

Letters

book. But I would encourage any reader to view the ethical and theological sections as starting points, just as inspiring by their incompleteness as for the content they do provide.

This book serves as a good introduction to scientific advance, the challenges that are already here and coming, and the way those challenges will be escalated and co-opted by various late modern and postmodern worldviews. We need more Christians knowledgeable about these issues, engaging the ethical and theological material as seriously as they do the scientific.

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Letters

Does Complementarity Explain Anything?

Jim Stump presents a notable defense of the view that God guides evolution in his article, “Did God Guide Our Evolution?,” in *PSCF* 72, no. 1 (2020): 15–24. While I am partial to the epistemological view that he espouses, there remain some difficulties. As he points out, the idea is an old one described with different terms over the years, from cognitive dualism to complementarity to levels of explanation, to cite a few. Cognitive dualism received a surge of interest and support with the discovery of scientific complementarity. Best known is the wave-particle duality articulated by Louis de Broglie in the 1920s. Scientific complementarity gave cognitive dualism support as a fundamental principle of the universe. Its logical application to Christianity was widely publicized by, among others, Richard Bube and especially Donald MacKay, in the 1970s. The late Jack Haas took a somewhat skeptical view in his series entitled “Complementarity and Christian Thought: An Assessment” in the September 1983, December 1983, and June 1984 issues of *PSCF*. As he explained to me personally, his major concern was that complementarity didn’t really explain anything.

While Jack has a point, I still find complementarity to be the best available perspective, even though it does not provide us with an understanding of divine action. The analogy of the tea kettle can help one to understand the problem. Stump attributes this analogy to John Polkinghorne while acknowledging in a footnote that Polkinghorne was “probably not” the first to use it. The earliest reference I have found is in the book *Christianity in a Mechanistic Universe*, edited by Donald M. MacKay and published in 1965. In his essay contribution to that book, Frank H. T. Rhodes, ninth president of Cornell University from 1977 to 1995, refers to “Dr Douglas

Spanner’s example of the boiling kettle ...” (p. 42) and describes the identical analogy and application.

In this analogy, the explanation for “why is the tea kettle boiling” can be either “I want some tea” or “the thermal energy of the flame transfers energy to the water beyond its boiling point.” These are complementary and not mutually exclusive explanations. But all of us are intuitively aware that humans have the agency to translate the desire to have some tea into igniting the fire or activating the electrical switch that provides the heat to boil the water. Though we may not understand all the details involving our consciousness and free will in generating and carrying out our desires, we do understand the connection. In contrast, we do not understand divine action through which God translates his ultimate purposes into guidance of evolution. The intelligent design community feels that they do not need to provide such a mechanism but merely need to demonstrate that there was such guidance. Stump rejects Russell’s idea of quantum interference by God as being inadequate. He also rejects, perhaps inappropriately, Barrigar’s probabilistic view of God’s purposes as too deistic. The epistemological view does not provide insight into any means by which divine action actually guides evolution. Complementarity seems to be an accurate description that two different discourses are necessary to fully represent phenomena. But it fails to explain the relationship between those discourses.

We have a biblical basis for claiming that God can work his purposes through random processes (see, for example, 1 Kings 22:34 and Acts 1:26). Yet we have no insight into how this is achieved. The mysterious way in which God guides evolution or anything else remains mysterious. The evidence in science is that evolution with key elements of randomness accurately describes the development of all life forms of which we are aware. The inference that God does, in fact, guide evolution, as well as all of nature, is our interpretation of how God carries out his purposes as revealed in God’s Word.

Randy Isaac
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The Agape/Probability Proposal Is Not Deist

Jim Stump has recently addressed the question, “Did God Guide Our Evolution?”¹ Along the way, he rejects three strategies for reconciling science and theology, including this writer’s *Agape/Probability* (A/P) proposal.² Stump rejects the A/P proposal “because of its implications for God’s distance from the created order”³—that the A/P proposal leaves God as a “spectator” to creation as the universe unfolds from its initial

conditions. That is, the A/P account “confine[s] God’s action to very rare occasions,”⁴ and therefore looks akin to deism.

This reading of the A/P account is only possible, however, by setting aside its most fundamental parts. So, I need to reiterate that the whole A/P account is about how the trinitarian God of *agape* love has created a universe in which God can actively engage in *agape* relationships. *Agape* relationships, including incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and the ongoing action of the Holy Spirit in the lives of ordinary people throughout history, means that God’s action is frequent, not rare. As I state, “Divine *agapic* action can take diverse forms, including giving gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit; providing inspiration, wisdom, guidance; providing healing (emotional, relational, and physical); and acting in physical surroundings (nature) to bring about *agapic* consequences for people and/or animals.”⁵ This is precisely the opposite of deism.

Enlightenment deists, like theists, believed in a Creator God, but what distinguished them as deists were two doubts they had about the God of theism: one doubt dealt with divine purpose (they doubted that God created the universe with human-related purpose); and the other, with divine action (they doubted that God engages in relationships with humanity). These two doubts led to an inference that after creation God has had no further engagement with the universe; this then led to a secondary derivative inference, that God simply “watches” the processes of the universe unfold. In other words, what constitutes deism is not the belief that God watches everything unfold, spectator-like; what constitutes deism is its doubts, denying both divine purpose in creation and divine involvement with humanity—which makes deism the exact opposite of the A/P account.

Moreover, Stump’s critique implies that there is some inadequacy in the sort of God that would enjoy watching the system he created unfold. But why should God not enjoy watching the spectacular creation he has created? With exploding stars, crashing galaxies, expanding nebulae bubbles, black holes shredding nearby celestial objects, not to mention all the stunning biological processes going on—an infinity of incredible beauty and awesomeness!—it seems a peculiar restriction on the Creator of beauty to imply that there is something unacceptable about God enjoying “watching” this incredible creation unfold while “waiting” for *agape*-capable beings to emerge. In no way does this make God “distant from creation” after God’s act of initial creation. Moreover, I put “waiting” and “watching” in quotes because God’s relation to time is not ours—so our sense of waiting such a long time, billions of years,

for *agape*-capable beings to emerge need hardly be God’s sense of time.

That God takes pleasure in watching his magnificent creation unfold while it brings about *agape*-capable beings no more makes the A/P account deist than belief in a Creator God makes orthodoxy deist. The A/P account’s front-loaded account is perfectly consistent with an orthodox trinitarian understanding of God’s nature, character, and purpose, and is in no way akin to deism—it is precisely the opposite. Moreover, there is available today no account that more fully integrates today’s mainstream scientific knowledge with God’s purpose and action in creation than that provided by the A/P account, thereby offering a powerful alternative to both ID and materialism. I fear that Stump’s misdescription of parts of the A/P account will lead readers to miss the value of what the A/P account has to offer.

Notes

¹Stump, “Did God Guide Our Evolution?,” *PSCF* 72, no. 1 (2020): 15–24.

²Barrigar, “God’s *Agape*/Probability Design for the Universe,” *PSCF* 70, no. 3 (2018): 161–74.

³Stump, “Did God Guide Our Evolution?,” 18.

⁴*Ibid.*, 20.

⁵Barrigar, “God’s *Agape*/Probability Design for the Universe,” 171.

Chris Barrigar

Response to Randy Isaac and Chris Barrigar

My thanks to Randy Isaac for taking the time to read and respond to my article. It was Randy who instigated the article (though he should have none of the blame for anything incorrect or foolish I’ve written!) by inviting me to present a paper at the 2018 ASA meeting, with himself and Denis Lamoureux responding to the book *Theistic Evolution*, edited by J. P. Moreland, Stephen C. Meyer, Christopher Shaw, Ann K. Gauger, and Wayne Grudem (Crossway, 2017). The paper became more than a book review, as it gave me the opportunity to try to work out some issues related to what I have called “cognitive dualism.”

Randy’s central concern seems to stem from sympathy he has with the comment he relayed from Jack Haas, “complementarity doesn’t really explain anything.” My response to that is, “Right, that’s the point.” My claim is that the sort of explanation being pushed for is what philosophers often describe not as wrong, but wrong-headed, or as a category mistake. I am not explaining how God guides evolution, but rather I am trying to explain why we can’t get an explanation to that.