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**Responding to Perceived Theological Implications  
of Evolutionary Creation**

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## ***Responding to Perceived Theological Implications of Evolutionary Creation***

**J. B. STUMP**

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**Abstract:** In this article I will respond to several common arguments against the position known increasingly as evolutionary creation. I consider an argument that evolution undermines the gospel itself, and other *reductio ad absurdum* arguments about human uniqueness, divine action, and the problem of evil. These are not technical arguments from academic literature as much as more popularly held views that I encounter regularly in churches and other places speaking to lay audiences about evolution and the Christian faith. Here I attempt to lay out the logic of these arguments (which is often more felt than articulated) and show where they can reasonably be opposed.

**Key Words:** evolutionary creation, theistic evolution, evolution, sin, human uniqueness, divine action, miracles, problem of evil

In this article, I will attempt to defend the position of evolutionary creation against what are often perceived to be untenable theological implications of the position. I will not offer evidence or arguments here for the science of evolution, but proceed via the conditional, “if evolution is true. . . .” As a prelude to that, I will first defend the terminology of “evolutionary creation” (EC) over against the more broadly used (broadly in two senses) label of “theistic evolution.”

Historian of science, Edward B. Davis, traces the use of “theistic evolution” back to at least 1877 and the Canadian geologist John W. Dawson in his book *The Origin of the World, According to Revelation and Science*.<sup>1</sup> The term has been used widely (one of my senses of “broad”) by both opponents and proponents of the idea that God has had something to do with the process of evolution. But the “something to do with” clause is capable of such broad interpretation (my other sense of the term), that many of us today want to be more specific in the position we adopt. Consider the similarity between apologetic defenses of bare theism versus a defense of robust and Christocentric Christianity. It might reasonably be thought that focusing on the more

1. Ted Davis, “Science and the Bible: Theistic Evolution, Part 1” BioLogos Blog (August 15, 2012) <http://biologos.org/blogs/ted-davis-reading-the-book-of-nature/science-and-the-bible-theistic-evolution-part-1>.

general case is easier to defend. But I am persuaded in the case of apologetics that it was the neglect of the specificity of Christian theism that opened the door for challenges to the “god of the philosophers.”<sup>2</sup> So too in the case of theistic evolution, I think it is wise to focus on the more narrowly defined “evolutionary creation” as there are specifically Christian responses to some of the challenges to generic theism.

The label “evolutionary creation” has increasingly been used by those who believe in the creator God of the Judeo-Christian tradition as articulated in the creeds (e.g., I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth).<sup>3</sup> We evolutionary creationists believe that God is the creator, and are unwilling to cede the term to those who deny the science of evolution.

Furthermore, “theistic evolution” is a curious and confusing conflation of terms. Does anyone talk about “theistic photosynthesis”? There are plenty of Christians who believe God superintends the process of photosynthesis, and yet do not seem to feel the need to qualify their acceptance of it with “theistic.” And they do not feel the need to inject miraculous divine action into the chemical equation of photosynthesis in order to preserve God’s role. The issue is that the equation, while complete as a scientific description, does not tell the whole story. I affirm theologically that it is perfectly legitimate to say that God provides food for plants to grow and flourish. In our total understanding of reality, we must take that into account just as much as (or perhaps even more than) the scientific description of how plants make food. So too, as an evolutionary creationist, I affirm theologically that God is the creator—even that God intentionally created human beings; and I affirm that evolution is the best scientific description we have for how that happened over time. Evolution does not tell the whole story, but provides one important perspective; theology does not tell the whole story either, but provides an important perspective. If we want to know the whole story, we must take account of both, and allow them to be in dialogue with each other.

I will return to this point below when considering the topic of divine action. I give the teaser here to explain why I call myself an evolutionary creationist, and turn now to defending this position against several common attacks.

Some people object to EC for reasons of biblical literalism: the Bible says Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day; the days were 24 hour periods; we can calculate when those days occurred by adding up the genealogies; therefore, evolution could not have happened. In my experience of interacting with Christian laypeople about science and the Bible, a version of that argument is deeply embedded in many of them because it is believed to be the most supportive of a “high” view of Scripture. It is curious, then, that none of the premises to that argument are actually literal readings of Scripture, and it is sometimes deeply troubling to people to realize that there are

2. See William Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987) for a full defense of this claim.

3. Denis Lamoureux was an early adopter of the label. See his *Evolutionary Creation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008). Now BioLogos explicitly promotes evolutionary creation.

multiple layers of interpretation required to sustain their “literal” reading of Scripture.<sup>4</sup> There are exegetical arguments from Scripture against evolutionary creationism that deserve consideration, but I am not professionally trained to respond to these with much authority. I am a philosopher (with some training in theology too), and so want to engage the objections as such.

My full-time work with BioLogos brings me into regular contact with Christian laypeople who are concerned that EC has dire theological implications, and therefore they believe the science of evolution must be rejected. We also hear consistently (though not quite as much as the first group) from science-minded skeptics who are quite sure that evolution has shown traditional Christian theism to be false. There are four areas of theological concern that come up over and over with evolutionary creation in these conversations:

1. The origin of sin and the need for a savior
2. Human uniqueness and the image of God
3. Divine action and deism
4. The problem of evil and the goodness of God

I am going to frame each of these topics as an argument against evolutionary creation. Each will have a central premise (or more precisely, a string of premises) that is an if-then statement, beginning with “If evolution is true. . . .” It is interesting to note that skeptical critics and evolution-denying Christian critics use the same chain of reasoning to object to EC. Skeptics use it for *modus ponens* arguments, accepting the antecedent of the conditionals and claiming that orthodox theological claims have in fact been undermined by evolution; Christian critics use it for *modus tollens* arguments, claiming that the rejection of the unorthodox consequents of the conditionals force us to reject the antecedent “evolution is true.”<sup>5</sup> I’ll attempt to show that there are points in the chain of reasoning where the asserted entailments can plausibly be denied. That means proponents of EC can accept the antecedent “evolution is true” without having to accept the problematic theological conclusions critics claim follow from evolution. It will also be seen that different people within the EC camp might object at different points in the string of conditionals.

4. For example, Adam and Eve are not mentioned in Genesis 1 where the six-day account is given; there is no mention of hours in Genesis 1 (and not even a sun for the first three days by which their length might be measured); and there are assumptions that must be made about the genealogies to get all the numbers required for the calculation (and it is not clear genealogies in the ancient Near East were intended to function this way).

5. Regarding the technical terminology, *modus ponens* arguments have a premise of the form “If A is true, then B must be true” as their first premise, and then the second premise is the claim “A really is true.” That generates the conclusion “B really is true.” *Modus tollens* arguments have the same first premise, but the second premise is the claim “B is false” which generates the conclusion “A is false.” For the conditional premise “If A then B”, whatever is in the A position is called the antecedent, and whatever is in the B position is called the consequent.

## 1. Sin and the Need for a Savior

The first topic I will consider involves the conceptual territory of Adam and Eve, original sin, and the need for a savior. Here is one way the central chain of reasoning can go:

If evolution is true,  
↳ then we didn't all descend from just two people;  
↳ and so there is no Adam and Eve;  
↳ and then we couldn't have inherited original sin;  
↳ so there is no need for a savior.

Of course there is a real concern for Christians here at the end of the chain of reasoning. Jesus Christ as the savior of the world is absolutely central to the Christian faith. If a line of reasoning leads us to believe that Christ's saving work is somehow not necessary, that can be taken as a *reductio ad absurdum* argument (or when the implied premises are supplied, a *modus tollens* argument). When the reasoning of the chain of implications is accepted, that means the starting point—evolution is true—must be denied by faithful Christians. Skeptics accept the starting point as obviously true, and accept the chain of reasoning, and therefore assert that our faith has been undermined. But does this really follow? Can we accept the starting point, but not be pulled through to the conclusion? I think we can.

Yes, if evolution is true, then we did not all come from just two people. But I am not so sure this next link follows. There are some defenders of evolutionary creation who think that Adam and Eve are symbolic and not historical individuals.<sup>6</sup> But there are others who accept the science of evolution and still think there are ways of holding to a literal pair that is consistent with science and with Scripture. Denis Alexander details several possibilities in his *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?*<sup>7</sup> He himself thinks a representative model of Adam is most plausible according to which God entered into a relationship with two individuals some 10,000 years ago (among the thousands living at the time), and they served as representatives for all of humanity. There are other options for a real Adam and Eve who were representatives of all humanity, and even some models according to which Adam and Eve were ancestors of all humanity (though not the sole progenitors of all humanity).<sup>8</sup> Genetic science has shown persuasively (through multiple independent lines of evidence) that the genetic diversity we find in humans today could not have come from just two people living six

6. See, for example, Denis Lamoureux's contribution to *Four Views on the Historical Adam*, ed. Caneaday and Barrett (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).

7. Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* Revised and expanded (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2014).

8. Alexander details five different models for understanding Adam and Eve in *Creation or Evolution*, chapter 10.

to ten thousand years ago.<sup>9</sup> But genetics cannot comment on whether God entered into a relationship with two people and treated them as representatives for all.

The next step in the argument is even more tenuous when it is tied to evolutionary science. The assertion seems to be that our sinful condition is passed through lines of biological inheritance. But does anyone really think now that sin is literally passed on through the mechanism we know to be responsible for biological inheritance—DNA? If so, we now have the technological ability to edit DNA through the CRISPR technology,<sup>10</sup> so if we could just identify which sequence of nucleotides corresponds to that inherited sin nature, we could once and for all rid the human race of original sin! That is a seriously faulty concept of original sin if it leads to such consequences. Instead, we must acknowledge that all humans sin—that is the biblical affirmation. It may be difficult to say exactly when sin entered the human race on evolutionary terms, and there is rigorous and helpful exploration of this now.<sup>11</sup> But it is not controversial at all to say that as a matter of fact sin did enter the human race. We all sin. None of us doubts that. Our inability to tell all of our species' history in detail does not prevent us from understanding our current condition. Consider if you were out hiking and came across an injured dog: you could tell immediately that help is needed without knowing exactly how the dog came to be injured. So too, it is painfully obvious that we all sin, so we need a savior. Understanding our natural history in evolutionary terms does not prevent us from affirming the reality of our salvation history.

## **2. Human Uniqueness and the Image of God**

Another concern people often have about the implications of evolutionary science is regarding our status as unique among all creatures, and what that means for the theological doctrine of the image of God. The argument might go as follows:

If evolution is true,

↳ then we have common ancestry with other forms of life;

↳ and then we cannot say exactly when human life began;

↳ so we are no different than other animals;

↳ and therefore we cannot bear the image of God.

9. See chapter three in Dennis Venema and Scot McKnight, *Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture after Genetic Science* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017). See also Eugene E. Harris, *Ancestors in Our Genome: The New Science of Human Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

10. A good introduction to CRISPR can be found at the Broad Institute website: <https://www.broadinstitute.org/what-broad/areas-focus/project-spotlight/questions-and-answers-about-crispr>

11. The 2016 Theology Fellows at BioLogos each wrote about sin from the perspective of evolutionary creation. Their posts can be found at: <http://biologos.org/blogs/guest/2016-theology-fellow-posts/>. Also look for the forthcoming book: Chad V. Meister and J. B. Stump, eds., *Five Views on Original Sin and the Fall* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, forthcoming 2018).

Once again, the first step is indisputable according to our current understanding of evolution. Pick any two people, and if you go back far enough in their family trees, you'll come to ancestor from which they both descend. Evolution predicts that the same is true of any two individual life forms: for a human and a chimpanzee, the common ancestor is about 6 million years ago; for a human and a fish, it is about 420 million years ago; for a human and a fern, it is about 1.35 billion years ago.<sup>12</sup> Does this mean we cannot say exactly when human life began? Some people affirm we cannot. It is problematic in the biological sense to say that one generation of non-humans suddenly gave birth to little human beings. It just does not work that way. The boundary lines between species are blurry.

We can look at the fossils of our ancestors and say with some degree of confidence that those older than three or four hundred thousand years ago were not us; and we can say with some confidence that those more recent than one hundred thousand years ago are anatomically just like us. But so much of what makes us human is not preserved in the fossil record. Theologically, some people might assert that there was a definitive break, a time when God breathed his breath into those *Homo sapiens* and made them fully human. The fossil record does record a fairly dynamic influx of symbolic activities starting around fifty thousand years ago (cave paintings, jewelry, decorations, etc.). Were these the result of our becoming "truly human"? Some scholars, like J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, see tremendous theological significance in this period of the emergence of "behaviorally modern" human beings.<sup>13</sup> Other scholars argue that evidence for a sudden burst of new behaviors is less than compelling and that the emergence of modern human behavior was more gradual.<sup>14</sup>

So some evolutionary creationists agree that we cannot say exactly when human life began; some do accept that uncertainty as an implication of evolution. Even if we agree, must we accept the next claim in the chain of reasoning, viz., that we are no different than other animals? I do not think this follows. Among those with an atheistic axe to grind, it is not uncommon to hear claims about humans being just another animal—a hairless ape, or tailless monkey. And Darwin himself in his later work attempted to show that even our cognitive abilities—as remarkable as they are compared to any other animal—differ only in degree, not in kind, from other animals:

The difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, certainly is one of degree and not of kind. We have seen that the senses and intuitions, the various emotions and faculties, such as love, memory, attention, curiosity,

12. A fun, interactive web page showing lineages and calculating generations and years to last common ancestors with human beings is: <https://www.evogeneao.com/explore/tree-of-life-explorer>.

13. See J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Alone in the World? Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

14. For example, John Shea, "*Homo sapiens* is as *Homo sapiens* was: Behavioral Variability versus 'Behavioral Modernity' in Paleolithic Archaeology," *Current Anthropology*, 52(1) (2011): 1-35.

imitation, reason, etc., of which man boasts, may be found in an incipient, or even sometimes in a well-developed condition, in the lower animals.<sup>15</sup>

The gap once seemed to be a temporary deficiency of our own knowledge and it would be only a matter of time until we filled it in with a smooth continuum of abilities; now it seems to be more definitive. One does not have to invoke theology to argue for human uniqueness these days, as one recent book puts it:

A hundred years of intensive research has established beyond reasonable doubt what most human beings have intuited all along; the gap is real. In a number of key dimensions, particularly the social realm, human cognition vastly outstrips that of even the cleverest nonhuman primates.<sup>16</sup>

There is a very strong case to be made for human uniqueness from a host of disciplines—and often with non-Christian scholars as the leading voices.<sup>17</sup> There is a remarkable difference in kind between us and other animals, not just a difference of degree. The tricky and often misunderstood part of this response is that the capacities that set us apart (morality, reason, language, culture, and so on) are dependent upon other components of behavior and our brain structures, and these things do have evolutionary stories. So we find hints or precursors of them in other species. But the story of how we came to be does not determine the kind of thing we are.

Finally for this topic, even if someone were to go all the way down the chain of reasoning and accept that we are not different in kind than other animals, that does not force them to accept that we are incapable of bearing the image of God. There is much theological discussion about what it means to bear God's image. Some theories depend on the kind of capacities we have, and so if our capacities are not really that different than other animals, then we could not justifiably claim the image of God to the exclusion of other species. But other understandings of the image of God are relational. That is to say, we bear the image because God chose us; God entered into a relationship with us. Presumably there are some necessary capacities for God choosing us (I am not claiming God could have chosen cucumbers to bear his image). But even if there are other species (whether extant or extinct, on Earth or elsewhere in

15. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, Chapter IV ("Comparison of the Mental Powers of Man and the Lower Animals--continued"), in *The Origin of Species and The Descent of Man* (New York: The Modern Library, 1936), 494-95.

16. Kevin Laland, *Darwin's Unfinished Symphony: How Culture Made the Human Mind* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 14.

17. Examples of non-Christian scholars who defend human uniqueness: from paleoanthropology, Ian Tattersall, *Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness* (New York: Harcourt, 1998); from neuroscience, Terrence Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: the Co-evolution of Language and the Brain* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997); from philosophy, Raymond Tallis, *Aping Man-kind: Neuromania, Darwinitis and the Misrepresentation of Humanity* (London: Routledge, 2016); from biology, David Sloan Wilson, *Evolution for Everyone: How Darwin's Theory Can Change the Way We Think about our Lives* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2008); and from psychology, Michael Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).



the universe) that have those minimally required capacities, one could still make the case we and we alone bear God's image because we were elected to do so. This does not differ in its justification from the theological position that God elected Abram, or that some people are predestined and others are not. It could be a matter of God's will that we bear his image and others do not, rather than a matter of our own merit.

Again, different people within the camp of EC will find different jumping off points of this chain of reasoning most plausible. They need not all agree on just where that point is in order to be unified in their assessment that the science of evolution does not present an insurmountable problem for affirming the theological doctrine that humanity was created in God's image.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Divine Action and Deism

Next, as I alluded in my introduction, there is often a problem for people in understanding how God's intentional action can be accounted for in scientific theories. The fear is that if we have scientific explanations for things, then God is no longer needed to explain that part of reality. Increasing scientific knowledge seems to paint God into a smaller and smaller corner. An argument expressing that sentiment might be the following:

If evolution is true,  
↳ then there are random elements to the development of life;  
↳ that means God does not guide or direct the process;  
↳ and then there are no miracles;  
↳ so we're stuck with a distant and  
uninvolved God (deism).

In evaluating this chain of reasoning, we should start by saying that if evolution is true, then it is true from the perspective of science that there are random elements to the development of life. Part of my response to this argument is to show that science is one perspective—not the only perspective. So some theological traditions (though not my own) could merely assert that God determines every facet of our world, and therefore evolution does not include any randomness in reality, just an epistemological randomness because of our inability to know all things. They deny the very first step of this chain of reasoning.

But many evolutionary creationists would accept that evolution entails some random elements to the development of life. Does that mean God cannot guide or direct the process? I do not think that follows, especially since we recognize that even we lowly humans can direct some random processes like lotteries and other games

18. Worth reading on this topic to get an overview of and orientation to the different approaches to theological anthropology is the article by Joshua M. Moritz, "Evolutionary Biology and Theological Anthropology," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2015).

of chance. Casinos do remarkably well at turning a consistent profit on the random outcomes of their games. Could it not be the same for God and evolution? No one is claiming that every aspect of evolution is random, just that there are some random elements—like when and where a mutation occurs in the transcription of genetic code.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps there are enough parameters built into the system (like the rules of casinos' games of chance) that over the long term, there are certain outcomes that are inevitable. Simon Conway Morris has earned a reputation for defending a version of convergent evolution according to which if we replayed the development of life, we would end up with very similar kinds of organisms.<sup>20</sup>

That is one interesting line of inquiry about divine action, but there is a slightly different concern many people have with scientific explanations with respect to divine action: if we have a scientific explanation (like random genetic mutations plus natural selection), then God must not be involved. That quickly leads to concerns about miracles in general and the fear that if you do not invoke God's special action to create human beings, then there are no grounds for believing in the resurrection. And if you believe in God at all after that, it could only be the God of deism who sits back and watches everything go on its own without any intervention.

But that view of divine action is seriously deficient, as it seems to imply a strict "either-or" between God's special, miraculous action on the one hand, and the natural workings of things on the other. It is a laudable impulse to keep God involved in our explanations, but when divine action is asserted only at the expense of there being no natural explanation, we set ourselves up for diminishing theological returns. This setup implies that God is not involved in phenomena for which we have natural explanations. Does God not cause the sun to rise, or knit us together in our mother's womb? On this understanding, we would have to say no. And that means we are already practically deists or episodic deists, because as Aubrey Moore noticed in the late nineteenth century, "a theory of occasional intervention implies as its correlative a theory of ordinary absence."<sup>21</sup>

The key to seeing the problem with this reasoning is to recognize that scientific explanations are limited, that they do not tell the whole story. The best illustration of this

19. Some people even claim that perhaps God is causing the right mutations to occur in order to keep things evolving the way he intends for them to develop, but that God is able to do this beyond the ability of science to detect his action. For example, Robert J. Russell, "Quantum Physics and the Theology of Non-Interventionist Objective Divine Action," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

20. See Simon Conway Morris, *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

21. Aubrey Moore, *Science and the Faith: Essays on Apologetic Subjects*, 6th ed. (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1905), 184.

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is still the one John Polkinghorne made famous about the boiling teakettle<sup>22</sup>: if we come into a room and see a kettle boiling, we might ask for an explanation: why is the kettle boiling? A scientist in the room might say that the electrical circuit was closed which caused electrons to flow through the heating element, which conducted heat to the kettle, which increased the kinetic energy of the water molecules, causing the vapor pressure of the liquid to exceed that of the surrounding atmosphere. That is a fine explanation, and in no part of it do we say, “and then a miracle happens.” So we understand the natural process very well. But it does not tell the whole story of what is going on in that room. For someone else there might answer our question, “Why is the kettle boiling?” with “because I wanted a cup of tea.” That personal explanation addresses a different dimension of reality, and it is not invalidated when we learn the scientific explanation of the process. We just have a better, bigger understanding of reality.

In the same way, I think it is perfectly legitimate to say theologically (a kind of personal explanation) that God created me in his image, that he knit me together in my mother’s womb—even though we also understand the natural explanation for how I came to be. So just as we know the scientific story of how each of us as individuals came about, and that does not negate the theological dimension of God’s involvement, neither should the scientific story of how our species came about negate the theological dimension of God’s involvement in that process.

#### 4. The Problem of Evil and the Goodness of God

Finally, we get to this last topic, and for many people this is the most difficult one. But it does not seem like the success or failure of EC should be pinned to whether it can answer the problem of evil to everyone’s satisfaction—since no other position has done that. Still, we want to be able to say something about this problem. Consider this framing of the problem:

- If evolution is true,
  - ↳ then created things have been dying since the very beginning;
  - ↳ so creation could not have been very good;
  - ↳ that means God is responsible for evil;
  - ↳ and therefore God is not good.

There is a picture of creation many people have according to which the “very good” creation means everything was originally perfect and nothing was dying—not even

22. Polkinghorne’s first published use of this example appears to be in “Is Science Enough?” *Sewanee Theological Review*, 39 (1995): 11-26. It should be noted, however, that Alister McGrath claims in his *The Big Question* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015), 44 the teakettle example first came from geologist (and then president of Cornell University) Frank H. T. Rhodes in his “Christianity in a Mechanistic Universe” in *Christianity in a Mechanistic Universe and Other Essays*, D.M. MacKay, ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1965), 42.

the organisms of the microbiome, on some accounts.<sup>23</sup> That picture bears little resemblance to the overall scriptural narrative, which must take account of God's provision of food for predators (Ps 104:21) and for creating monsters like leviathan (Job 41). Perhaps it is argued that these pertain only to the post-Fall creation. But then we can point to Genesis 1, where there is no hint of a Fall: God creates the humans, then commands them to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it. After that, God calls the situation "very good". This must mean that God did not create things originally the way he intended for them to be. He could have snapped his fingers and made a world that was already filled and subdued, but he did not do that. Instead he created us and instructed us to do it.

If God created things such that they needed subduing, but even in that condition were called "very good", it seems that God delights in the process of things coming to be what he wants them to be. So we can affirm that God ultimately intends for death to be defeated, while accepting that the world was not originally created in that condition, even though it was very good. I think that point alone stops this argument from reaching its conclusion, but I think we can say something more positive about how the EC position can treat the problem of evil, suggestive though it may be.

The evolutionary struggle is often criticized as involving needless pain and suffering. But that point seems often overblown as a critique unique to evolution. Evolution does not require death and suffering; it only requires variation among offspring and a selection mechanism that gives an advantage to some offspring for reproducing. Yes, some individual organisms die painful deaths on the evolutionary account; they do on non-evolutionary accounts as well. The fact that many more do on evolutionary accounts than on versions of natural history that appeal to the special creation of species, seems to be merely a function of the fact that there are many more creatures that live and die over the span of evolutionary time (hundreds of millions of years). That is often called "wastefulness" by opponents of EC, but we might just as well call it the lavishness and extravagance of God's creation. Our understanding of the cosmos and all it contains has continued to reveal the unbelievably vastness of what God has made. That is consistent with the evolutionary account according to which many, many more things have been allowed to exist and to reflect God's glory in their unique ways.

I think it is important to look at the fallenness and difficult parts of creation with eschatology foremost in our minds. It is not orthodox theology to claim God is looking to save us in order to whisk us off to some far away heaven that is unconnected to this created order. If that is what he wanted, he could have just made that from the start. Instead, he has saved us so we might function as we were intended to: as his image bearers and rulers in his kingdom now and in the new heavens and the new earth that

23. For example, Alan Gillen, "The Wonderfully Made Design of the Skin and Its Microbiome," last modified July 16, 2014, accessed May 31, 2017, <https://answersingenesis.org/human-body/wonderfully-made-design-skin-and-its-microbiome/>.

are to come. And thus the grand narrative of salvation history should be seen as one in which God has embarked on a project of shaping us to be who he wants us to be. This applies to us as individuals, as each of us has a story of our spiritual journey to tell. But it seems appropriate to me to say as well that God has shaped us as a species—call it the spiritual journey of *Homo sapiens*.

Perhaps there is an argument analogous to the free will defense here. Perhaps the process of evolution is the only way to develop moral beings like us. Maybe it cannot be done for us. Maybe God can no more snap his fingers to create morally mature creatures than he could create free persons who are incapable of sin. These are contradictions in terms. We become morally mature only by being involved in our own moral formation, by making decisions with moral implications; and this requires challenging environments where decisions have serious consequences. So perhaps our species' capacity for moral responsibility was forged from processes that included pain. This is not senseless pain and gratuitous violence; but consistent with the cruciform nature of creation, it is ultimately redemptive, as God transforms all of creation—even the hard parts—and from the beginning has been working all things together for good. The Christian hope is not in some fabled, perfect past; but in the transformed future, the new heavens and the new earth, the kingdom of God.

And pushing the speculative nature of this exercise even further, perhaps there is an eschatological dimension for creatures beyond humans. Keith Ward says, "Immortality, for animals as well as humans, is a necessary condition of any acceptable theodicy."<sup>24</sup> Such sentiments are not just the post-Darwinian innovations of liberal theologians. John Wesley also thought there might be a place for non-human animals in the afterlife. He said,

May it not answer another end; namely, furnish us with a full answer to a plausible objection against the justice of God, in suffering numberless creatures that never had sinned to be so severely punished? they could not sin, for they were not moral agents. Yet how severely do they suffer! . . . but the objection vanishes away if we consider that something better remains after death for these creatures also; that these likewise shall one day be delivered from this bondage of corruption, and shall then receive an ample amends for all their present sufferings.<sup>25</sup>

This is not some sort of simplistic "all dogs go to heaven" claim, but rather the suggestion that it is fitting with a view of God's justice that all creatures have a place in the Kingdom of God according to their kinds.

24. Keith Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 1982), 201.

25. John Wesley, "The General Deliverance" in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 251.

I do not pretend to have solved the problem of evil. Now we see through a glass darkly. But I think such suggestions show that EC has the resources to grapple with it as least as well as other positions.

### **Conclusion**

I have tried to give some flavor of the kinds of theological concerns many people have with evolutionary creation. Some scholars might object that the arguments as I have presented them here are just strawmen. I invite such objectors to spend some time fielding questions about the topic at evangelical churches (or in online forums). These are real concerns that real people have, and they deserve careful and sympathetic responses. All of us benefit from hearing them and working through responses to them.

I want to affirm with critics of EC—particularly with my brothers and sisters in Christ—that it is good to be concerned about theology. I do not take these issues lightly, but neither do I take the testimony of the created world lightly. And when it so clearly says evolution is real, we have got to allow that to be in dialogue with our theology. It seems to me that a result of that dialogue will be a greater understanding of the truth both in theology and in science.