false, they should not be accepted as divine revelations (Deut. 18:22; 1 Thess. 5:21). When the science-history in Genesis 1, as an example, is checked by empirical data, it is proven by that data to be false: e.g., earth history does not begin with a primeval ocean. If we obey Deut. 18:22 and 1 Thess. 5:21, then we must conclude that the science-history in that chapter is not a divine revelation.

When the history-science of Genesis 1 is compared to ancient Near Eastern literature, it becomes readily apparent that its concepts about the natural world are ancient Near Eastern concepts; this again tells us that they are not divine revelations. The view which emerges from obeying Deut. 18:22 and 1 Thess. 5:21 and from comparing the history-science in Genesis 1 to ancient Near Eastern literature is that God, like a wise Father, has chosen to reveal himself and his will to his children in terms of *their* understanding of the natural world.

This biblical and forthright view of the science-history in the Bible is, unfortunately, excluded by the doctrine of absolute biblical inerrancy which Montgomery is espousing. In his view, the Bible *must* agree with scientific truth; therefore God cannot speak to his children in terms of *their* understanding of the natural world. Montgomery's doctrine leaves Christians with just two choices: Either set aside modern science in favor of a contrived private science or set aside the historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture in favor of a contrived private interpretation.

In the essay which Montgomery wrote and recommends, the latter course is chosen. Rather than testing the history-science of Genesis 1 by empirical data as Scripture enjoins, his essay refers us (p. 21, note 17) to the book, *Modern Science and Christian Faith*, which gives us interpretations of Genesis 1 that at first glance harmonize the biblical statements with modern science. Unfortunately, the relevant chapters were written by an astronomer and a geologist, who understandably were oblivious to the fact that Genesis 1 reflects ancient Near Eastern "science" — from the primeval ocean of Gen. 1:2 to the rising of animals out of the ground like plants in Gen. 1:24.

The concordism found in that book and concordist interpretations in general depend upon lifting the biblical text out of its historical and biblical context, setting it back down in the context of modern science, and then having modern science determine the meaning of the words. In short, they depend upon taking the Bible out of context.