

Book Reviews

which is based on experiences over five decades with a computer chatbot designed to be a therapist. They conclude that human relationships are an essential and non-AI replaceable element for spiritual growth. Following Albert Borgmann and Andy Crouch, they promote “hearth habits.”

In their final chapter, O’Callaghan and Hoffman address the question of how ministry leaders should approach AI from a principled rather than tactical approach. They provide three categories: things not to be done, things to be freely done, and things that require caution. Prohibited AI uses include writing or delivering entire sermons of Bible lessons, substitution for interpersonal counseling, and writing entire worship songs or planning entire worship services. They are fine with using AI for media material production, website management, human resource management, and language translation. Activities for cautious use of AI include research assistance and generation of teaching materials. My personal positions and practices are in general agreement with the authors’ positions and backing rationale.

I found the book worth the reading investment. Most valuable to me was the connection made between Gnosticism and how some view AI. “These concepts are taking greater import as AI threatens to perpetuate a fresh form of Gnosticism in Western culture, unbiblically dividing and decoupling the physical from the mental-spiritual” (p. 65). I would especially recommend the book to the intended audience of church leaders to introduce them to AI, key theological issues raised by AI, and church applications. The book is not comprehensive but provides an introduction with copious footnotes for further reading. Perhaps more importantly, it can provide basis for conversation between church leaders and congregants who are living on the front lines of AI. From this conversation, specific congregational spiritual challenges and opportunities can be identified and addressed.

Reviewed by Noel Anderson, intelligent agricultural systems consultant, Fargo, ND 58102.

THEOLOGY

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF9-26Walton>

NEW EXPLORATIONS IN THE LOST WORLD OF GENESIS: Advances in the Origins Debate by John H. Walton with contributions by J. Harvey Walton. IVP Academic, 2025. 244 pages. Paperback; \$25.99. ISBN: 978-1514004913. Kindle; \$25.99. ISBN: 9781514004920.

John Walton, well-known scholar of the Bible and professor emeritus of Wheaton College and Graduate School, returns to his primary study of Genesis and its place within the world of the ancient Near East. This book serves as the eighth publication in his Lost World series, begun in 2009, and as the fourth writing relating that

world to “the modern scientific origins debate” (publisher’s description). This edition updates previous readings and serves as a digest of the series as well as a summary of the status of the origins debate, all of which provide value to readers interested in these topics.

The target audience is primarily communities within the evangelical and fundamentalist conversation, rather than larger scientific, or academic, communities. Walton begins by describing the intellectual process through which he moved from early default young earth creationism (an uncomfortable position as a teacher) to the realization that there are other ways to think about creation (Genesis 2–4). His discovery of ancient world texts during his early academic studies opened his eyes to the significance of the historical and cultural contexts of the Hebrew Bible, which in turn raised questions about preserving the demands of biblical authority in the face of scientific (archaeological) evidence. We cannot, he concludes, get good answers if we are not asking the right questions. The Lost World series represents a systematic effort to ask the right questions, and this volume represents one more attempt to bring Walton’s constituency along with him.

Each chapter follows the same pattern. First, a summary of what Walton previously published on the topic; second, new insights and clarifications; and third, FAQs on the topic, developed out of Q&A sessions during his decades of interaction with evangelical colleges, churches, and conferences. It is abundantly clear that the same questions continue to be asked as those that were raised when he began his project in the 1970s.

The topics arise from the opening chapters of the Bible. Genesis 1 raises questions concerning the creation and “functional ontology,” in chapter 3 of this book; the seventh day and its significance as “temple and rest” in chapter 4. Genesis 2 questions cover the garden and the trees as “sacred space and priestly roles,” in chapter 5; Adam and Eve as “archetypes of dust and rib,” in chapter 6. Genesis 3 topics include “the serpent and fall” in chapter 7, and “pronouncement and aftermath” in chapter 8). Chapter 9, “Genesis and science,” speaks directly to the relation of approaches to origins in religion and science as the contrast between mechanism and agency.

In terms of contemporary scientific discovery, Walton argues that evolution is not incompatible with the Bible. He also offers a long footnote of works by devoted Christian scientists who adopt an evolutionary view of creation. Walton’s biblical methodology, to which he devotes chapter 2, remains balanced and largely consonant with broader scholarship on the subject. He frequently couches this method in his own terminology. For instance, he contrasts the existing evangelical reading of Genesis as a conversation about the material origins of the cosmos with his functional ontology. The claims of science address the mechanisms of “how” and “when.”

The Bible, he says, remains interested in the “who” and “why” of agency. So, the biblical text addresses a question of “order,” an observation as old as rabbinic recognition of the priestly concerns of Genesis 1. This perspective emerges by recognizing the biblical text as literature produced for the people and cultures of its own time and thus answering their questions rather than ours.

Since this argument remains predominantly an evangelical discussion, Walton appropriately writes in language and terminology for the people and cultures of his own time. He is devoted to preserving the evangelical commitment to the authority of Scripture, and to encouraging the readers to embrace other ways to think about creation. This commitment provides the center of the debate. Walton appears to still be answering the same questions about Genesis because of the continuing prevalence among ordinary believers of the view that the inspiration of Scripture consists in the very words verbally dictated directly by God. So, Scripture remains authoritative even in matters of science and history. Walton walks a fine line between his affirmation of biblical authority as “God’s authority vested in the human instruments he used to produce Scripture” (p. 17) and of inspiration as both “each word (verbal) comes from God (inspired)” and “the whole message throughout (plenary) comes from God (inspired)” (p. 27). He qualifies this definition with the language of “affirmation”: that is, the inerrancy of Scripture in “all Scripture affirms.” There is also the language of “reference”: all that which is not affirmed is in reference to the perspectives of the culture (pp. 22–25). The line appears very fine between the role of the divine and the human in the production of Scripture, which role will no doubt remain disputed.

There are small faults with this book. Familiarity with Walton’s previous work is expected, as indicated by references to a prior publication without explication for the sake of the present reader. There are also frequent mentions of “my viewpoint,” as though his work appears original and unique where it is within the scope of scholarly conversations elsewhere. Finally, footnote references are almost wholly to authors within evangelical publishers (e.g., Zondervan, Baker, IVP). These practices might be understood as signs of the internal evangelical focus of this project, and the care with which Walton chooses his language.

Apart from these quibbles, *New Explorations in the Lost World of Genesis* provides a valuable contribution to the origins debate. It serves as a tribute to Walton’s patience and long-suffering over the past 20 years with this project. Scholars can find it wearisome to repeatedly face the same questions and criticisms. I admire and respect Walton for the grace and patience he exhibits in our current polarized and contentious cultural and spiritual environment. There is so much more to Genesis 1–3 than clues as to how and when creation came to be. Walton attempts to open horizons of understanding through the

culture and peoples for whom the Bible was written. This offering should free readers to ask better questions.

Reviewed by Dwight D. Swanson, Senior Research Fellow at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester UK, and Honorary Research Fellow in Biblical Studies at the University of Manchester.

Letters

A Response to Joshua Harris’s View of “Restricted Methodological Naturalism”

In his article, “Against Restricted Methodological Naturalism” (*PSCF* 78, no. 1 (2026): 27–37), Joshua Harris defines Restricted Methodological Naturalism (RMN) as follows: within the domain of science for X to be a valid explanation of Y, X must be natural. In his critique and ultimate rejection of RMN he implies that science must include explanations that include supernatural agents to avoid dead-end explanatory paradigms, or creating obstacles to promising novel explanations. However, he ignores that other domains also have claims to truth. There are good and true explanations that lie outside of science. All truth is not scientific!

A return to the original definition of methodological naturalism by Christian philosopher Paul deVries is helpful. He described the limitations of scientific inquiry as follows:

The goal of inquiry in the natural sciences is to establish explanations of contingent natural phenomena strictly in terms of other contingent natural things—laws, fields, probabilities. Any explanations that make reference to supernatural beings or powers are certainly excluded from natural science ... The natural sciences are limited by method to naturalistic foci. By method they must seek answers to their questions within nature, within the non-personal and contingent created order, and not anywhere else. Thus, the natural sciences are guided by what I call methodological naturalism.¹

He explicitly argued that this definition serves to give proper intellectual space for theological inquiry; it rejects science as the only arbiter of truth. To remove this limitation on what science can investigate is yielding to a culture of scientism.

Harris pursues two extended arguments against RMN—the “Intelligibility Problem” and the “Truth-Seeking Problem.” I will briefly respond to both of these arguments.

Harris sees the intelligibility problem as the inability to define “natural” and “supernatural.” He argues that the incompleteness or potential falsity of current theories