

In Response to the Review of My Book

Darrel Falk is a highly valued Christian colleague with a wealth of knowledge and experience: I have always appreciated interacting with him at meetings and through email. I know that Darrel and I agree on a great many points.

In his review of my book, *Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: Genesis and Human Origins* (PSCF 71, no. 1 [2018]: 63–65), Darrel first addressed a very important point: Intelligent Design (ID). He is correct that I was making my way through the arguments for and against ID. I wish to clarify that I myself am not “decidedly pro-ID”: a perusal of my blog-site archive (<https://lukejanssen.wordpress.com>) will make this abundantly clear. My primary target audience for this book is nonscientific believers with a young earth creationist (YEC)/fundamentalist background who wish to be better informed about human evolution and how this might influence one’s theology. I did present several arguments against ID, but did so gently because I’ve learned that some interpret a staunchly anti-ID stance as a belief that God had nothing to do with Creation and/or that he is not intelligent.

Next, he drew attention to certain “scientific misstatements” made to my nonscientific audience. One which he labelled the “most disconcerting” was an unfortunate use of word-play on my part: in one instance, I juxtaposed and contrasted a hypothetical “*Homo australopithecus*” against *Homo sapiens* in order to make a theological point, but everywhere else (31 times) described it scientifically using the correct term *Australopithecus* (without the prefix “*Homo*”).

Also “disconcerting” was my use of the word “millions” in the context of the genetic bottleneck from which humans emerged. However, I was pointing to the ancestral population existing before that bottleneck: three sentences later I referred to a natural disaster which left only a few thousand survivors (the bottleneck). My goal was not to describe that stage in human evolution in scientific terms, but to confront the view that humans descended from a single pair.

Space constraints prevent me from going through the other specific examples point-by-point, but none of them change the central point I was trying to make to my nonscientific audience in the first half of the book (one with which I’m sure Darrel agrees): an abundance of data convinces us that humans evolved.

The rest of Darrel’s review pertained to the theological impact of human evolutionary theory. He stated it “need not shake up theology in any major

ways.” For me, however, three or four decades of a YEC/fundamentalist upbringing shaped a worldview which simply could not reconcile with my world of science, let alone accept human evolution. Upon finally accepting it, I felt forced to re-think the nature of scripture (inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility, authority), atonement theology, human ontology (sin, death), and so many other big issues. The dominoes started falling, and the unceasing cognitive dissonance brought me to a point of complete agnosticism bordering on atheism.

Many of the believers that I interact with are still struggling with that tremendous paradigm shift; many others have entirely given up their faith because of it. I fully agree with Darrel that the central tenets of a Christian faith can survive human evolution, but I still feel that it will require extensive remodeling: I’ve written previously in this journal about one example.¹ The second half of my book was intended to help the reader over many of the theological stumbling blocks.

This final comment is directed at the ASA community in general (not Darrel in particular) to convey why books such as this one are needed. I often quote from Roy Clouser writing against the down-playing of any perceived conflict between Genesis 1 and science: “If these clergy and scholars have good reasons for thinking there is no such conflict, they have done an extremely poor job of communicating those reasons to the lay members of their churches.”²

I question whether the Christian Academy is adequately preparing ministry leaders for our new understanding of anthropogony: as a student attending a divinity school, I still regularly witness discussions which are based on theological presuppositions that no longer comport with many well-documented, repeatable, and testable facts. And the ministry leaders produced by the Academy are not adequately preparing their flocks: most churches still teach their children a literal reading of the story of Noah’s Flood. We need to do better at all these levels of Christian education. This is the stated purpose of my book.

Notes

¹Luke Jeffrey Janssen, “‘Fallen’ and ‘Broken’ Reinterpreted in the Light of Evolution Theory,” (PSCF 70, no. 1 [2018]: 36–47).

²Roy Clouser, “Reading Genesis,” (PSCF 68, no. 4 [2016]: 238).

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