

Book Review

Genesis, Evolution, and the Search for a Reasoned Faith

Mary Catherine Birge, Brian G. Henning, Rodica M. M. Stoicoiu, and Ryan Taylor
(Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2011) 133 pages.

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The strength of *Genesis, Evolution, and the Search for a Reasoned Faith* is the fact that the four essays are written by professors from different backgrounds: biblical studies, philosophy, systematic theology, and evolutionary biology. Written for college undergraduates of various majors, these four chapters include a glossary, occasional sidebars (e.g., “Christian Fundamentalism”), illustrations,¹ and “Discussion Questions.”

Birge describes the inspiration of Scripture: “...the Bible contains the word of God” and the writers “were assisted by God” (p. 2). She repeatedly refers to the human author rather than the divine author.

She explicates the Genesis creation accounts (GCA) based on the “Documentary Hypothesis” (JEDP). She posits that the Israelites combined the other ancient Near East (ANE) “creation stories, events, and characters” to produce “a new cosmogony that stood in stark contrast to the worldview promoted by worshippers of Baal, Marduk, Tiamat...” (p. 11). Birge lists five differences between the GCA and the other ANE cosmogonies (p. 33f).

Ryan Taylor describes the method of *science*: “If a hypothesis is not testable, it is not scientific. To be testable, a hypothesis must be falsifiable” (p. 42). He presents the verification and the falsification principles as the *sine quibus non* of science,² but he

does not deal with the “demarcation problem.”³

He argues that scientific knowledge is limited to the physical world. Some scholars engaged in the religion-science dialogue ask why God must be excluded from the study of His creation. Others reply by positing that reality/truth can be discovered only by naturalistic methods. However, one must ask, “Can either of these propositions be verified or falsified by a naturalistic method?” No. These are foundational philosophical presuppositions.

Unfortunately, Taylor states some opinions as fact. Since he adheres to the concept of *common descent*, he writes, “Mutation is the ultimate source of all genetic variation” as if there is universal agreement on this.

Taylor dismisses Intelligent Design (ID) as “a form of creationism that masquerades as science” (p. 68f). If he would read less *about ID* and more *by ID proponents*, he might discover their testable predictions.⁴ I cannot say that I fully embrace ID, but I wish those who reject it would not do so only after reading AAAS⁵ commentary.

Brian Henning introduces the debate over biological evolution with a précis of Aristotle’s influence on the development of modern science and the ultimate repudiation of his teleological worldview. Then he

recites the contributions of René Descartes. Neither does much to prepare the reader for his thesis: that evolution has produced humans who are not *exceptional animals*, but are *exemplary animals*. Thus, he rejects the notion that humans are the pinnacle of creation (anthropocentrism). He strays off topic when he argues that accepting evolution should lead people to treat other animals ethically (e.g., antivivisectionism, p. 86ff).

Henning rejects a deterministic view of nature by agreeing with Cobb that “a materialistic treatment of evolution is profoundly inadequate and misleading...” since it is mechanistic (p. 93).

He posits that people who embrace evolution, if they are to be consistent, should recognize the fallacy in thinking “humans alone have intrinsic value” (p. 95). He implies that those who reject evolution make this error. Surely many people who reject evolution consider humans above the other animals (due to “God’s image”) without thinking that we “alone have intrinsic value” (p. 94).

The chapter by Rodica Stoicuou is disappointing, but, to her credit, she discourages both a “God of the gaps” approach and Stephen Gould’s non-overlapping magisteria (which she terms “separatism,” p. 109ff).

She dismisses ID as “neither good science nor good theology” (p. 106). Michael Behe’s “irreducible complexity” and two of his examples are mentioned: a bacterial flagellum and the human blood clotting mechanism. She quotes John Haught to counter that neither “is irreducibly complex.

Both can be explained by evolutionary theory” (p. 106). Both she and the quote from Haught merely beg the question.⁶

Stoicuou uses Haught’s version of process theology to address the problem of a loving God being responsible for suffering (theodicy). She describes God as a caring creator who suffers along with His creation (p. 113). *Evolutionary theology* sees nature in a process of becoming something new; and God is not merely *involved* in this process, He is also in process of becoming (p. 119).

In his “Conclusion,” Henning compares people of different ages reading a *Harry Potter* book to people in different disciplines attempting to understand reality (pp. 122-124). While interesting, the two situations are not analogous.

Here’s a better analogy: a ballet dancer, a sociologist, a mechanical engineer, and an electrical engineer tour a hydroelectric plant.⁷ These four people then describe what they have seen quite differently, but each description is “true” at some level—and the four descriptions could be integrated to form a more complete picture of reality.

Christians should attempt to integrate scientific and religious knowledge by integrating the thinking of scientists, Bible scholars, and philosophers. I cannot recommend this book since other books accomplish this goal much better.⁸ This work fails to significantly contribute to the religion-science dialogue or to advance the creation-evolution debate.

¹One of the best is on p. 93.

²Although Taylor does not use the terms “verification principle” or “falsification principle,” he does present them without apology as essential elements of science. He does not mention the fact that they are self-refuting and that parts of the evolutionary theory fail to meet these criteria. In spite of the fact that self-refuting statements are necessarily false (private communication, Norman Geisler), science relies on them.

³The “demarcation problem” describes the inability of scholars to list the necessary and sufficient conditions for something to count as *science*.

⁴Casey Luskin, “The Positive Case for Design,” Discovery Institute, www.discovery.org/scripts/viewDB/filesDB-download.php?id=986 (accessed March 22, 2011).

⁵AAAS is The American Association for the Advancement of Science (See <http://www.aaas.org/>).

⁶Meaning that they assume as true what they claim to prove. This phrase is not synonymous with “raises the question,” as used on page 109.

⁷I was tempted to write, “a minister, a priest, and a rabbi, go into a bar....”

⁸Heidi Campbell and Heather Looy, *A Science and Religion Primer* (Baker, 2009); J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003) [see “Part IV: Philosophy of Science,” pp. 307-390]; J. P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds, eds. *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 2009).