

# Book Reviews

Who should be reading this book? I think if you are interested in moral philosophy, theology, and cognitive neurobiology, then this book will offer many insights into these fields. If Suddendorf is correct, experimenting on rats and mice and chimpanzees will not unlock the mystery of “humanness” as the mystery simply is not to be found in these animals. Also, if we aim to build a moral society, then we must know something of our nature that urges us to seek each other out. I just read an article by Rabbi Warren Goldstein (“Alternative Reality: Why We Misunderstand Faith” on Jewishworldreview.com) on the human desire to recreate our reality and communicate. Sadly, what Rabbi Goldstein describes as evidence for a divine human soul now seems less supernatural, but still, there is a large gap between animal and human nature that should lead us to understand that we are very special—and to whom much is given, from him much will be required—but I digress. Goldstein’s point is that faith is our reimagining of reality into what God wishes us to become. Paul’s emphasis on our carnal nature is also relevant as we bring with us, through our evolution, many potentially negative traits (*yetzer hara*, to borrow the Jewish idea) that can be put to good use (toward *tikkun olam*) but that can, without a sound worldview (a *faith*) in which to interpret reality, just as well be used to break and destroy our world (to cause *ra* and *rasha*). If we are to accept the Divine invitation to “let us [God and you, me, and others] make humankind” we must know and understand what our starting materials are.

Who would enjoy reading this book? I would think any biologist would find this book interesting. Psychologists and neurobiologists would also find it interesting and informative as to the human condition. Nonprofessionals with an interest in behavior or social pathology would find this a rewarding read, full of interesting material on human development and social experiments. I, as a new parent, found it fascinating to find the ideas of human development espoused by Suddendorf recapitulated in my growing son. The book does a great job of taking what little we know about the behavior of human ancestors and presenting it in the context of what it is to be human.

Suddendorf encourages us to know ourselves. I would like to echo this encouragement: read the book and get to know yourself a bit better.

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As space permits, *PSCF* plans to list recently published books and peer-reviewed articles related to science and Christian faith that are written by our members and brought to our attention. To let us know of such works, please write to [patrick.franklin@prov.ca](mailto:patrick.franklin@prov.ca).



## SCIENCE & BIBLICAL STUDIES

**NAVIGATING GENESIS: A Scientist’s Journey through Genesis 1-11** by Hugh Ross. Covina, CA: Reasons to Believe Press, 2014. 298 pages, endnotes, indexes, appendixes. Paperback; \$19.95. ISBN: 9781886653863.

In *Navigating Genesis*, Hugh Ross presents readers with his attempt to engage in a reading of Genesis 1-11 in a way that promises to “ultimately satisfy intellectual curiosity” (p. 13). While Ross’s engagement with the conclusions of much modern scientific inquiry is often interesting and seems (from this outsider’s perspective) to be well researched, his commitment to a particular way of reading the Bible, coupled with what appears to be a near-total disregard for academic biblical scholarship, makes this book profoundly frustrating to read. A complete list of the various problems in the book is far beyond the scope of this review, but I will present here several key issues indicative of the kinds of problems one finds throughout, and which, taken together, create a work that is fatally flawed.

From the beginning, Ross displays a tendency to brush aside or disregard significant problems in his argument regarding Genesis 1. For instance, he goes to great pains to indicate that, contrary to the entire interpretive history of Genesis 1, God did not *create* light and darkness on the first day of creation, but that light *appeared* (pp. 38-39). This is a necessary argument for Ross’s conclusions, since he believes that Genesis 1 offers us a scientifically accurate (if not exhaustive) account of the beginnings of the world. If one is to suggest that the creation of light precedes anything that might produce light, as the text seems to suggest, one has a rather significant problem. Ross solves the problem in two ways, both of which are difficult to accept.

First, Ross proposes a (to my knowledge) unique reading of Genesis 1:1-2 that involves a shift in observer perspective (pp. 28-31). He suggests that the “observer’s vantage point [in verse 2] is clearly identified as ‘the surface of the deep’ ... over the waters” (p. 31). In point of fact, the text does not identify any “observer” at all, nor is there any clear indication of a shift in “vantage point” (or of the existence of an initial “vantage point”). The entity that broods over the waters is the *rûach ‘elôhîm*, the spirit of God, and there is no indication whatsoever that this entity is narrating the account. In terms of perspective, all of Genesis 1 appears to occur from the divine perspective, or from what we would usually call a third person omniscient perspective. This

is the normal way for Hebrew storytelling to proceed. The narrating voice appears to know and see all, and reports on what occurs. There is no more an “observer” with a “vantage point” here than there is, say, in the narrative voice of the book of Ruth. The narrator is nowhere and everywhere. Ross’s suggestion of a shift in location for the “observer” is thus implausible, in no way necessary to the flow of the account, has never been proposed by another interpreter, is not clearly indicated by the grammar of the text, and is not referred to in the text specifically. Unfortunately for Ross, his entire reading of Genesis 1 hangs on this thinnest of threads.

The second way in which Ross solves the sequencing problem in Genesis 1 is by attempting to create a clear differentiation between the semantic ranges of the various verbs used in the passage. He notes correctly that several different words are used to refer to God’s activity in this passage, including *bārā’*, *hāyâ*, *’āsâ*, *nātan*, *rā’â*, and *yāšâ*. He then attempts to argue that there is a significant difference of semantic range between *bārā’* and (especially) *hāyâ* and *’āsâ*. The former, he suggests, refers to divine creation out of nothing, and the latter to the act of making something come about, and fashioning or manufacturing something (respectively). Here the source cited is the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT). This is the only lexical resource that Ross cites in the book, though he notes in the appendix that in the past he has drawn on various resources for his definitions and here he has used TWOT in order to simplify his presentation (p. 231).

There are several problems here. In the first place, while TWOT is a resource edited and produced by biblical scholars, it is of uneven quality, and it is badly out of date (it was published in 1980). Entries in TWOT did not represent the cutting edge of linguistic research into Hebrew at the time of their publication, and they most certainly do not represent current research today. With reference to the verbs in question, Ross overlooks or fails to note that many biblical scholars see these terms as being used more or less synonymously in this passage, and that over the past few years, a great deal of ink has been spilled over the semantics of *bārā’* especially (cf. Becking and Korpel, “To Create, to Separate or to Construct: An Alternative for a Recent Proposal as to the Interpretation of *bārā’* in Genesis 1:1–2:4a,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 10 [2010]; van Wolde and Rezetko, “Semantics and the Semantics of *bārā’*: A Rejoinder to the Arguments Advanced by B. Becking and M. Korpel,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 11 [2011]—and related bibliography). Even current work by scholars who accept a distinct definition/function for *bārā’* in

Genesis 1 (e.g., Walton) is absent in Ross’s discussion. Though a precise definition for the word remains, to a certain degree, a matter of debate, it is generally acknowledged that it does not refer to creation by divine decree, as TWOT would have us believe. However, for Ross, it is utterly vital to his reading that this traditional meaning of *bārā’* be maintained, and that it be placed in sharp distinction to the other verbs noted above. Ross is either ignorant of, or has chosen to ignore, the extensive scholarship available on this issue.

One of the most profoundly frustrating experiences I had while reading this book was examining the endnotes for this portion of his argument. Apart from TWOT, peer-reviewed biblical scholarship is entirely absent. I was even more profoundly frustrated when I did find references to works by relevant scholars such as Walton and van Wolde much later in the book, in reference to entirely different issues, which clearly indicated that Ross had read work that was material to this conversation, but did not engage with it.

On the subject of words, Ross also casually brushes aside the question of the meaning of the word *rāqîya`*, defining it as “expanse” (i.e., atmosphere) and not “vaulted dome” as is generally accepted among scholars (see the relevant entry in the *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*). Ross suggests that critics of this view cite Job 37:18 for support, and then pivots to dismantling an argument based upon Job. Not only does Ross fail to identify those with whom he disagrees here, but he also fails to actually engage with the question of the meaning of the specific word at hand. The word *rāqîya`* has been understood as a reference to a solid dome that covered the world since antiquity (both the Septuagint and Vulgate translate the word in this way), and this reading is consistent with all other instances of *rāqîya`* in the Old Testament as well as with cognate words in other ancient Semitic languages. Again, this reading completely derails Ross’s attempt to bring Genesis into line with modern scientific cosmology.

These are not the only linguistic infelicities Ross commits. In the same chapter, Ross engages in a foray into the problem of the verbal system of biblical Hebrew. Here he suggests that “Hebrew verbs by themselves do not specify the duration of actions. Nor do they determine the time ordering of actions. Instead, the ordering of past actions is established most straightforwardly by word order” (p. 32). The only support that Ross cites for this view is Rodney Whitefield’s *Reading Genesis One*, a self-published book written by a physicist. The verbal system of biblical Hebrew

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is a topic of immense debate within the field of biblical studies, and anybody wishing to research the topic seriously should have no difficulty at all in finding ample resources written by researchers with specific training and expertise in modern linguistics and ancient Semitic languages (e.g., Cook, *Time and the Biblical Hebrew Verb*; Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb*; Buth, "The Hebrew Verb"; Buth, "Functional Grammar, Hebrew, and Aramaic"; Endo, *The Verbal System of Classical Hebrew*; Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*; Joosten, "Do the Finite Verbal Forms ...?" – and this is to say nothing of the many beginner and technical grammars available). The fact that Ross in no way engages any of this literature while depending heavily on the conclusions of an untrained, amateur Hebraist regarding verbal syntax and semantics simply beggars belief.

In fact, apart from his use of *TWOT* and passing references to a few scholars, Ross seldom engages biblical scholarship of any kind. He does not engage current thinking about the structure, theology, and message of Genesis 1–2, or of the primeval history (chaps. 1–11) as a whole, to say nothing of the overall literary structure of the book of Genesis. Walton and van Wolde each receive the briefest of mention and are brushed aside without meaningful engagement, and well-known evangelical scholars working actively in the book of Genesis, such as John Sailhamer, receive no mention at all. This absence is felt most keenly in chapter 20, in which Ross purportedly engages "Higher Criticism." Ross's engagement with what he calls "higher criticism" (a term that belongs more to the nineteenth century than the twenty-first) is badly out of date, and is only accurate in the broadest sense of the word. Here we find statements such as the following:

Astruc, Eichhorn, and the emerging "higher critics" presumed that the order in which various creation events appear on the page represents the intended chronology in the text. For the most part, they ignored verb choice, verb forms, contextual cues, indicators of parenthetical comment, and virtually all other syntactic features. (p. 198)

No citations are provided to support this claim. First, most biblical scholars (and not merely the terrible "higher critics") do indeed read the Genesis 1 and 2 accounts as though they are presented in chronological order. For chapter 1 at least, the creation account is presented as an event proceeding in six successive days, each culminating in evening and morning. The suggestion that this somehow ignores the structure and context of the text is peculiar. Second, the suggestion that biblical scholars (whether in the seventeenth/eighteenth century such as Astruc, the

eighteenth/nineteenth century such as Eichhorn, or the nineteenth/twentieth century such as most of those who called themselves "higher critics") ignore issues such as verb choice, syntax, and context is simply false. The briefest perusal of books, commentaries, and articles on the book of Genesis disproves this absurd claim immediately. No honest engagement with critical biblical scholarship is even attempted in this chapter. What we find here is little more than a dismissive parade of straw men.

Suffice to say that I find Ross's foray into biblical scholarship in *Navigating Genesis* wanting. Ross is dismissive toward the long history of scholarship on this ancient text, constantly submits the text to his modernist eisegetical presuppositions, and does not deal honestly and openly with those with whom he disagrees. The frank truth is that I cannot recommend this book to anybody, except as a case study in concordist hermeneutics.

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## TECHNOLOGY

**INFORMATION DOESN'T WANT TO BE FREE: Laws for the Internet Age** by Cory Doctorow. San Francisco, CA: McSweeney's, 2014. 192 pages. Hardcover; \$22.00. ISBN: 9781940450285.

"Information doesn't want to be free, people do," says Internet expert and prolific author Cory Doctorow in this provocative and timely book. If this phrase leaves you still a little murky as to what his thesis is, the subtitle says it better. In short, the Internet changes everything, so let's start changing copyright laws so that they work better for people in creative fields (and use existing laws to serve creators rather than their distributors).

Doctorow proposes three main "laws" for the information revolution when it comes to creative content (writing, music, visual art, etc.). By "law," he means a universally true observation; in particular, these are his observations about the current copyright situation whose implications he believes most Americans do not fully grasp.

First, locked formats such as DVDs that you cannot play on Linux, or Kindle books that you cannot read somewhere else, are not there for the benefit of consumers or artists. Second, having fewer distribution channels and more copyright liability for intermediaries such as YouTube or Internet providers is bad for artists and consumers. Third, and most critically, a copyright system that encourages providers to have