



John R. Schneider

Article

Recent Genetic Science and Christian Theology on Human Origins: An "Aesthetic Supralapsarianism"

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Recent genomic science strongly supports the theory of common ancestry. To classical Protestants, particularly, this theory seems incompatible with Scripture, most especially with the "historical Fall," which Protestants presume to be manifestly biblical and so have cemented it securely into their confessions and theology as a whole. Nevertheless, John Schneider proposes that it is important for traditional Protestants to consider alternatives to this essentially "Augustinian" view. He invites readers to examine Eastern thinking (mainly in Irenaeus of Lyon) together with a minority of Protestants (such as Karl Barth and supralapsarian Calvinists), for whom the Incarnation and Atonement are the purpose of creation from the beginning. Their understanding differs from the execution of divine "Plan B," as implied by the Augustinian western version of an unintended "fall" from utopian first conditions. Schneider appeals to a fresh reading of the book of Job in support of an "aesthetic supralapsarianism," which sustains Protestant virtues of biblical authority, divine sovereignty, and grace, while opening avenues to compatibility with evolutionary science.

Evolutionary Science and Protestant Hermeneutics

In the last century, theologians of major Christian denominations (Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and mainline Protestantism) have managed (not without effort) to find ways of formulating Christian theology to make it compatible with the theories of modern evolution-

ary science.¹ However, scholars in conservative Protestant (evangelical and otherwise classical confessional) churches (especially in the United States) are still unsure how they could affirm the Grand Evolutionary Hypothesis (as Alvin Plantinga has named it) without compromising the biblical and confessional core of their distinct traditions.² In this article, I choose to focus on the most fundamental source of difficulty, namely, that evolutionary science seems to be in conflict with the doctrines comprised by classical Protestant teaching on the historical Fall. These doctrines are firmly embedded in major denominational confessions, and they are master threads in the logical fabric of Protestant theology as a whole. So it is difficult for faithful conservative Protestants to see how to change them

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very much at all, much less how to reformulate them in ways that would resolve conflicts with science.

The immediate occasion for writing this article is the emergence of recent *genomic* science (following the dramatic success of geneticists in mapping the human genome). When this new science becomes better known, as it soon will be, it is bound to pose even greater challenges to traditional Christian ecclesiastical and educational institutions than the ones they face already. Many genetic experts judge that the genomic evidence dramatically strengthens the theory of ancestral evolution.³ The new evidence will make it harder than it has ever been to justify the stances that now prevail among conservative Protestant churches; in addition; those religions (worldwide), which cannot at least articulate themselves plausibly as compatible with evolutionary science, may be in serious danger of losing whatever currency they have with people of science (or with people who are simply literate in science).

In this article, I explore avenues that I believe traditional Protestant Christians could take without violating the core of distinctly Protestant principles, such as commitment to the supreme authority of Scripture and the sovereignty of divine grace. However, taking these prescribed avenues will be hard for some to do, for they will have (in some instances) to abandon belief in the verbal inerrancy of Scripture, and (in all instances) they will seriously have to consider reformulations of confessional teaching on human origins, and particularly on the historical Fall. This, in turn, will demand rethinking a connected cluster of traditional Protestant teachings logically linked with other doctrines that constitute the confessional core of their institutional identities.

The warrants for my proposals in this article do not come primarily from evidence of science, even though science provides important reasons to explore them. In good Protestant fashion, the appeals in my arguments are primarily biblical, so that Protestant readers who are initially skeptical may at least entertain them, on the principle of *reformata et semper reformandum*. I would like to think that the authority of Scripture prevails overall in my interpretations and conclusions. Moreover, readers should consider these proposals as exploratory. The question they purport to answer is, what sort of genuinely Protestant theology could be compatible with the narrative of human evolution?

One source of the difficulty is that very many conservative Protestants in America have committed themselves to a distinctly Protestant kind of concordism when facing apparent conflict between the Bible and science.⁴ Concordism, generically, stands on belief in the inerrancy of the Bible: belief that every assertion of fact in the Bible is necessarily true, because every assertion originates with God, via divine inspiration. On this understanding, every human assertion in Scripture is at the same time the “incarnation” of God’s assertion.⁵ And on this understanding of divine revelation as mediated by inspiration and inerrancy, it follows that for any true assertion in science (or for any true assertion at all), no logical conflict *can* exist between it and *any* assertion of Scripture. In other words, it is necessarily true that positive concord exists between all true statements of science and all statements in Scripture, rightly understood – hence the term, “concordism.”

For concordists, then, in the event that conflict between science and Scripture *seems* to exist, it follows that at least one of the two – the *science*, or the *reading* of Scripture – is mistaken. Now, this logic poses a first-rate problem for Protestant Christians in engaging *theoretical* science. In the instance of a theory of science that is still by definition “unproven,” but has presumed currency in science, and also is in conflict with the presumed reading of Scripture, there is no sure-fire rule for knowing where the default probability lies for either the science or the reading. It becomes a matter of evidence, and that becomes a matter of expertise in both science and the relevant text. Even so, disputes are bound to break out over assessments of the evidence.⁶ How Christians go about deciding which end of the epistemic and hermeneutical “stick” to pick up in such instances, exposes very deep theological dispositions that are notoriously hard to assess as mere matters of evidence. Catholic and Protestant scholars display considerably different deep epistemic and hermeneutical values and habits that lead to quite different initial epistemic judgments, assessments, and formulations of conclusions.

Both Catholic and Protestant scholars faced exactly this problem during the midphase of the Copernican controversy. It is instructive to see how their subtly different epistemic and hermeneutical values and dispositions (especially on interrelationships between Scripture, tradition, and reason) eventually led to similar conclusions, and yet left them in quite differ-

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ent positions for engaging the Darwinian controversy that was to come.⁷ I think it may be instructive to consider this point in more detail before going to the main body of this article.

For Catholic scholars, concordism had been the unofficial rule for facing apparent conflicts between Scripture and natural science since the time of Augustine (354–430) and afterwards. In his great commentary on the “literal sense” of Genesis (*Genesis Taken Literally*), Augustine established (contrary to the majority of eastern theologians) the teaching that the *literal* human propositions of Scripture were all products of verbal divine revelation, and therefore literally true.⁸ In saying this, though, he was greatly concerned to avoid intellectually embarrassing and ignorant applications, such as the “flat-earth creationism” that had apparently become something of a popular movement among the unlettered Christian populace. These “flat-earth” (or, if you wish, “solid-ceiling”) creationists apparently read Genesis simply and (so they believed) literally to teach that the earth is a flat disk resting on an ocean and covered by a solid ceiling, or dome, that protects it from a second ocean up above. (We will notice the irony of this “ignorance” in a moment.) They used the Bible (mainly Gen. 1:6–8) to proclaim the superiority of *revealed* cosmology over *pagan* Greek teaching, which was that the earth was a sphere, and that the heavens could not be an ordinary solid, as the Bible said. Augustine knew that the Greek theory was almost certainly right, and he judged that these Christians were unwittingly conferring their own ignorance on sacred Scripture, and bringing disgrace to the Gospel itself.⁹

The situation Augustine faced stands in almost direct parallel with our own contemporary promoters of “young-earth creationism,” which is the most extreme kind of Protestant concordism in its assignment of default probabilities to their simple reading of Scripture and the offending evidence of science. Both Christian scientists and biblical scholars have very ably and thoroughly discredited young-earth creationism in its approach to science, on the one hand, and Scripture (mainly Genesis), on the other.¹⁰ So despite its immense popular influence, I choose not to engage young-earth creationism in detail in this article.¹¹

As for Augustine, he pleaded for a more learned and sophisticated approach to both Genesis and to

science—so far as I can tell his was the first formulation of a “rule” for concordism that has endured for centuries in the West.

When they are able, from reliable evidence, to prove some fact of physical science, we shall show that it is not contrary to our Scripture. But when they produce from any of their books a theory contrary to Scripture, and therefore contrary to the Catholic faith, either we shall have some ability to demonstrate that it is absolutely false, or at least we ourselves will hold it so without any shadow of a doubt.¹²

This was, in essence, the “rule” that Catholics took with them into the great debates over Copernican science a thousand years later.

The main trouble for Catholic authorities at the highest levels of science and theology was not a too-simple hermeneutical biblicism, or a scientific skepticism, as it was for some notable Protestants (such as Martin Luther himself, and perhaps also John Calvin).¹³ The source of trouble, rather, was what had become by then an overwhelming traditionalism that was integrated with an extremely high (Augustinian) respect for reason as embodied in human science. It was almost unthinkable to most of the leading Catholic authorities that the entire *consensus patrum*, going back through Aquinas to Augustine, and taken together with the great Aristotle, should turn out to be *completely* mistaken on a subject of such magnitude as cosmology. The setting was, of course, framed by enormous concern with challenges to tradition on all sorts of things by Protestants, and so the old church mainly dug in—for them, the timing of Copernicus was about as bad as it could be.¹⁴ The Roman Church naturally had huge investments in both this rendering of the faith and that articulation of human reason as the synthetic context for asserting authoritative teaching in both theology and science. Of course, the accumulation of evidence eventually left them with no choice but to abandon Aristotle’s geocentric science, to wipe the egg off their faces (which took awhile), and then to adopt the phenomenological reading of Scripture on cosmology (as Galileo had, for a long time, recommended that they do).¹⁵

The good news for Catholicism was (is) that they emerged from the controversy with their traditionalism properly chastened, and with a better sense of the fragility of particular traditions; at the same time,

the historic high regard for reason and respect for science endured, but in a more hermeneutically guarded form than in previous, more triumphal synthetic renderings. It took time, of course, but Catholicism eventually used these hermeneutical resources to achieve two things that have been crucial to their impressive intellectual and cultural success in engaging evolutionary science this past century. First, they were finally able (especially after Vatican II) to embrace discoveries of historical criticism which revealed the *antiquity* of the “science” contained in Scripture (another irony: the flat-earth creationists had been right, and Augustine had been wrong about the literal sense of the Genesis text).¹⁶ Second, in that light, they were able to maneuver hermeneutically to soften the implications of inerrancy and papal infallibility, and thereby to become more flexible than they had been (especially after the Council of Trent) in rethinking certain interpretive traditions (so as not to repeat mistakes made in the past), such as readings of Genesis 1–3. Currently, as we shall see, Catholic scholars are now helping to lead the way to rethinking the doctrines of a historical Fall and original sin in the light of recent genomic science.

In contrast, Protestantism was very young when Copernicus published his theory in 1543, and Protestants had no investment in the *consensus patrum*; in fact, they had a vested interest in seeing it fail. However, they did have nascent hermeneutical ground principles that disposed some influential leaders (such as Luther) to scoff at Copernican theory: *sola scriptura* was coupled with the intuitive principle of biblical *perspicuitas*, or “perspicuity,” which naturally encouraged the simpler geocentric reading of texts, and discouraged confidence in the new science.¹⁷ Nevertheless, some leading Protestant theologians knew their science (notably, Philip Melancthon) and from early on in their universities, they supported the work of fellow Protestant astronomers (such as Caspar Peucer at Wittenberg and Johannes Kepler at Tübingen).¹⁸ It was not a very difficult thing for them to keep their principles of concordism and distinctive Protestant hermeneutics intact while taking the key texts in question as phenomenological rather than as literally factual.

The hermeneutical tables, however, have now turned. This distinctively Protestant concordism and its hermeneutical intuitions led all the Protestant churches quite quickly to enshrine the Augustinian

reading of Genesis in their confessions, as if it were simply and perspicuously read from Scripture, and not a matter of interpretation and tradition. The bold motto of the young Reformation was *reformata et semper reformanda*, and that slogan could be a valuable source of flexibility in making changes today; however, distinctly Protestant practice has cemented the historical Fall into the foundations of confessional doctrine and theology, so that it has become a sort of Protestant *consensus patrum*, and it is very hard for faithful Protestants to imagine that it could be significantly wrong. This instinctive judgment, also, naturally lowers the default degrees of probability that they are disposed to assign to the evidence for human evolution (presumed to be in glaring conflict with the default reading of Genesis on human origins).¹⁹

Especially when reinforced by a doctrine of biblical inerrancy, distinctly Protestant hermeneutical principles of *sola scriptura* and biblical *perspicuitas* combine (under the nearly unconscious influence of Augustinian authority in the West) to make it seem obvious that our classical (western) reading and theology of Genesis 1–3 is as securely biblical as it can be, and the tendency to put the issue beyond dispute is very strong. Meanwhile, since there is no lock-grip proof for the theory of ancestral human evolution, fence-sitting, or even outright skepticism, seems warranted. Of course, in this instance, the closer the evidence comes to the level of confirmation, or demonstration, in the minds of scientists, the nearer conservative Protestantism comes to the brink of crisis—very similar to the one Catholicism faced in the 1600s. We must wonder whether traditional Protestantism emerged from the Copernican controversy with the intellectual resources necessary for meeting the challenge as well as Catholic theologians have done.

In the West, the Augustinian legacy of presumed biblical inerrancy led naturally to establishing a doctrine of the historical Fall on the basis of Genesis 2–3, as understood in the light of (mainly) Romans 5, and to teaching a doctrine of original sin. When I use the phrase “historical Fall,” it will henceforth be shorthand for the doctrine that affirms this account of human origins, or something like it: that God originally created a first pair of human beings, positioned them in idyllic spiritual and moral conditions, so that when deliberately subjected to temptation, they were genuinely free to obey God or not. They freely chose not to obey God, and as a consequence, they

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“fell” from these utopian beginnings, so that they and all their descendants, by heredity, became mortal, and enslaved from birth to a natural desire to embrace their disobedience (sin). Finally, somehow, their disobedience brought about a “Fall” for the cosmos and nature, too. We may refer to this account, as Milton famously did, as the story of a “Paradise Lost.” On this understanding of beginnings, redemption through Christ entails “Paradise Regained.”

All conservative Protestant denominations have enshrined the historical Fall, officially or unofficially, in their confessions, catechisms, and dogmatic expositions of the faith. The doctrine seems to them as securely biblical as it could be (even if we allow for symbolic representation of the facts in the Genesis story, as many do). On inerrancy, which many conservative Protestants apply to the doctrine, all avenues leading to a critique of the biblical story seem closed off, and on perspicuity, no alternative reading of the story (and the relevant other texts on Adam and Eve) seems plausible. The elementary facts of the Genesis story narrate a historical Fall.²⁰ Within these constraints, Protestant scholars have labored in good faith to find ways of rendering the Genesis text compatible with the science of an ancient cosmos and Earth, with a very long history of species and human race, and with a variety of things that seem to be in conflict with science (daylight prior to the sun, predation, labor pains, and thistles, all following the human Fall).²¹

One may take these efforts to be too labored, to the point of being tortured and strained, but at least they manage to respect the most certain evidence of science while maintaining the core teachings of Protestantism. However, it is very hard to see how similar techniques can render classical Protestant faith compatible with ancestral evolution (especially as framed by the new genomic science, as we shall soon see), since it seems to discredit the essential facts of a historical Fall.

Furthermore, the Genesis story has another extremely important role to play, not only in Protestant theology, but also in western Christian theology: it frames Christian “theodicy,” or defense of God against the charge that God is the responsible cause of evil. In the Augustinian version of the historical Fall, the purpose is to exonerate God from this charge, and to pin all the blame on creatures—demonic and

human. As we will see, the narrative of human evolution makes it very hard, if not impossible, to maintain this position and its approach to theodicy. For it seems, on this science, that not just *natural* evils, such as animal suffering and violent episodes in nature, but also the disposition for human *moral* evils, are practically part of God’s original design.

Evolutionary Science and the Hermeneutics of Scripture

The newest genomic research creates some new points of conflict with Scripture, as enshrined in conservative Protestant tradition, and it amplifies some old and familiar ones.²² For supporters of biblical inerrancy, the recent genomic mathematical calculations of Francisco Ayala pose a conspicuous problem. In his reckoning, the genetic diversity in the existing population of human beings could not have been the legacy of descent from a single human pair, even allowing for 100,000–200,000 years. The computation requires between 1,000 pairs at a minimum, and probably more like 20,000 “bottle-necked” first human ancestors, showing up in northern parts of Africa. In other words, “polygenism” (we have many first human ancestors) has displaced “monogenism” (the idea that we have just one pair of ancestors) in recent genetics studies of human origins.²³

Obviously, this new science intensifies the Christian hermeneutical debate over the biblical story of Adam and Eve. This point of conflict can be readily resolved, however, by making use of the rich resources supplied by historical criticism that enable us to place the text of Genesis pretty ably in its own historical context and to read it in its own ancient terms. We may think that the writer of Genesis deliberately used Adam and Eve as literary types that represented the first human beings symbolically, in which instance, we can simply stretch the symbolism to include the original colonies of our ancestors, to be compatible with polygenism. This hermeneutical strategy will probably require giving up concordism and its principled inerrancy, however, because it seems unlikely that Paul (or Luke) in the New Testament understood biblical Adam in this symbolic way.

Jack Collins provides an extremely thorough exegetical case for supposing that this last suspicion is correct.²⁴ Unfortunately (in my opinion), he does not infer from this the invalidation of concordism and

inerrancy, but instead resists historical-critical strategies and implies, at least, that this science must be false. In contrast, Daniel Harlow provides a superb explanation of how this historical-critical strategy might be executed faithfully by Christians who affirm the divine inspiration of Scripture.²⁵ The mere fact that Paul thought Adam, like Abraham, was a specific person by that name does not necessarily mean that we should have that belief (widely held by first-century Jews) now.

A second historical-critical strategy for resolving the conflict with polygenism is somewhat more critical (and, for conservative Protestants, controversial). It is to think that the writer of Genesis has created the figures of Adam and Eve by logical and imaginary extrapolation, or by a sort of “first-cause” fictional-historical deduction, that he placed them quite naturally in his own geographical location (where, so far as he knew, history began), that he gave them typological names, and that he then used these imagined historical figures to promote his distinctly Hebrew and anti-Babylonian theology. Denis Lamoureux recommends something similar to this explanation, and I strongly suspect that it is right, but I choose not to defend that suspicion at any length for now.²⁶

I wish, rather, to focus here, and in the rest of this article, on matters of conflict between genomic evolutionary science and Christianity’s standard western teaching on origins that cannot be resolved *hermeneutically*, but can only be resolved *theologically*, i.e., by revising what has become the quasi-orthodox Augustinian *theology* of origins as enshrined in Protestant confessions, as embedded in Protestant systematic theology, and as employed at crucial points in important Christian theodicy. At the core of this theology of origins is the doctrine of a historical Fall, as just defined.

Evolutionary Science and Christian Theology

One part of this conflict between evolutionary science and the Christian doctrine of a historical Fall is old hat by now, and the new genomic science merely intensifies the problem at a microgenetic level. It is that Genesis and premodern Christian tradition attribute quite a list of unpleasant and peculiar things in *nature* to the occurrence of a historical Fall of human beings. The trouble is that paleoscience overwhelmingly

proves that labor pains, the locomotion of snakes, predation, deadly diseases, mass extinction, thorn plants and weeds, and violent natural events existed for millennia before the existence of the first humans. Thus, they cannot be the consequence of a “curse” that God placed on the creation as punishment for human sin. Furthermore, the genomic sequence-data expose a fascinating, if otherwise grim, history of viruses that have left “scars” in human and animal DNA.²⁷

Concordists have never been able to resolve this conflict between the Bible and science on the order of nature with their hermeneutics of inerrancy. Young-earth creationists, of course, defiantly refuse to embrace the overwhelming evidence of the science supporting an ancient cosmos with this history. Progressive creationists (particularly the inerrantists among them) selectively accept the science, but have to wonder how to make it compatible with the sequence of events in Genesis.²⁸ At any rate, it seems that they somewhat artificially separate the problem of *natural* disorder from the more theologically essential matter of human *moral* disorder and human sin, leading to human death. Ken Ham, who is the leading figure now in young-earth creationism, correctly observes that there is something disintegrated in abandoning the Genesis “cosmic Fall” on evidence of science, but then resisting science on human origins on evidence of Genesis.²⁹ The situation calls for a better-integrated approach that (unlike Ken Ham’s) can stand serious scrutiny on all the scientific and biblical evidence.

As for the genetic “maps,” Dennis Venema provides a clear summary of mathematical lines of evidence, all of which strongly support the theory of common ancestry.³⁰ Meanwhile, together with these new genetic computations, recent studies of animal behavior present startling new discoveries of animal “moral” behavior. Among other things, these studies show that “practically all of the overt acts regarded as ‘sinful’ in humans are part of the normal, natural repertoire of behavior in other species.”³¹ We cannot go very far into Daryl Domning’s fascinating summary of research by Jane Goodall, S. B. Hrdy, Craig Packer, and others on primates and other animal species, without noting the unexpected extent of the similarities between the “immoral” actions of animals and humans. Animals engage in deception, murder (even serial killings), infanticide, bullying, and so forth. Insects come into play, too. It seems

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that even ants—widely known for their cooperation as colonies—on closer inspection, also engage in a litany of antisocial actions: family quarrels, theft, street muggings, premeditated murder, and slavery, to name a selected few.³²

The main point is that recent phylogenetic or cladistic analysis convinces many genetic experts that these detailed similarities of self-serving behaviors can hardly be coincidental—they look like a genetic legacy that has been passed on from one species to the next, including to our own. Domning endorses this as, by far, the best explanation: “The selfish acts of humans are *homologous*; that is, similar because derived from a common source.”³³ And in any event (so we add, lest one resist that explanation), the traits are *genetically* common to every individual in all animal species. As members of a species, we are programmed, as it were, or powerfully disposed, to engage in our own genetic self-interest and advantage. We need not endorse the theory of common ancestry in order to respect the force of all this evidence and to begin pondering its implications for theology.

It should be noted that geneticists observe, too, that we also share with animals “virtuous” traits involving love, genuine sympathy, and care. If this is selfishness, it proves that selfishness is the source of not only vice, but also virtue. If animals engage in genuinely unselfish acts—disinterested in the general survival of their own germinal DNA—then that is extremely interesting, to be sure.³⁴ It is nevertheless clear that many animal “virtues” show self-interest in a manner that benefits other nonmembers of the species, too. Domning calls this behavior “amoral selfishness.”³⁵ As for deliberative human altruism (if there really is such a thing), it requires, writes Domning, “an intellect and will of a caliber that does not and cannot exist in the simplest life forms.”³⁶ The clear implication of the science is that, at the dawn of human consciousness and its moral awareness and capacities for such virtue, altruism was the challenge for humanity in the future, not the original primal condition of human beings in the past.

The bottom line is that if the first human beings evolved genetically this way, then it is very hard to see how they could have originated in conditions of original righteousness, as required by Augustinian theology, for they would have inherited powerful

natural dispositions toward selfish actions. Moral freedom and the will to resist or redirect those dispositions toward unselfish actions surely presupposes time for cultivating a nascent moral awareness, and for building character through a history of personal and social discipline. Even if we assume that we are talking about *Homo sapiens* and not some other hominid species with “soulful behaviors” (as Ralph Stearley has called them), even considering their superior cranial capacity and commensurate moral awareness and freedom from mere animal biology, the first modern humans would have faced extremely difficult internal and external moral circumstances, to say the least.³⁷ And even if we imagine that God strangely broke his policy of nonintervention and interrupted the moral voice of nature with an explicit command, what sort of command could that have been? The immature, biologically driven, intellectually naive and confused creatures (still trying to figure out the most basic realities of the world—who they were, what the world was about, what the meaning of life and moral experience was) would have had quite a time making sense of divine moral discourse and conforming immediately to all its unnatural demands. It would seem that the Creator had deliberately stacked the moral deck against them. Did God then expect these beginners at the moral game to play a winning hand, and bet the entire future of the creation that they would win, as Augustinian theology on the Fall would have us believe? Surely God knew better.

In Western tradition, in order to make the story morally plausible, some medieval theologians inflated Adam into a sort of spiritual and moral *Übermensch*; at any rate, all classical Protestant confessions stress that the first parents were created perfectly upright, leaving their act of disobedience without excuse.³⁸ In that light, influential contemporary Protestant writers presume that the world that came about in consequence of the original sin is “not the way it’s supposed to be.”³⁹ Entire Protestant college curricula are built uncritically upon these questionable Augustinian foundations.⁴⁰

Major eastern theologians, however, read the Genesis story quite differently than Augustine did and western theologians have mostly done. And even in western Protestantism, there are notable exceptions, as we will see. The great Irenaeus of Lyon (d. c. 200 CE), for instance, apparently did not think it plausible that the Fall was the outcome of

an experiment that might well have gone the other way, and which foiled God's original plan, forcing God to adopt an inferior "Plan B," including the Incarnation and death of Christ. It seemed entirely implausible to Irenaeus that God could fail that way in the first place, or that in the fullness of his knowledge, power, and love, that God did not *always* plan to create the best world possible in and through the saving triumph of Jesus Christ. For Irenaeus and other eastern theologians, then and now, the Incarnation and the Cross together compose the purpose of creation from the beginning.⁴¹

This understanding, of course, entails that the Fall was not an accident of human libertarian history, but was part of "Plan A" in the foreknowledge and purpose of God to begin with. Irenaeus read the Genesis text theologically, rather than just literally, on this matter: Adam and Eve were juvenile innocents, no match for the seductions of the serpent (as God well knew when he chose to leave them alone with it—to what end?). Their pity would be the world's loss, but greater gain, as in the strange irony of the Latin Easter Vigil, "O happy fault, that merited so great a Redeemer!"⁴²

In Protestantism, certain Calvinists known as "supralapsarians" (more on this term in the last section) pondered these mysteries in the context of divine sovereignty and predestination, and they read many New Testament texts to mean that election in Christ logically preceded creation and the Fall.⁴³ More recently, the great Karl Barth gave impressive Christological form to this otherwise strained Calvinistic notion—that God decreed the election of *some* human beings prior to creation, implying that the only divine purpose for creating all the others was to afflict them with eternal damnation. Barth stressed that God elected the *world* in Jesus Christ from "the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). In Christ, and especially on the cross, the hidden will of God is revealed: God is the "electing God," who justly takes the sins of the world upon himself, and (justly) mercifully extends grace to all creatures and persons. It is fitting, is it not, for the God who subjected all human beings to sin in the first place, to extend mercy to all human beings in that self-sacrificial way (Rom. 11:32).

On the cosmic level, an advantage of this Christological understanding is that it also provides a framework for integrating science and theology on

the origins and history of unpleasant, destructive, painful, and deadly disorders in nature. These natural conditions fit with the presumed divine purpose, which is to *bring* human beings and the entire creation into maturity and perfection, via triumph—not just to make them that way at the beginning. A world forged on the anvil of difficulties and through triumph is better than a world that merely flourishes in unbroken bliss. George Murphy, who is an Episcopalian theologian of science, writing in support of this teleological-Christological approach to creation in the context of science, puts the matter eloquently:

Our picture of creation is then not one of static perfection but of divine activity in the dynamic universe, which the physical and biological sciences disclose to us. God intended time and history, and the final state of things will not be just a return to the initial state. In that consummation of history, there is indeed the tree of life (Rev. 22:2) but in the midst of a city, into which people have brought "the glory and the honor of the nations," everything good accomplished in human history.⁴⁴

What of Eden, then? In Barth's understanding, Eden (which means "delight") is an almost necessary element of any origin myth—the lost Golden Age—that cannot serve our purposes in modern paleology, and, for sound Irenaean reasons of theology, cannot be a literal description of how things really were in the primal human past. Eden reveals the beginning of God's vision for the world, and for human beings, as to be consummated not in Adam, but in still-superior form through re-creation in the image of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:11-16). Christ is to biblical Adam what the "new heaven and new earth" will be to biblical Eden.

This subject leads naturally to our last one: Christian theodicy. But before going ahead, I would like to make two very brief points on the implications of evolutionary science for theology on the doctrine of the Fall.

One of them is in response to the objection that, without a historical Fall, the need for a savior disappears. As George Murphy observes, this argument fails, simply because the need for a savior arises from the reality that all people are in need of redemption from a nature of sin and the conditions of sin and death.⁴⁵ If recent theories of evolution confirm any element of Christian theology, it is that all

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human beings are disposed by nature to be excessively self-serving, and while we can improve our moral condition through deliberate discipline, our efforts to be set free from powers of selfish desire are futile. Domning devotes the main argument of his book to making just this point, which, by the way, is a fresh way of helping to prevent Christianity from committing new forms of the Pelagian heresy that are reappearing in some modern formulations of original sin. Domning's doctrine of "original selfishness" guarantees that all human beings are disposed to commit sin from birth, and they begin to deal subjectively and morally with it at the dawn of self-awareness. In self-awareness, human beings begin facing and making moral decisions, but never in the context of complete moral freedom, or perfection. By locating the disposition to sin in human nature, he preserves the essential intuition of original sin much more securely than do Monika Hellwig or Piet Schoonenberg with their "semi-Pelagian" sorts of environmental and cultural explanations.⁴⁶

The second point is about divine grace, atonement, forgiveness, and reconciliation of the world with God through Christ. As suggested above, in this Christological and teleological understanding of creation, one does not depict God as a sort of unwitting, overly optimistic experimenter, whose greatest and best creature unexpectedly and disastrously goes bad (a sort of Frankenstein story, only with Noah there to save the day). In the alternative account, God's creatures are more like pitiful sheep that have gone astray, in the way that sheep do, as every good shepherd knows. Or we are more like juveniles who cannot but misbehave, as all good mothers and fathers know their growing children will. Wise parents are not taken aback by these misdoings. If they love their children, they will take offenses with due gravity, they will exact reparation when necessary, and they will demand and encourage correction and so forth. But all these actions are framed by a love that diffuses blame into grace for fragile beings—we can only imagine the love and grace of God for his own fragile creatures. I do not at all mean to remove human responsibility and blame, but the Irenaean sort of picture shifts the burden in a manner commensurate with the grace God extends on the Cross (taking it all upon himself) and with Jesus' promise that his "yoke is light." These intuitions about grace have very important implications for Christian thinking on the matter of

eternal damnation, which is very hard to integrate well into theology as integrated with evolutionary science, and is also very difficult, if not impossible, to sustain within successful Christian theodicy.

Evolutionary Science and Christian Theodicy

The doctrine of a historical Fall is not just a master thread in the fabric of western Christian theology, as observed in the first section; this doctrine also provides the crucial metaphysical framework for important versions of Christian theodicy, notably the free will defense made famous by Alvin Plantinga, and also employed by many writers going back at least to Augustine.⁴⁷ In the last few years, the list of publications on the implications of evolutionary science for Christian theodicy has become fairly long, and it is growing still.⁴⁸ The problem that evolutionary science forces to the surface for theodicy of the free will defense kind is that this science makes God the deliberate and responsible agent of some natural and human moral evils (even adjusting the agency and moral responsibility to whatever degree of genuine moral freedom and responsibility that human creatures may variously have). For instance, C. S. Lewis made the argument that natural disorder was fitting for the larger purpose of preserving human freedom, so that people would not be coddled into belief, but challenged to exert saving faith.⁴⁹ On the evolutionary view (and on Irenaeus's and Barth's Christological view), this scenario seems implausible: does God deliberately leave immature, vulnerable creatures to contend with confusing, terrifying, and deadly things in order to encourage trust that God cares deeply about them?

In any event, if that were the plan, it failed—the experience of nature almost universally produced polytheism and rituals to allay fears and to influence divine powers, frequently in the extreme practice of human sacrifice. When Paul writes in Romans that virtually the entire pagan world from the very beginning of creation refused the true God and exchanged true religion for idolatry (Romans 1), one may justly wonder why the true God did not change course and amplify the "voice" of God's glory that nature supposedly declares (Psalm 19). And evolutionary science intensifies (Eastern) objections just raised about the theology of Genesis taken literally: God

inexplicably wanders off, purposely leaving moral novices alone in Eden with a master con artist who was out to wreck them and everything else God cared about, and then God wanders back only to seem shocked at what they had done, giving a good scolding, cursing the earth, taking away the serpents' larynx and legs, and eventually wringing his hands in regret that he had made humans, and (literally) drowning his sorrows by washing most of them away.

The subject of evolution, natural evils (especially animal pain), and Christian theodicy has grown into a fairly advanced, wide-ranging discussion and disputation, and we cannot possibly explore its various angles and complexities in this article.⁵⁰ The core of the question is how to think about biblical texts that seem to depict the cosmos as somehow fallen, and one day to be redeemed. Genesis 3 and Romans 8 are the primary points of reference. The Genesis text pretty clearly attributes an index of things deemed evils or disorders to the disobedience of the first creatures. The Romans text does not explicitly identify the cause, although it does name God as the one who "subjected" creation to the curse, and stresses that through Christ's true humanity, creation will be set free. In the book of Revelation, the writer takes up the vision of a new creation from the late Isaiah, and depicts this "new heaven and new earth" as continuous with the old creation and yet brought to completion and perfection.

In the last section of this article, I wish to use the book of Job as a means of thinking biblically about the creation as fallen and redeemed in a manner compatible more with Eastern theology and evolutionary science than with Augustinian western tradition. It seems to me that Job (and Wisdom teaching generally) purposefully corrects the simplistic theodicy of Genesis 2-3, or at least forces a more complex "literal" reading of that story than the one Augustine and many others since have given. As Barth has shown, there is some justification for seeing the original creation of Genesis 1, and even also Eden in Genesis 2-3, as unperfected work, and this may well disclose the artistry of a later hand in the last composition by someone who was made uncomfortable by the crude theology of the original, and so may have changed it in ways more compatible with the theology of Wisdom.⁵¹ In this light, the simple theodicy at the end is made ambiguous at best, by riddles planted in the last version of the text (the

lingering dark, the seas, the serpent as God's strange "crafty" creature in the Garden, for instance).

In *Original Selfishness*, Domning turns to the book of Job to see if it might answer our evolutionary question in some fashion, but he concludes that it does not. In Domning's view, Job exemplifies ancient humanity's vexation at the experience of morally inexplicable suffering (the subject of Job). He accepts the widespread reading of Job, which is that at the end, God shows up—finally—and bawls Job out for impudence. Who does Job think he is to challenge the great and powerful God? Job rightly grasps that the only explanation for *these* evils is that God deliberately caused them, but the ending of the book proves that no answer was forthcoming except that "God is God." Evolutionary science has at last answered Job's (and our) question: "God stands revealed, not as an arbitrary tyrant, but as a solicitous and empathetic parent who acknowledges, however regretfully, that children cannot be entirely spared the pains of life."⁵² In Domning's scientific "theodicy," these disorders are simply "inherent in the existence of a physical and moral universe."⁵³ The theodicy is that to create a real physical universe, these sorts of sufferings were inevitable, even for God.⁵⁴

For now, I choose to ignore the questions that this assertion raises, such as the "options" that would be available to an omniscient and omnipotent being, and how the "new heaven and earth," lacking these sufferings, is eventually possible. Instead, I wish to focus on the theology of God and evil in Job, and provide an interpretation quite opposed to Domning's and others' on God's supposed authoritarian nonanswer. I do not think that evolutionary science corrects Job, but that the book contains a generally neglected theology that can help Christians engage evolutionary science constructively. If so, Protestant intuitions about the authority and modern relevance of Scripture endure in a way that they do not in Domning's (Catholic) rendering, in which scientific reason mainly (not only) controls articulation of the faith.

I assume (with most scholars) that the book of Job belongs with Israel's Wisdom Literature, and that it enshrines very late—most probably post-exilic—views that had developed over time, and which in important respects stood (and still stand) to correct oversimplification in the metaphysics of earlier

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Hebrew teaching in the so-called Deuteronomic era. I do not think that my argument depends in any crucial way on this assumption, however.⁵⁵ My proposal generally is that Job enshrines very serious corrections of the simpler, more cut-and-dried theodicy that Genesis 2–3 seems to convey—explaining every disorder (including pain in childbirth, weeds, sweat in toil, and the weird locomotion of snakes) in God’s interest as “not the way it’s supposed to be.” In Job, this explanation is exposed (ironically) as imputing weakness and perhaps incompetence to God (omnipotence is one thing Job never budges from), and (ironically) damaging, or even destroying the grounds of faith for people whose sufferings are genuinely unjust, and so cannot be extricated from the sovereign agency of God. The truth of Job is terrifying, to be sure, but a great deal more worthy of hope than any of its denials (voiced by Job’s “friends”). My comments abbreviate a longer published essay of mine on Job and the problem of God and evil.⁵⁶

As everyone involved in Job studies knows, the poetic speeches of God at the end are the keys to understanding the book as a whole. Recent scholarship proves that the poetry takes up a very old symbolic tradition in its theology about God’s victory (in creation and exodus) and mastery (via the Law) over the enigmatic sea monsters of chaos—Behemoth and Leviathan. The poet of Job, however, does something that is unexpected and remarkably new in the context of that theology and its symbolism. In a masterly discussion, Carol Newsom shows convincingly that the speeches of Job do not merely reclaim this tradition and throw it back at people with Job’s question. This would make God say something hardly worth saying: “Who are you to question me? I have everything under control, and I know how to bring everything into control in the end. Your job isn’t to question or challenge me, but to have faith. So forget the question, and believe.” This, of course, is exactly what many commentators on Job (including Domning) believe that God, in essence, did say.⁵⁷

On Job 38:11 and the imagery of the sea as a realm of hostility and chaos, Newsom agrees that it does portray the sea traditionally as “aggressive, ‘bursting out,’ and threatening to exceed its place.”⁵⁸ But then she comments,

This pericope radically departs from traditional imagery, however, in that it does not cast the

sea as God’s opponent in battle (cf. Ps. 74:13–14; 89:10–14; Isa. 51:9–10; *Enuma Elish IV*), but instead represents God as midwife who births the sea and wraps it in the swaddling bands of darkness and cloud.⁵⁹

The change is remarkable: “Here the chaotic waters of the sea are represented not only as the object of divine limitation *but also care*.”⁶⁰ The same is true of the imagery that follows: animals weird and wild now become subjects of beauty and ugly horror together, such as the vultures cleaning up human corpses on a field of battle—God’s way of enabling them to provide food for their nestlings.⁶¹

Here is the point: the poetic technique “seems unnervingly to place God in considerable sympathy with the emblems of the chaotic.”⁶² The poetry shatters the quaintly clean theodicy of earlier times, as conveyed by Genesis 1–3 and by the older Deuteronomic tradition of divine triumph over these powers via the Law—a sort of old Hebrew version of the modern prosperity gospel: get right with God, and God will get right with you—no room for chaos in God’s world.

The last speeches on the great monsters Behemoth and Leviathan remove all doubt that the poet indeed braves blasphemy. Newsom deserves wholehearted agreement on the meaning of these monsters:

Although they are unquestionably creatures of God (40:15; 41:25–26; cf. Ps. 104:26), they partake of the primordial (Behemoth, 40:15) and the mythical (Leviathan, 41:10–17) ... More emphatically, than the wild animals of chapters 38 and 39, they manifest the alien Other, with the terror of the chaotic present in their very being.⁶³

Good reasons exist for linking them together with the chaos dragon of myth in the Ancient Near East now converted by Israel into a sort of “demonology.”⁶⁴ By the end of the book, Newsom writes, “Three characters dominate the scene: Job, God, and Leviathan. The crucial hermeneutical task posed by the images is to discern the relationships among them.”⁶⁵

The temptation is to read the chapters as God reading Job “the riot act,” by reminding him none too gently of the old “victory tradition,” in which God has wrecked the monster, killed it, cut it into pieces, and locked it up in the sea. This reading would support a common interpretation of Job: God asserts his power over everything and Job is

put in his place. But “things are not so simple.”⁶⁶ In context, it is shocking that God speaks of these creatures not so much as enemies, but “with evident admiration.”⁶⁷ God even identifies with them in their wild, undomesticated (except by God) qualities and powers. What theology is this, then, that even the winds and seas *obey* him, we might ask?

There is not space to consider Newsom’s own provocative proposals on the theology of Job as tragic, and so, as a breaking down almost entirely of Israel’s tradition of unmixed divine triumph over evil.⁶⁸ In my view, the old theology of divine victory remains, but in a fresh form—one that has implications for our doctrines of creation, the Fall, original sin, and the nature of redemption on just about every level.

The essence of the theology in Job on God and theodicy is this: a great many things that people previously believed came about through human sin, did not come about that way. They came about by the creative-destructive will of God. The disorder of the world—even grotesque injustice—exists because, in a sense that only poets dare describe, while God does not approve the injustice that exists, God strangely does approve the world in which, as a matter of *fact*, the injustice exists, and in the way of liberating that world, God sometimes mysteriously does cause injustices to occur. In other words, Job has been right all along: it is *God* who slays him, and ultimately none other.⁶⁹

It is deliberate and important that the Job poet brings God into the scene in the vortex of a violent wind storm—it is not a harmless “whirlwind,” as the old translations say. It is a tornado—the most powerful and intensely unpredictable, violent, terrifying, and destructive force of weather on Earth. God speaks from within (and not against) that chaotic force. God is completely calm in the storm. God is master of Leviathan and the storm.

In my view, this is what Job “sees,” and this is what causes him to withdraw his question and to repent in “dust and ashes.” Job does not get (nor do we get) an explanation for *why* God has done these unfair things to him.⁷⁰ He also gets no explanation as to *how* God might put these evils right, “defeat” them, as it were, by integrating them in all their disorder and ugliness into a perfectly ordered and beautiful plan (although this eventual victory of God is still embedded in the tradition the poet shapes).⁷¹

What Job does “see” is that God is in complete command and mastery—he sees in a “second-person” sense what cannot be explained to him in “third-person” terms, apparently.⁷² He is able to see now with his own eyes (as it were) that God has “rightfully,” or “justly,” and not immorally or amorally, decided to make and to shape the world (and in microcosm, his own life) in this unexpected, undeserved, and painful way, including inexplicably great violence, disorder, suffering, and injustice. He sees in this nondidactic way that God is the sort of Being who knows exactly what he is doing and why, and that despite appearances, God is completely in control of the otherwise uncontrollable, chaotic situation. Seeing things thus, Job requires no further explanation, he “repents,” and withdraws his bitter accusations, satisfied that they have been resolved.

There is a great deal more to be said here, but I will finish with these brief comments on the logic of Job as it bears on the fresh findings of genetic science.

It seems to me that Job conveys intuitions very similar to the ones in later Isaiah, where the prophet (while admitting the sins of the people) writes the agonized words: “O Lord, why do *you* make us err from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you?” (Isa. 63:17). He appeals pitifully to God as the “potter,” to the sympathy he hopes God has for fragile clay/human beings: “We are the clay,” and “we are the work of thy hands” (Isa. 64:8). This “clay,” this “work” of God’s hands, is nothing to boast about. It is ugly and apparently ruined—deliberately so—why?

The Apostle Paul may very well have had this situation and this text in mind when he seized the same metaphor for help in his own comparable circumstances. Paul has come to the troubling conclusion that Israel’s rejection of their very own “Christ” was not accidental (no free will defenses here). On the contrary, Paul judges that rejection of the Christ was part of God’s plan, and that God is the ultimate subject of the Israelites’ actions. God has mysteriously hardened his own people, in much the same way as God hardened Pharaoh in the past, in order to save them (Rom. 11:7-11). Paul judges that God has *rightfully* done so, since God is the “potter,” and the people of Israel are God’s “clay” (Rom. 9:21). God may “harden” whomever he chooses to harden (Rom. 9:18). To be very clear, though, Paul was not

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endorsing a doctrine of “double predestination,” as Calvin thought he was in this passage, depicting God monstrously as creating some human beings for salvation, but all the others deliberately for eternal damnation. Rather, Paul was endorsing the prerogative of God, the Artist, to execute his perfectly just purposes in a manner that seemed unjust in the extreme—in fact, was unjust in the short term—unimaginably cruel and unfair to the people involved, treating them as mere objects of wrath and destruction (Rom. 9:22) for the sake of other people, the objects of mercy, in this instance, the Gentiles worldwide (Rom. 9:23). The challenge is to trust that God is not “trans-moral” in that sense, despite appearances, but that the plan, in all its often unjust parts, works perfectly together for good. In Rom. 11:32, Paul sums up the whole of his thinking better than anywhere else: “God has subjected everyone to sin, in order to have mercy on everyone.”

Whatever all this comes to, it cannot very well be captured by the metaphysics embedded in the phrase, “not the way it’s supposed to be.” When all is said and done, our experience of God and the world is not “Plan B,” or “Plan C,” or some amended bureaucratic form of a botched original plan. Our experience of God and the world is *on the whole* exactly what God planned from the beginning. “Blessed is the Lamb, slain from the very foundations of the world” (Rev. 13:8).⁷³ In a carefully guarded sense, we might venture to say that human history is a work of divine art reminiscent of the Joseph story and its ironic ending: “Even though you meant to do harm to me, God meant it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people” (Gen. 50:20). In that light, Joseph weeps, and Joseph forgives.

Paul offers no logical explanation of God’s actions. Instead, even if somewhat obscurely (Paul was no poet), Paul, like Isaiah (whose poetic instincts were better), turns instinctively to aesthetics and to the nature of art. God’s actions in history are better understood in the analogy of artistic or *aesthetic* preferences than in analogies of logical perfection (pace Leibniz) and the moral utility of a “best possible world.” In Paul’s terms, they are choices that simply *pleased* God. They pleased God in a manner compatible with perfect moral goodness, understood as universal grace to be extended to everyone. The statement in Rom. 11:32 makes this truth as clear as can be, I think. But at least for the time being, the precise sense of that compatibility is entirely

elusive and left to mystery—Rom. 11:33–36 keeps the aesthetic freedom and inscrutability of the Potter’s will intact, even while keeping it connected to moral grounds of character that we need in order to sustain faith, hope, and (most of all) love of God.⁷⁴ Perhaps one should hope for a resolution of the world that is also better pictured in aesthetic terms than purely logical ones—as in recent treatments of the “morally sufficient reason” God must have for permitting some evil or other.⁷⁵ The precious few visions of God’s kingdom that we have in Scripture—later Isaiah (chap. 65) and the book of Revelation (chaps. 21–22)—are certainly rich with encouragement of just that view: resolution by means of incorrigibly triumphant beauty as the medium of perfect goodness, cashing out in pure joy (rather than studied nods of heads at the successful logic of explanations).

At the end, this view comes to be a sort of new “supralapsarianism,” not the old decretal sort of Calvinism, but an “aesthetic supralapsarianism.” This view of creation, the Fall, and redemption through Christ in history is unusual, but not unprecedented in either ancient or modern formulations of Christian tradition. And it happens to have the advantage of being positively compatible with the intuitions of genetic science about our human origins and the existential condition in the world. This science sharpens the ancient question we are inclined to put to the Potter: “Why have you made me (us) thus?” At most, the proposals of this article help us to see better how to ask that question in the right way, how to answer it, and how not to answer it at the same time. Or at least, my proposals show that warrant exists in Scripture and theology for embracing what genetic science seems to be teaching us about ourselves. ◇

Notes

¹Debate exists among Eastern Orthodox theologians over the compatibility between evolution and Christian faith. For an example of a constructive view of Orthodoxy and evolution, see Fr. George Nicozisin, “Creationism Versus Evolutionism,” www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org (last accessed June 24, 2010). No official prohibitions exist in Eastern Orthodoxy against affirming the compatibility of evolution with the faith.

Roman Catholic teaching approves compatibility between evolutionary science and the Christian faith. The most recent papal writings affirm the strength of evidence supporting evolutionary theory. See especially John Paul II, “Message to the Pontifical Academy of Science” (1996),

commenting on *Humani Generis* by Pius XII (1950), which approved academic freedom to teach the theory. John Paul II went further: "New findings lead us toward the conclusion that evolution is more than a hypothesis." The modern Catholic catechism, Catholic schools and universities, and many unofficial Catholic organizations explore the compatibility of evolution with Catholic faith, and the list of Roman Catholic scholars writing on the subject is quite long by now.

Four hundred fifty Protestant churches from various denominational and nondenominational communities celebrated Evolution Sunday on February 13, 2006, commemorating Charles Darwin's 197th birthday. Denominations represented included Episcopalian, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, United Church of Christ, Baptist, and many community churches, www.ekkleisia.co.uk (last accessed June 24, 2010). See the Episcopal *Catechism of Creation Part II: Creation and Science*, www.episcopalchurch.org (last accessed June 24, 2010). Also see *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2008). In this article, we shall refer to leading mainline Protestant scholars who are exploring evolutionary science in the context of Christian hermeneutics, theology, and theodicy.

²Numerous denominations explicitly disavow the theory of evolution. For example, "The Doctrine of Creation" was adopted by the Assemblies of God General Presbytery, August 15-17, 1977, <http://ag.org> (last accessed June 24, 2010). See also, the Southern Baptist Convention, "Resolution on Scientific Creationism," www.sbc.net (last accessed June 24, 2010). Others include the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Seventh-Day Adventist Church, and Oneness Pentecostal Denominations.

The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) of North America (my own denomination) has a more complex position: it prohibits "espousal of theories that posit the reality of evolutionary forebears of human beings," as "ruled out by Scripture and the Reformed confessions," yet oddly does not intend this prohibition to "limit further investigation and discussion on the topic," www.crcna.org (last accessed June 24, 2010). This applies to all institutions of the CRC, including Calvin College. Wheaton College (the "Harvard of Christian schools") has also gone through a furor recently over administrative attempts to require denial of ancestral human evolution as a condition of employment. Andrew Chignell, "Whither Wheaton?" *SOMA* (The Society of Mutual Autopsy), www.somareview.com (last accessed June 24, 2010).

Alvin Plantinga coined the phrase Grand Evolutionary Hypothesis in his article, "When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21 (September 1991): 15.

³Dennis R. Venema lays out the diverse lines of genomic evidence for common ancestry in "Genesis and the Genome: Genomics Evidence for Human-Ape Common Ancestry and Ancestral Hominid Population Sizes," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62, no. 3 (2010): 166-78.

⁴For a lucid mapping out of the various concordist positions, see Deborah B. Haarsma and Loren D. Haarsma, *Origins: A Reformed Look at Creation, Design, and Evolution* (Grand

Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2007), 82-4; also Denis O. Lamoureux, *I Love Jesus and I Accept Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 15-8.

⁵Lamoureux, 17-8.

⁶See Plantinga, "When Faith and Reason Clash," for a fine analysis of the complexity, esp. 9-15.

⁷For a superb study of Catholic and Protestant responses to Copernican theory, see Kenneth J. Howell, *God's Two Books: Copernican Cosmology and Biblical Interpretation in Early Modern Science* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

⁸St. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 1, books 1-6, trans. and ed. John Hammond Taylor, S.J. (New York: Newman Press, 1982).

⁹In *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Book One, chapter 19, 38, pp. 42-3, Augustine says,

Usually a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens, and the other elements of this world, about the motion of the stars, and even their size and relative positions, about the predictable eclipses of the sun and moon, the cycles of the years and the seasons, about the kinds of animals, shrubs, stones, and so forth, and this knowledge he holds to as being certain from reason and experience. Now it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an unbeliever to hear a Christian presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; and we should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn ... for when they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our sacred books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven?

¹⁰For a nearly total discrediting of the approach to geology by contemporary young-earth creationists, and for support of the parallel just alleged, I recommend the book by Davis A. Young and Ralph F. Stearley, *The Bible, Rocks, and Time: Geological Evidence for the Age of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008). As for biblical scholarship on Genesis, and for similar support, see Daniel C. Harlow, "Creation According to Genesis: Literary Genre, Cultural Context, Theological Truth," *Christian Scholar's Review* 37, no. 2 (2008): 163-98.

¹¹According to studies, about 90% of evangelical Christians in America affirm young-earth creationism as correct. See Lamoureux, *I Love Jesus and I Accept Evolution*, 15.

¹²St. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Book One, chapter 21, 41, p. 45.

¹³Luther disparaged Copernicus in a loose remark in 1539 (four years before Copernicus published his theory) on the grounds that Joshua clearly stopped the sun. Martin Luther, *Table Talk* 54, ed. and trans. Theodore C. Tappert (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1967), 53-4. John Calvin never commented explicitly on Copernicus (a statement attributed to him by historians did not, in fact, appear in Calvin's works), but he clearly affirmed geocentric cosmology in his sermons and commentaries. Edward Rosen, "Calvin's

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Attitude toward Copernicus," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21, no. 3 (July 1960): 431–5. Also Matthew F. Dowd, "Calvin and the Astronomical Revolution," www.nd.edu/~mdowd1/postings/CalvinAstroRev.html (last accessed July 24, 2010).

¹⁴Howell, *God's Two Books*, at length, and on 25–6.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, esp. 209–26.

¹⁶See the superb statement on divine revelation and Scripture in *Verbum Dei: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Second Vatican Council*. Source: www.vatican.va/archiv/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html (last accessed July 24, 2010).

¹⁷For an insightful discussion of *sola scriptura* and its link with the principle of the Bible's *perspicuitas*, see Kenton L. Sparks, *God's Words in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), esp. 31–2.

¹⁸Howell discusses the Protestant figures at length in *God's Two Books*, 39–181.

¹⁹Consider the editorial synopsis of Herman Bavinck's understanding of human evolution as incompatible with Reformed (biblical) Christianity.

The arguments against Darwinism in general are weighty, with the problem of human origins and transitions from one species to another particularly insoluble. The theory of evolution also clashes with Scripture in regard to the age, the unity, and the original abode of humanity. Above all, it is essential to maintain the fundamental unity of the human race; this conviction is the presupposition of religion and morality. The solidarity of the human race, original sin, the atonement in Christ, the universality of the kingdom of God, the catholicity of the church, and the love of neighbor are all grounded in it.

Herman Bavinck, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Christian Theology*, ed. John Bolt and trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999). The original publication was somewhere between 1895–1901; see editor's explanation, 19.

²⁰See the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 3.

Q: Did God create people wicked and perverse?

A: No. God created them good and in his own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness.

Lord's Day 4,

Q: Then where does this corrupt human nature come from?

A: From the Fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise.

Also the *Belgic Confession*, Article 14:

We believe that God created man from the dust of the earth and formed him in his image and likeness—good, just, and holy; able by his own will to conform in all things to the will of God ... But he subjected himself willingly to sin and consequently to death and the curse, lending his ear to the word of the devil.

Similar commitment to a historical Fall is enshrined in the *Augsburg Confession*, Article II, and the *Formula of Concord*, Article I.

²¹See Lamoureux, *I Love Jesus and I Accept Evolution*, 23–6. Also Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), esp. 32–7.

²²For my understanding of the evidence that pertains directly to Scripture and theology, I rely mainly on three sources: Daryl P. Domning, with foreword and commentary by Monika Hellwig, *Original Selfishness: Original Sin and Evil in the Light of Evolution* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Haarsma and Haarsma, *Origins: A Reformed Look at Creation, Design, and Evolution*, esp. 196–203; and Dennis Venema, "Human Genomics: Vestiges of Eden or Skeletons in the Closet?" (paper presented at the American Scientific Affiliation Annual Meeting, Baylor University, Waco, TX, August 2, 2009). A version of this paper titled "Genesis and the Genome: Genomics Evidence for Human-Ape Common Ancestry and Ancestral Hominid Population Sizes" appears on pages 166–78 of this issue.

²³Domning, *Original Selfishness*, on Ayala's work, 71–2.

²⁴C. John Collins, "Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why It Matters," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62, no. 3 (2010): 147–65.

²⁵Daniel C. Harlow, "After Adam: Reading Genesis in an Age of Evolutionary Science," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62, no. 3 (2010): 179–95.

²⁶See Lamoureux, *I Love Jesus and I Accept Evolution*, 77–80.

²⁷Domning, *Original Selfishness*, 73–82.

²⁸For instance, Rodney J. Whitefield presented a paper seeking to show via possible verb tenses that God "had" created the sun and moon *before* the fourth day. "The Fourth Creative 'Day' of Genesis: Answering the Questions about the Sun and the Moon" (paper presented at the American Scientific Affiliation Annual Meeting, Baylor University, Waco, TX, August 1, 2009). Also, William Dembski presented a paper to contend that the various unpleasant and disordered things named just above might be "retroactive effects of the Fall." "The Retroactive Effects of the Fall," (paper presented at the American Scientific Affiliation Annual Meeting, Baylor University, Waco, TX, August 3, 2009).

²⁹See Ken Ham in debate with Hugh Ross on the John Ankerberg Show, ten three-part shows, www.answersincreation.org (last accessed June 24, 2010). Ham repeatedly accuses Ross and other old-earth creationists of inconsistency in taking part of the Genesis sequence literally (Adam and Eve cause human death) and part not literally (animal suffering and thorns before human sin).

³⁰Venema, "Genesis and the Genome," 167–70.

³¹Domning, *Original Selfishness*, 102.

³²*Ibid.*, 104–5.

³³*Ibid.*, 105.

³⁴See the essay volume, Philip Clayton and Jeffrey Schloss, eds., *Evolution and Ethics: Human Morality in Biological and Religious Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004). Several of the essays in this collection deal with the subject of evolution and (ostensible) moral altruism.

³⁵Domning, *Original Selfishness*, 106.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 107.

³⁷Ralph F. Stearley, "Assessing Evidences for the Evolution of a Human Cognitive Platform for 'Soulful Behaviors,'"

Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith 61, no. 3 (2009): 152–74.

³⁸See previous references to the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Belgic Confession*, among others, endnote 20.

³⁹The title and the theological formulation of origins are the same in the award-winning book by Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), *Christianity Today's* selection as 1996 Book of the Year.

⁴⁰Calvin College requires all students to take a course initiating them into the main themes of the Reformed tradition, understood as creation, fall, and redemption, formulated in Augustinian terms by Cornelius Plantinga Jr. in *Engaging God's World: A Reformed Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002).

⁴¹Both George Murphy and Domning independently it seems, use this metaphor of "Plan A" versus "Plan B." Citing Eastern theology and Irenaeus, Domning in *Original Selfishness* observes, "Far from being 'Plan B' the Incarnation and Redemption were part of the plan from the very outset" (152–3).

⁴²The phrase "*O felix culpa, quae talem et tantum meruit habere redemptorem*" occurs in the *Exultet* of the Roman Easter Vigil and is used in many Western churches. T. F. Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁴³Edwin Van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴⁴George L. Murphy, "Roads to Paradise and Perdition: Christ, Evolution, and Original Sin," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 58, no. 2 (2006): 110.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁶Notably the Reformed theologian and president of Calvin Theological Seminary, Cornelius Plantinga Jr., seems to adopt a cultural rather than an ontological explanation of original sin in *Engaging God's World*, 54–62. He explains "original sin" as "wrong tendencies, habits, practices, and patterns" that we now absorb from a corrupted human culture.

⁴⁷The Augustinian understanding of the Fall is *ipso facto* a "free will defense" of God, and is necessary in order to make philosophical defenses of this kind seem theologically plausible. Alvin Plantinga's original version of the argument from freedom is in *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977). It is intriguing to see that Plantinga's most recent treatment of the problem of evil is very much in line with the one that I am defending here: "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'" in Peter van Inwagen, ed., *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 1–25. Plantinga contends that for all we know, the value of the Incarnation and Atonement is so great that (when finally understood) their existence will vastly override the evils. See esp. 25–6.

⁴⁸For a very thorough and useful summary of recent work in Christian theodicy on natural evils, see Christopher Southgate and Andrew Robinson, "Varieties of Theodicy: An Exploration of Responses to the Problem of Evil Based on a Typology of Good-Harm Analyses," *Physics and Cos-*

mology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil 1, ed. Nancey Murphy, Robert John Russell, and William R. Stoeger S.J. (Berkeley, CA: Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2007), 67–90.

⁴⁹C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1943). Lewis called pain, including pain in nature, "God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world," 93. Peter van Inwagen has proposed a similar version of the free will defense in "The Argument from Evil," *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, 55–73.

⁵⁰I refer again to Murphy, Russell, and Stoeger, eds., *Physics and Cosmology*, especially part II, "Scientific and Philosophical Responses," 91–294.

⁵¹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 3.1, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), esp. 250–88 on Eden.

⁵²Domning, *Original Selfishness*, 169.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 162–3.

⁵⁴So we see in Christ a God "who hates suffering, who would not tolerate it *if there were any alternative*, but the facts in front of us prove that there was no other way available for God." So "God needs no defense," for "banishing evil from an autonomous world involves a contradiction, and is therefore impossible, even for God." So Domning, *Original Selfishness*, 167. I should think that omnipotence entails favoring the existence of alternatives.

⁵⁵Dating the composition of Job with certainty seems impossible. See Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), 528–33. I do believe, however, that recent studies (to be cited in due course) encourage thinking that Job's canonical function was, in part, to correct earlier tradition and, in part, to construct a fresh formulation of spirituality, ethics, and expectations in the context of suffering. My judgment that Job was written during or even after the exile of Israel is an extrapolation from its theology of God and evil, as I understand it. Since this theology seems to be in deliberate conflict with aspects of so-called Deuteronomic tradition (which says that righteousness leads causally to flourishing, and only unrighteousness brings impoverishment), it seems likely that Job is later and represents the experience of oversimplification in earlier tradition.

⁵⁶John R. Schneider, "Seeing God Where the Wild Things Are: An Essay on the Defeat of Horrendous Evil," in Peter van Inwagen, ed., *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil* 226–62.

⁵⁷See references in Schneider, "Seeing God Where the Wild Things Are," 239–44.

⁵⁸Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 244.

⁵⁹*Ibid.* "Whether this imagery represents an innovation of the Job poet or the use of an otherwise known tradition cannot be determined."

⁶⁰*Ibid.* These are my italics.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 245–7.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 247.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 248.

⁶⁴Norman Whybray points out that certain aspects of the descriptions are those of the fire-breathing dragon of myth and legend. The LXX translates it literally as a dragon

Article

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(*drakon*). Whybray, *Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 41.

Whybray explains that German form-critical scholars were vexed by the beasts' identities and place in the poem, to be sure, and had some misguided things to say about their being ordinary animals that historical-literary study corrects by relating them to Ancient Near Eastern myths.

Perhaps the most remarkable reading is by Ken Ham, executive president of Answers in Genesis, who contends that Behemoth and Leviathan in Job refer to dinosaurs that coexisted with human beings in the ancient world (for a brief while) after the Flood. "Contrary to what we may think, what we know now as dinosaurs get more mention in the Scriptures than most animals!" Ham goes on to claim that evidence of encounters with dragons in the "history" books of various peoples is "overwhelming evidence" that "dragons were real beasts" and that dinosaurs coexisted with human beings. He then explains that they died off quickly because the global flood changed the environment so as to render them (and almost all the other kinds of animals God intended to *save* on the ark) extinct. Ham does not say what we should think about the massive failure of God's plan. Ken Ham, "Dinosaurs and the Bible," www.answersingenesis.org (last accessed June 24, 2010). Hence my earlier appeal to the parallel between young-earth creationists now and the flat-earth creationists whom Augustine derided as an unfortunate embarrassment to Christianity.

⁶⁵Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 252.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 249.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 250–7. See my discussion and critique, in Schneider, "Seeing God Where the Wild Things Are," 253–6.

⁶⁹By chapter 7, God has become the direct agent of the evils that have happened to Job, e.g., Job 7:20; 9:17–22; 10:1–22. In chapter 16, Job cries that God has "shriveled," "torn," "gnashed," "seized," "slashed," and violently attacked and all but destroyed him, deliberately, and why?

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⁷⁰Nor does the reader get an explanation. The prelude to the drama is either extremely bad theology, or it is a deliberate farce designed to keep the enigma of what God does infuriatingly intact during the drama to the end. Readers get nothing like an answer to their questions: where did this miscreant come from, how and why does it exist, and what conceivable reason could God have for taking up its bet (knowing the outcome in advance, we suppose) and ruining the life and family of a good man in the bargain? Nor does the writer return to the wager at the end, which is either abysmally bad plot resolution or it is deliberately elusive to retain the riddle—why this elemental force of chaos, now embodied in the more monstrous character of Leviathan? Leviathan and "the Satan" cash out to the same thing—creatures of God, as it were, which do nothing but destroy in the cosmic order, even as God masters and "uses" them in producing a cosmos that is perfectly good.

⁷¹Job gets his health back, he gets his property back, but he does not get his original children back. The ending of the book is like the beginning: it is either very bad moral theology or it deliberately admits low-key sarcasm that prevents satisfaction for the reader.

⁷²Eleanor Stump discusses Job's experience of God as a "second-person" experience, which is an encounter with the reality of the person himself or herself, rather than simply hearing or reading about the person. "Second-Person Accounts and the Problem of Evil," *Faith and the Problem of Evil: The Stob Lectures, 1998–99* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College, 1999), 1–44.

⁷³Once again, we stand on the ancient footings secured by Irenaeus, and eloquently built upon by Karl Barth and Christological supralapsarians.

⁷⁴For an intriguing defense of an "aesthetic" defense against arguments from evil, see Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999). This "aesthetic" view fits well with Alvin Plantinga's recent version of the argument from supralapsarian metaphysics.

⁷⁵On the rule of "morally sufficient reason," see William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. David Howard-Snyder (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 1–11.

In short form, the generally agreed upon rule on both sides of the dispute is that God (omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good) would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering (animal or human) unless thereby causing some greater evil, or losing some indispensably greater good. So, for any such suffering, there exists a morally sufficient reason for its occurrence, such that by preventing it God would have done something worse than the evil involved in permitting it. This seems to mean that there is some specific reason for every occurrence of such evil, and that God would give that explanation, at last, to the people who participated in them. In my version of the "aesthetic" defense, particular evils are absorbed into the great beauty of the whole life of the person, in the context of the great whole of creation in its perfected form. Particular explanations may be superfluous in that case. The evils are "defeated" by virtue of the glory that now obtains.



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