

GOD
AND
EVOLUTION

PROTESTANTS, CATHOLICS, AND JEWS
EXPLORE DARWIN'S CHALLENGE TO FAITH

JAY W. RICHARDS, EDITOR

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Description

This book seeks to analyze “theistic evolution,” to critique various attempts to reconcile Darwinism with traditional theistic religion, and to respond to criticisms of intelligent design. Contributors include William Dembski, Logan Gage, David Klinghoffer, Stephen Meyer, Denyse O’Leary, Jay Richards, Jonathan Wells, John West, and Jonathan Witt. Edited by Jay W. Richards.

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INTRODUCTION

Squaring the Circle

Jay W. Richards

WHEN SOMEONE ASKS ME: “CAN YOU BELIEVE IN GOD AND EVOLUTION?” I always respond: “That depends. What do you mean by ‘God’ and what do you mean by ‘evolution?’” No one seems to be very satisfied with this retort, which seems evasive; but it’s the honest answer, since the initial question, as it stands, is hopelessly ambiguous. Without more detail, it’s susceptible to almost any answer.

Asking whether one supports so-called “theistic evolution” has the same problem. Unless you define “theistic” and “evolution” very carefully, it might refer to positions that, on closer inspection, are more different than they are alike. One version might be an oxymoron, one a triviality, one an interesting proposition, and another, a complete muddle.

Besides being vague, these questions, and practically every answer to them, are controversial. Perhaps no subject now inspires more heated arguments at family reunions and cocktail parties. Whether in religious or secular, scientific or literary circles, giving the “wrong” answer can put you on the fast track to being labeled a heretic. A scientist in an academic setting who expresses any doubt about Darwinism, for instance, may find himself in a battle for tenure and funding. In his church, the same scientist may be suspected of creeping liberalism because he doesn’t think the word “evolution” means atheism. Or he may be thought a “fundamentalist” because he thinks his faith has something to do with his science, and vice versa.

Such countervailing social pressures don’t encourage clear thinking or clear speaking. So when they encounter the question, many people, especially academics, choose obfuscation over clarification. If pressed, they may attempt to stake out a moderate both-and position: “I think evolution is God’s way of creating.”¹ For the conflict-averse, this may be a reassuring response, but what does it mean?

In the century and a half since Charles Darwin first proposed his theory of evolution, Christians, Jews, and other religious believers have not only pondered its truth—or lack thereof—they have grappled with how to make sense of it theologically. So far, they haven't reached a consensus and tend, instead, to argue among themselves. It can be quite confusing. In fact, the whole subject of God and evolution, and especially what is called “theistic evolution,” is an enigma wrapped in a shroud of fuzz and surrounded by a blanket of fog.

The purpose of this book is to clear away the fog, the fuzz, and the enigma.

GETTING OUR HISTORY RIGHT

ONE OF THE FIRST patches of fog that needs to be cleared away is pop culture's caricature of the historical relationship between evolution and religion. In America, that caricature is epitomized by the old film *Inherit the Wind*, which reduces the debate over Darwin to a battle royal between intolerant Bible-thumpers and enlightened champions of free speech. In England, the caricature is epitomized by an exchange between a scientist and a clergyman. On June 30, 1860, a mere seven months after Charles Darwin released his *Origin of Species*, Oxford's Museum of Natural History hosted a famous debate on Darwin's theory of descent with modification, or what would later be called his theory of evolution. Among its distinguished participants were “Darwin's Bull Dog,” Thomas Henry Huxley, and the Anglican Bishop Samuel Wilberforce. During the course of the debate, it is said that Wilberforce asked Huxley if it was through his grandmother or grandfather that he supposed that he was descended from apes. Huxley purportedly said that he “was not ashamed to have a monkey for his ancestor; but he would be ashamed to be connected with a man who used great gifts to obscure the truth.”

The Huxley-Wilberforce repartee is often portrayed as a decisive victory for good science over bad religion. J. R. Lucas cheekily summarizes the received account:

Huxley's simple scientific sincerity humbled the prelatial insolence and clerical obscurantism of Soapy Sam; the pretension of the

Church to dictate to scientists the conclusions they were allowed to reach were, for good and all, decisively defeated; the autonomy of science was established in Britain and the Western world; the claim of plain unvarnished truth on men's allegiance was vindicated, however unwelcome its implications for human vanity might be; and the flood tide of Victorian faith in all its fulsomeness was turned to an ebb, which has continued to our present day and will only end when religion and superstition have been finally eliminated from the minds of all enlightened men.²

It's a memorable story. But as Lucas's arch tone suggests, this trope, like so many stories drawn from the hallowed pages of Darwiniana, is mostly mythology.

First of all, careful historians suspect that the grandparent-ape exchange probably never happened. Even though it is the most widely recounted detail from the famous debate, there was no contemporaneous report of it.

Second, it misrepresents how Darwin's theory was initially received. To judge from the story of the debate, you would think that objections to Darwin's theory came mainly from clerics and religious believers for religious reasons, while being quickly embraced as good science by scientists.³ In truth, Darwin had a number of scientific critics, and even Bishop Wilberforce focused on scientific rather than religious objections to Darwin's theory.

Third, the Christian response to his theory was diverse from the very beginning. For instance, Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield, two nineteenth century Presbyterian theologians at Princeton Theological Seminary, initially disagreed with each other on the merits, and theological implications, of Darwin's theory. Both were pillars of conservatism. But while Hodge saw the theory as atheism masquerading as science, Warfield thought it could be reconciled with Christian orthodoxy (though he later came to agree more with Hodge⁴). There was similar ambivalence among Catholics. Although most traditional Catholics opposed the implications of Darwin's theory for human beings, the *Origin of Species* was never placed on the Church's Index of Prohibited Books.

Fourth, the Huxley-Wilberforce debate is often used to illustrate a larger myth about an innate war between science and religion. Tales of that

warfare usually include Copernicus, Galileo, Giordano Bruno, and William Jennings Bryan. Though many science textbooks still spread this “warfare myth,” most historians of science recognize that this simplistic trope distorts a much more complicated and interesting history of interaction between science and religion in the West. Many have argued, in fact, that the Judeo-Christian tradition actually helped give rise to natural science.⁵

There is no innate war between natural science and theistic religion; nevertheless, the question of God-and-evolution remains complicated, controversial—and confused.

A RANGE OF VIEWS

THERE ARE PRACTICALLY AS many views of how God relates to evolution as there are people who have pondered the subject. Still, most views fall into one of several categories. Unfortunately, before defining the categories, you have to overcome a terminological hurdle. What do you do with the troublesome word “creationist”? The word is usually used pejoratively, to bring to mind “young earth creationists” who believe that God created the universe in six, twenty-four hour days sometime in the last ten thousand years. Critics assume that the young earth view is so disreputable that anyone associated with it will likewise be tarnished. However you judge that uncharitable assumption, you can’t use the word “creationist” these days without carrying some of this baggage along for the ride.

This is an accident of history. In a less complicated world, the word “creationist” would not be a put-down but simply a way to refer to people—Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, and other theists—who believe in a doctrine of creation. Regrettably, that’s not how the world or the word works. Like it or not, the entire discussion about God and evolution takes place in a rhetorical context designed to misdirect and misrepresent certain views, especially those views that take God seriously.

Since we’re stuck with the word creationist, though, we’ll just have to slog ahead.

Besides “young earth creationists,” there are folks who refer to themselves as “old earth creationists” and others who call themselves “progressive

creationists.” Old earth creationists generally hold to mainstream scientific views of the age of the Earth and the universe, but believe that God worked directly in nature (as a “primary” or “efficient cause”⁶) to create some things. These might include heavenly bodies like galaxies and the solar system, the first reproducing cell, various forms of life, human beings, human souls, and so forth. Old earth creationists disagree among themselves on the *loci*—the places—where they think that God acts directly, but all agree that, sometimes at least, God acts directly in natural history to bring about things that nature would not produce if left to its own devices.

Progressive creationists also believe that God acts directly at various points in cosmic history, but they tend to see more evolutionary development between the seams of God’s specific acts.

Then there are those who don’t fit simply on the “creationist” spectrum, but do challenge materialistic theories of evolution. For example, “**intelligent design**” or “**ID**” theorists argue that nature, or certain aspects of nature, are best explained by intelligent design. On this view, repetitive, law-like or mechanistic explanations that invoke, say, the gravitational force and natural selection, explain some aspects of nature, but a full explanation of the natural world will include intelligent agency as well.

Moreover, ID theorists have argued that physical laws are themselves the result of intelligent design, even if they are not, arguably, adequate to explain everything in nature.

At the same time, ID theorists focus on the detectable effects of intelligence, rather than on the specific locations or modes of design within nature. As William Dembski, one prominent ID proponent, puts it: “Intelligent design (ID) is the study of patterns in nature that are best explained as the result of intelligence.”⁷ Since ID is minimal, it is logically compatible with almost any creationist or evolutionist view that allows for intelligent agency as an explanation within nature. (The contributors to this volume fall into the ID camp.)

Finally, there are **theistic evolutionists**, who would appear to subscribe to a hybrid position that combines both “theism” and “evolution.” Most theistic evolutionists contrast their view with “special creationism,” which would

include any view that suggests that God has acted directly in natural history. However, logically speaking, a theistic evolutionist could also be an ID proponent (in fact, there are many such people). Nevertheless, most self-described theistic evolutionists distinguish themselves from intelligent design proponents, and are, in some cases, harsh critics of ID. So, like the word creationist, “theistic evolution” tends to have a meaning different from what its etymology alone would suggest.

So what exactly is theistic evolution? It would be nice to open Webster’s, find the definitions of “theism” and “evolution,” stick the definitions together, and be done with it. Alas, it’s not that simple. Behind the phrase “theistic evolution” lurks a lot of mischief and confusion.

A DILEMMA

WHEN DEALING WITH GOD and evolution, most people have an intuitive feeling that there’s some contradiction lurking in the neighborhood, some dilemma that has to be resolved. Even children, at some point, begin to sense this. Most probably ask their parents what my eleven year old daughter asked me recently: “So why did God make dinosaurs that all died out millions of years before Adam and Eve?” Several years earlier, she had asked, obviously garbling the kindergarten evolution lesson: “Did we used to have tails?” Perhaps you’d have ready answers to these questions. But if you’re like millions of other parents, you might try to punt.

For punters, theistic evolution (or “evolutionary creationism” as it’s sometimes called) might seem to promise some relief. But eventually, if you tell an attentive child that evolution is just God’s way of creating, she’s going to ask you what you mean. It would be nice to have something more than a pat answer accompanied by some hand waving.

The difficulty begins when we start to dig into the common textbook definitions of the term “evolution.” Here, evolution is often *defined* by its opposition to creation. Consider just two academic sources among legion: “That organisms have evolved rather than having been created is the single most important and unifying principle of modern biology.”⁸ And here’s the Harvard paleontologist George Gaylord Simpson: “Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind.”⁹ Darwin

himself understood his theory this way. As he said, “There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings, and in the action of natural selection, than in the course which the winds blow.”¹⁰

These descriptions of (Darwinian) evolution don’t leave a lot of wiggle room. And notice that the idea of organisms evolving *rather than* being created is not presented as a side-light, as the private opinion of a few scientists. In the first quote, as in many others, evolution is described as the “single most important and unifying principle of modern biology.” It would be hard to put the point any more strongly.

Surely, for the sake of truth and sanity, it’s better to ask and answer the follow up questions directly than to avoid them indefinitely.

THE DILEMMA WITH DILEMMAS

BEFORE DIVING IN, HOWEVER, let’s step back and think about dilemmas in general. Whenever you’re trying to hold together ideas that seem to contradict each other, you have a *dilemma*—or trilemma if there are three ideas involved. (We don’t have a word for apparent contradictions that involve more than three ideas, perhaps because most of us just give up or think about something else when things get that complicated.)

Anyone who has studied theology or philosophy will be familiar with one famous trilemma, called the problem of evil. The problem of evil involves three ideas believed by most theists (that is, people who believe in a personal God who transcends the universe). The problem is that it seems at first blush like these three beliefs can’t all be true:

1. God is all powerful.
2. God is perfectly good.
3. There is evil in the world.

There’s no obvious contradiction here, as there is if you claim that 2 plus 2 equals 4 and 2 plus 2 does not equal four, or you say that your best friend is a married bachelor. In fact, the three claims above aren’t even about the same things. The first two are about God. The third is, strictly speaking, about the world. So we’re not dealing with what is called a formal contradiction. Still,

most college freshmen sense trouble when they first see the problem of evil presented in Philosophy 101.

And the freshmen are surely right. The basic intuition motivating this trilemma is that if God is really all good and all powerful, it seems that he would not create a world with evil in it. Whatever world he created, he would know how things are going to turn out and would prevent evil from popping up anywhere in his creation. Since there obviously is evil in the world (premise three), something must be wrong with at least one or both of the other premises. Either God is not all powerful or he's not perfectly good. Or maybe he's neither.

Now there are a few basic ways to resolve any real dilemma (or trilemma in this case). If you want to be consistent, you need to drop one of the premises. Since contradictions describe impossible situations, at least one of them has to be false.

To solve the problem of evil, for example, you might decide that God is good but not all powerful, so he just can't keep all the evil out. Or maybe he's all powerful but not perfectly good, so he's not really that concerned if evil turns up. Or maybe we're mistaken and there is no evil in the world, meaning there's no reason to doubt that God is all-powerful and perfectly good. If you go in any of these three directions—problem solved.

Regrettably, each of these solutions requires that you abandon one of the beliefs that, if you're a theist, you'd prefer to retain. If you believe that God is all powerful, perfectly good, *and* that, nevertheless, there is evil in the world, then you want to find a way to reconcile the three beliefs, not sacrifice one for the others. So you may hold out hope that what looks like a contradiction is not really one at all, but just an unfortunate misunderstanding.

The traditional response to the problem of evil, for instance, is called the free will defense. According to this rejoinder, in choosing to create the world, God chose to create free beings such as humans and angels, beings so free that they could choose against him, could do evil. Even though God is all powerful, he couldn't create a world with free beings and no evil, any more than he could create a square circle. No matter how powerful God is,

there is no possible world with free beings and no evil. So God had to accept a trade-off.

Usually the free will defense is paired with the greater good defense, which says that a world with free beings and some evil is better, all things being equal, than a world that lacks both free beings and evil. This assumes that the existence of free beings has intrinsic value. And since God knows how things are going to turn out, he can bring about a greater good by allowing free beings to exercise evil than by creating a world of robots that always do what they're told. As Joseph (in the book of Genesis) explained to his brothers, who had sold him into slavery, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."

There is, of course, much more that could be said about this thorny issue (for example, the problem of evil in the natural world), but this short summary should give you some sense of the basic moves for solving a dilemma. When it comes to the question of God and evolution, we're dealing with a different subject but the same basic options.

Presumably, a theistic evolutionist is someone who claims that both theism *in some sense* and evolution *in some sense* are true, that both God and evolution somehow work together in explaining the world. But of course, all the real interest is hidden behind the phrase "in some sense." So let's lay out the main senses of the two words in question.

"THEISM"

ALTHOUGH DIFFERENT PEOPLE UNDERSTAND God differently, the word "God" has a pretty stable meaning in ordinary conversation. If I tell Christopher Hitchens, an atheist, that I believe in God, he has some sense of what I mean. In ordinary English and other Western languages, "God" usually refers to a Creator, a personal being who has chosen to create the world, who is powerful and perfect in whatever ways such a being could be powerful and perfect, and who transcends the universe. That is, God would exist, would be, whether or not he had chosen to create the world. The world, in contrast, exists as the result of his free choice, for his purposes and at his discretion.

Of course, “God” doesn’t refer to just any old being like a bunny resting on a down or the guy in Mumbai who answers your questions when you call Dell tech support. God, though a “being” in the sense that he “exists” (or, more precisely, is), is himself the source of other beings, and in that way, he is qualitatively different from all other beings. Classical theists often say that God is “Being itself.” That way of speaking is a bit obscure to the uninitiated. At the very least, however, what this means is that God doesn’t participate in some more fundamental reality called “being” along with everything else. He is the Source of all being. Moreover, unlike you, me, and the burrito I had for lunch, God necessarily exists. He exists in every possible world.

Technically speaking, you could believe that such a God exists, and be either a theist or a deist. A **theist** believes that God both created the world and continues to conserve and interact in and with it.¹¹ In fact, God is so intimately related to the world that, while being separate from the world, he still wholly pervades it. So theists speak of God as both transcendent and immanent.¹² What the theist will never do is identify God with the world.

A **deist** holds a more minimal view, believing that God created the world but doesn’t really keep up with the day-to-day activities on the ground. Or even if he keeps up, he doesn’t get directly involved. He maintains a strictly hands-off policy.

Besides theism and deism, and leaving aside polytheism, the other main options are **pantheism** and **panentheism**. Pantheism identifies God and nature. For the pantheist, God doesn’t transcend the world nor is he independent of it. He’s not really even immanent in the world. Rather, God is the world and the world is God. For most pantheists, moreover, God is not really personal either. After all, the universe just doesn’t look much like an agent with purposes and a will. So for the pantheist, “God” might be thought of as a rational principle or a life force that somehow pervades the universe; but God, for the pantheist, most certainly is not a transcendent Creator.

A hybrid position is called **panentheism**, which holds that God has some transcendent qualities but is nevertheless in the world, or, to put it differently, the world is in him. The world, we might say, is part of God. God and nature may be distinct but they’re inseparable. A panentheist might think

of God as a Creator, but not in an absolute sense. God might push or pull or persuade or cajole things to go in a certain direction. He might have purposes. But he won't call everything into existence from nothing simply by his free choice. God will evolve along with the world.

Though there are a few Christian academics who identify with panentheism,¹³ the vast majority of Christians, Jews and Muslims, and the historic thinkers in these traditions, are theists. That's because the basic tenets of their religions hold that God is a transcendent Creator who at least occasionally acts directly in the world. All three of these Abrahamic faiths believe that God specially communicated with Abraham and Moses, for instance.

In addition, Christians believe that God became a man, Jesus, at a particular time and place; that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary rather than by ordinary means; and that after Jesus died, he was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. All this implies the Christian belief that God is triune. He exists eternally as three "persons" while still being one God. Though less central to Christian doctrine, most Christians also believe that Jesus worked certain extraordinary miracles, such as calming a storm and raising a girl from the dead.

Take away all beliefs about God acting in history, and you have at best only a shadow of theistic belief.

Of course, theists don't believe that God is aloof from the world except when he acts directly in nature. For theists, God transcends the world, is free to act directly in it, and always remains intimately involved with it.

At the same time, the theist need not believe that God always acts directly in the world. Traditionally, Christian theologians have argued that God can act in the world in two different ways. He can act directly or "primarily," such as when he creates the whole universe or raises Jesus from the dead. It's God's world, so that's his prerogative. He's not violating the universe or its laws when he does this, or invading alien territory, since he's the source of both the universe and whatever "laws" it might have.

He also can act through so-called "secondary causes." These include the choices or tendencies of the creatures he has made. For instance, he can work through the evil choices of Joseph's brothers to achieve a greater good

of getting the descendants of Abraham to Egypt so that they don't die from famine.

God can also bring about his purposes through natural processes and laws that he has established, such as the electromagnetic force. An event might be both an expression of a physical law and the purposes of God. It's not as if atheists appeal to gravity while theists appeal to miracles. Gravity is as consistent with theism as are miracles. But for the theist, gravity is a creature, or rather, it describes creatures. It's like a mathematical description of how God has ordained physical objects to act in ordinary circumstances; it's not an eternal law governing God's behavior.

Christians, Jews, and other theists recognize that God can act through secondary causes when they thank God for their food, even though they know that God normally provides our food, not as manna from heaven, but through natural causes like rain, spring, and soil, and through human actions like sowing and reaping. God is so free and so powerful that he can act either directly or through secondary causes. He's like a doting gardener who creates his own sun, seeds, water, nutrients, and dirt. And he's perfectly happy to have "flowers" who can make their own decisions.

Therefore, for theists, God, while acting either directly or through secondary causes, continually upholds, oversees and superintends his entire creation in "providence," even as he allows his creatures the freedom appropriate to their station.¹⁴

We've just scratched the surface, but we've probably said enough about theism for our purposes.

"EVOLUTION"

THOUGH GOD IS THE grandest and most difficult of all subjects, the meaning of the word "evolution" is actually a lot harder to nail down.

In an illuminating article called "The Meanings of Evolution," Stephen Meyer and Michael Keas distinguished six different ways in which "evolution" is commonly used:

1. Change over time; history of nature; any sequence of events in nature.

2. Changes in the frequencies of alleles in the gene pool of a population.
3. Limited common descent: the idea that particular groups of organisms have descended from a common ancestor.
4. The mechanisms responsible for the change required to produce limited descent with modification, chiefly natural selection acting on random variations or mutations.
5. Universal common descent: the idea that all organisms have descended from a single common ancestor.
6. “Blind watchmaker” thesis: the idea that all organisms have descended from common ancestors solely through unguided, unintelligent, purposeless, material processes such as natural selection acting on random variations or mutations; that the mechanisms of natural selection, random variation and mutation, and perhaps other similarly naturalistic mechanisms, are completely sufficient to account for the appearance of design in living organisms.¹⁵

Meyer and Keas provide many valuable insights in their article, but here we’re only concerned with “evolution” insofar as it’s relevant to theology.

The first meaning is uncontroversial—even trivial. The most convinced young earth creationist agrees that things change over time—that the universe has a history.¹⁶ Populations of animals wax and wane depending on changes in climate and the environment. At one time, certain flora and fauna prosper on the earth, but they later disappear, leaving mere impressions in the rocks to mark their existence for future generations.

Of course, “change over time” isn’t limited to biology. There’s also cosmic “evolution,” the idea that the early universe started in a hot, dense state, and over billions of years, cooled off and spread out, formed stars, galaxies, planets, and so forth. This includes the idea of cosmic nucleosynthesis, which seeks to explain the production of heavy elements (everything heavier than helium) in the universe through a process of star birth, growth, and death. These events involve change over time, but they have to do with the history of the inanimate physical universe rather than with the history of life. While this picture of cosmic evolution may contradict young earth creationism, it

does not otherwise pose a theological problem. The generic idea that one form of matter gives rise, under the influence of various natural laws and processes, to other forms of matter, does not contradict theism. Surely God could directly guide such a process in innumerable ways, could set up a series of secondary natural processes that could do the job, or could do some combination of both.

In fact, virtually no one denies the truth of “evolution” in senses 1, 2, or 3. And, pretty much everyone agrees that natural selection and random mutations explain some things in biology (number 4).

What about the fifth sense of evolution, universal common ancestry? This is the claim that all organisms on earth are descended from a single common ancestor that lived sometime in the distant past. Universal common ancestry is distinct from the mechanism of change. In fact, it’s compatible with all sorts of different mechanisms or sources for change, though the most popular mechanism is the broadly Darwinian one. It’s hard to square universal common descent with some interpretations of biblical texts of course; nevertheless, it’s *logically* compatible with theism. If God could turn dirt into a man, or a man’s rib into a woman, then presumably he could, if he so chose, turn a bacterium into a jellyfish, or a dinosaur into a bird. Whatever its exegetical problems, an unbroken evolutionary tree of life *guided and intended by God*, in which every organism descends from some original organism, sounds like a logical possibility. (So there’s logical space where both intelligent design and theistic evolution overlap—even if ID and theistic evolution often describe people with different positions.¹⁷)

Besides the six senses mentioned by Meyer and Keas, there is also the metaphorical sense of evolution, in which Darwinian Theory is used as a template to explain things other than nature, like the rise and fall of civilizations or sports careers. In his book *The Ascent of Money*, for instance, historian Niall Ferguson explains the evolution of the financial system in the West in Darwinian terms.¹⁸ He speaks of “mass extinction events,” survival of the fittest banks, a “Cambrian Explosion” of new financial instruments, and so forth. This way of speaking can sometimes be illuminating, even if, at times, it’s a stretch. Still, no one doubts that there are examples of the fit-

test surviving in biology and finance. We might have some sort of “evolution” here, but not in a theologically significant sense.

Finally, there’s evolution in the sense of “progress” or “growth.” Natural evolution has often been understood in this way, so that cosmic history is interpreted as a movement toward greater perfection, complexity, mind, or spirit. A pre-Darwinian understanding of “evolution” was the idea of a slow unfolding of something that existed in nascent form from the beginning, like an acorn eventually becoming a great oak tree. If anything, this sense of evolution tends toward theism rather than away from it, since it suggests a purposive plan. For that reason, many contemporary evolutionists (such as the late Stephen J. Gould) explicitly reject the idea that evolution is progressive, and argue instead that cosmic history is not going anywhere in particular.

Much more could be said, but it should now be clear that theism, properly understood, is compatible with many senses of evolution. For most of the senses of evolution we’ve considered, in fact, there’s little appearance of contradiction. Of course, this is a logical point. It doesn’t tell us what is true—only what could be true.

But there’s one clear exception—the blind watchmaker thesis. Of all the senses of “evolution,” this one seems, at least at first blush, to fit with theism like oil with water. It claims that all the apparent design in life is just that—apparent. That apparent design is really the result of natural selection working on *random* genetic mutations. (Darwin proposed “variation.” Neo-Darwinism attributes new variations to genetic mutations. In the following chapters, we will follow convention and use “Darwinism” and “Neo-Darwinism” interchangeably, except where otherwise indicated.)

The word “random” in the blind watchmaker thesis carries a lot of metaphysical baggage. In Neo-Darwinian theory, “random” doesn’t mean uncaused; it means that the changes aren’t directed—they don’t happen for any purpose. Moreover, they don’t occur for the benefit of individual organisms, species, or eco-systems, even if, under the guidance of natural selection, an occasional mutation might ultimately redound to the benefit of a species.

Darwin, at least in his argument in *The Origin of Species*, assumed a form of radical deism in which God establishes general laws that govern matter,

but then leaves the adaptation and complexity of life up to random variations and natural selection. (Note that Darwin's personal views are a separate matter from the structure and rhetoric of his argument in the *Origin*.¹⁹) Nowadays, though, most evolutionary biologists are more thorough-going materialists, at least when it comes to their science. So the blind watchmaker thesis is more or less the same as the mechanism of Neo-Darwinism as its leading advocates understand it.

The blind watchmaker thesis is usually wedded to some materialistic origin of life scenario, which isn't about biological evolution *per se*, though it is sometimes referred to as chemical evolution.

From the time of Darwin, who first proposed it, to the present, Darwinists have contrasted their idea with the claim that biological forms are designed. Here's how the late Darwinist Ernst Mayr put it:

The real core of Darwinism, however, is the theory of natural selection. This theory is so important for the Darwinian because it permits the explanation of adaptation, the 'design' of the natural theologian, by natural means, instead of by divine intervention.²⁰

Notice that he says "instead of." Darwinists almost always insist that their theory serves as a designer substitute. That's the whole point of the theory. This makes it different from other scientific theories, like Newton's law of gravity. Newton didn't formulate the law to get God out of the planet business (in fact, for Newton, God was involved in every aspect of the business.) And theories that invoke ordinary physical laws are determinate: they allow the scientist to make specific predictions about what will happen, all things being equal.

Darwin's theory isn't like that. It simply says that whatever has happened, and whatever will happen, the adaptive complexity we see in organisms is (primarily) the result of natural selection and random variation, not design. From the very beginning, the theory was intended to rule out teleological (purposive) explanations. As William Dembski once said: "The appeal of Darwinism was never, That's the way God did it. The appeal was always, That's the way nature did it without God."²¹ That's why, even if not all agree with Richard Dawkins that Darwin "made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist,"²² the vast majority of Darwinists claim that Dar-

win's mechanism makes God superfluous. It's their theory, so presumably they have a right to tell us what it means. Theists, in contrast to Darwinists, claim that the world, including the biological world, exists for a purpose, that it is, in some sense, designed. The blind watchmaker thesis denies this. So anyone wanting to reconcile strict Darwinian evolution with theism surely has a Grade A dilemma on his hands. It's akin to reconciling theistic evolution with anti-theistic evolution.

We noted above that the easy way to solve the problem of evil is to drop one of the offending premises. The same is true with theistic evolution: the easy way out is to drop or radically redefine the theistic part (dropping the Darwinian part is usually much riskier to one's career). Dissolving a dilemma, however, is not the same as resolving it. If the adjective "theistic" in "theistic evolution" is to be an accurate description, it should include a theistic view of God.

If you're unfamiliar with the debate over God and evolution, you might already be anticipating how to be a theistic evolutionist. A theistic evolutionist, as suggested above, would be someone who holds that God somehow sets up or guides nature so that it gives rise to everything from stars to starfish through a slowly developing process. Organisms share a common ancestor but reach their goal as intended by God. God works in nature, perhaps through cosmic initial conditions, secondary processes, discrete miracles, or some combination, to bring about his intended results, rather than creating everything from scratch. Or perhaps God created the universe as a whole primarily, but everything else he "delegates," as it were, to natural causes. But whatever the details, by definition the process of change and adaptation wouldn't be random or purposeless. It would implement a plan, and would have a purpose. So a theistic evolutionist, you might assume, would hold a *teleological* version of evolution, which includes cosmic evolution, the origin of life, and biological evolution, and would certainly not endorse the Darwinian blind watchmaker thesis in biology.

But it's rarely so straightforward. Consider the view of Presbyterian pastor Timothy Keller. In his popular book, *The Reason for God*, he tells readers:

“For the record I think God guided some process of natural selection, and yet I reject the concept of evolution as an all-encompassing Theory.”²³

Earlier he says: “Evolutionary science assumes more complex life-forms evolved from less complex forms through a process of natural selection. Many Christians believe that God brought about life this way.”²⁴ He also quotes approvingly from a Bible commentary, which affirms evolution as a mere “scientific biological hypothesis,” but rejects it as a “world-view of the way things are.” Thus partitioned, the reader is told, “there is little reason for conflict.”²⁵ Elsewhere Keller observes that he has “seen intelligent, educated laypeople really struggle with the distinction.... Nevertheless, this is exactly the distinction they must make, or they will never grant the importance of” evolution as a biological process.²⁶

But those “intelligent, educated, laypeople” struggle for a reason. What exactly is the distinction he is proffering, and what does it distinguish? Is he saying that while it’s okay to speculate about various evolutionary hypotheses, we should not affirm any? Surely not, since he seems to affirm a broad, semi-Darwinian evolutionary hypothesis. So is he saying that Darwinian evolutionary theory explains hearts and arms and ears and bacterial flagella, but not our love of music and our moral intuition? And if so, on what basis is he maintaining the distinction? After all, it’s not as if we have solid empirical evidence that natural selection acting on random genetic mutations can give rise to an avian lung but not to our belief in the Golden Rule. So at best, such a distinction would be *ad hoc*.

Or does Keller have something else in mind? He doesn’t say. In any case, distinguishing evolution as a hypothesis from evolution as a “world-view of the way things are” doesn’t offer much guidance one way or another. To be useful, he would need to specify exactly what he means by evolution, what he thinks it explains well, and what he thinks it leaves out that keeps it from constituting a “world view of the way things are.” Instead, we get a vague distinction without a difference. It’s no surprise that the laypeople to whom he’s commended the distinction don’t find it very illuminating.

Notice that he speaks of God “guiding some process of natural selection,” but does not mention *random variation*, which is as much a part of Dar-

winian Theory as is natural selection. Perhaps that avoidance is intentional. But since he doesn't say outright that he rejects the idea that natural selection acts only on random genetic mutations, the careful reader is left guessing.

If we read him charitably, however, Keller seems to want to affirm that God guided the origin and development of life forms, all of which are linked by a chain of common ancestry, by coordinating his guidance with natural selection. So the outcome isn't really random. (Recall the generally accepted definition of "random" discussed above.)

At the same time, Keller explicitly rejects the blind watchmaker thesis. So he's apparently not an orthodox Darwinist. He doesn't quite realize that to hold this view consistently, however, he needs to embrace teleology and reject orthodox Neo-Darwinism and materialistic origin of life scenarios, and not merely reject "evolution as a worldview of the way things are," whatever that means.

I am not intending to pick on Keller, whose work I hold in high regard. I am using him to illustrate how confusing this issue can be, and how even smart, orthodox religious thinkers often get into a muddle when they try to wed their Christian beliefs with Darwinian evolutionary theory.

If we peel away these confusions and look for a straightforward, coherent position, however, we usually end up with the idea of God-guided common ancestry. This is probably what most people would think theistic evolution means. But they would be wrong, at least when it comes to describing the views of many who describe themselves as theistic evolutionists. These days most theistic evolutionists seek, somehow, to reconcile theism with *Darwinian* evolution. They may affirm design in some broad sense at the cosmic level, but things get patchy when it comes to biology. Though it's not always easy to understand what they're saying, many theistic evolutionists want to integrate the blind watchmaker thesis into their theology. Now that would be quite a trick to pull off. Is it possible? And even if it's possible, why believe it's true?

ORGANIZATION

THIS VOLUME IS ORGANIZED into four parts.

- I. **Some Problems with “Theistic Evolution”** deals with broad thematic issues related to the God and evolution debate, such as the affinities between Gnosticism in early Christianity and the thought of certain theistic evolutionists; the unstable strategic alliance of theistic evolution and the “evolution lobby”; and the failure of theistic evolution to resolve the problem of evil. It engages the thought of a diverse group of theistic evolutionists including Karl Giberson, Kenneth Miller, and Stephen Barr.
- II. **Protestants and Evolution** responds to several representative Protestant theistic evolutionists, including Francis Collins, Denis Lamoureux, and Howard Van Till.
- III. **Catholics and Evolution** treats Catholic thought in particular, including the early Catholic responses to Darwinism from G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, and St. George Jackson Mivart; the Catholic Church’s response to Darwin’s theory; and the often-perplexing response of certain Thomists to Darwinism and intelligent design.
- IV. **Jews and Evolution** considers Darwinian evolution and intelligent design in light of the thought of ancient, medieval, and contemporary Judaism.

One might wonder why an ecumenical group of intelligent design proponents would write a book dealing with the subject of God and evolution. ID, after all, is not a religious program. Yet while intelligent design is based on non-sectarian, public evidence, and uses public modes of reasoning, ID, Darwinism, and other theories of origin obviously have theological *implications*. Individual ID proponents should be just as free to explore such implications as their critics, although such explorations should not be mistaken for ID *per se*.

Moreover, the resurgence of theistic evolution, or what might more accurately be called theistic Darwinism, has made theology a central concern in the current debate. Certain theistic evolutionists have argued, for instance, that Darwinian evolution is compatible with or even useful to theology. Oth-

ers have claimed that ID is theologically suspect or even “blasphemous.” This volume is, in large part, a response to these claims.

Finally, while it is often useful to distinguish natural science from, say, philosophy and theology, truth is ultimately a unity. While we may sometimes express a truth in different but complementary ways, a proposition cannot be true in theology but false in natural science. Sometimes, it is appropriate to explore the themes at the boundary of otherwise distinct academic disciplines. The chapters in this volume are intended to do just that.

Of course, the subject of God and evolution is far too big a subject for a single volume. In a sense, it touches all of the biggest questions we can ask about ourselves and the world we live in. If you find yourself perplexed by the current debate, however, the following contributions are intended to provide some relief.

Some Terms to Keep Straight

Young earth creationism: the view that God created the universe in six, roughly twenty-four hour days sometime in the last ten thousand years or so.

Old earth creationism: This view affirms that God created the universe from nothing, affirms the mainstream scientific views of the age of the Earth and the universe, and maintains that God worked directly in nature (as a “primary” or “efficient cause”) to create some things.

Progressive creationism: those who describe themselves as progressive creationists are similar to old earth creationists. For instance, they usually hold to mainstream views of the age of the Earth and universe and also maintain that God acts directly at various points in cosmic history; but they tend to see more evolutionary development between the seams of God’s specific acts than do old earth creationists.

Intelligent design (ID): ID proponents argue, on the basis of public evidence drawn from natural science, that nature, or certain aspects of nature, are best explained by intelligent agency. Most ID proponents are critics of Neo-Darwinism as an adequate explanation for the adaptive complexity of life, and of materialistic theories of the origin of life and biological information. Since ID is minimal, it is logically consistent with a variety of creationist and evolutionist views, but identical with none.

Theistic evolutionism: the view that theism and evolution are both true. The term is ambiguous because the word “evolution” means many different things. Logically, one could be an ID proponent and a theistic evolutionist, although the term is commonly used to describe individuals who affirm Darwinian evolution and are critical of contemporary intelligent design arguments in biology.

Theism: the view that a transcendent, all powerful, perfectly good, personal God created the world *ex nihilo*—from nothing—and continues to conserve and interact in and with it. Traditional Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are theistic.

Deism: the view that a transcendent God created the universe but does not interact with it or act directly in history.

Pantheism: the view that God and the universe are identical. Pantheists reject the concept of a transcendent God, and usually do not believe that God is fully personal.

Panentheism: the view that God has some transcendent qualities but is nevertheless in the world, or alternatively, that the world is “in” God. God and nature may be distinct but they’re inseparable. Most panentheists believe that God evolves along with the world and did not create the world *ex nihilo*. Panentheism is somewhat popular among religious academics, especially those involved in the dialogue between faith and science; but it is extremely rare among ordinary religious believers.

Evolution: this word has many different meanings, not all compatible with each other, and only a few of which are theologically significant. Among the meanings of evolution are the following:

1. Change over time; history of nature; any sequence of events in nature.
2. Changes in the frequencies of alleles in the gene pool of a population.
3. Limited common descent: the idea that particular groups of organisms have descended from a common ancestor.
4. The mechanisms responsible for the change required to produce limited descent with modification, chiefly natural selection acting on random variations or mutations.
5. Universal common descent: the idea that all organisms have descended from a single common ancestor.
6. “Blind watchmaker” thesis: the idea that all organisms have descended from common ancestors solely through unguided, unintelligent, purposeless, material processes such as natural selection acting on random variations or mutations; that the mechanisms of natural selection, random variation and mutation, and perhaps other similarly

naturalistic mechanisms, are completely sufficient to account for the appearance of design in living organisms.²⁷

7. A metaphor describing the rise, development, success, and collapse of sports careers, business enterprises, nations, and so forth, through a process of competition.
8. Progress or development through time of something that existed initially in a nascent form, such as a child emerging from an embryo or an oak tree from an acorn. This idea was common in pre-Darwinian views of biological evolution, which led to Darwin avoiding the word "evolution" in his *Origin of Species*. Contemporary Darwinists, following Darwin, generally reject this understanding of biological evolution, which suggests a purposeful or teleological process. Nevertheless, language that implies progress frequently appears even in the writings of those who officially reject it.

Meaning 6 (the blind watchmaker thesis) is the least compatible with theism. Meaning 8 is implicitly theistic or at least teleological.

Teleology: refers to a system, event, or process that is purposeful and goal-oriented. There are teleological and non-teleological versions of cosmic and biological evolution. A central purpose of Darwinian Theory is to explain the apparent teleology of life as merely apparent rather than real.

Darwinism: the theory that every form of life on Earth is descended from one or a few common ancestors, and that the adaptive complexity of life is largely the result of natural selection acting on random variations. Darwin proposed his theory as an alternative to the idea that species had been specially created, and most modern Darwinists have followed Darwin's lead. Strictly speaking, it is Darwin's mechanism of natural selection and random variation, and not common ancestry, that contradicts the intelligent design of life.

Neo-Darwinism: the modern version of Darwinism, according to which random variations are identified with random genetic mutations.

I.

SOME PROBLEMS WITH
“THEISTIC EVOLUTION”

1. NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

Theistic Evolution, the Early Church, and the Return of Gnosticism, Part 1

John G. West

I sing the goodness of the Lord, who filled the earth with food,
Who formed the creatures through the Word, and then pronounced them good.
Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed, where'er I turn my eye,
If I survey the ground I tread, or gaze upon the sky.

—Isaac Watts (1715)

FROM THE WORDS OF ENGLISH HYMNIST ISAAC WATTS TO THE MUSIC of Hadyn's *Creation*, from the ceiling of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel to the pages of C. S. Lewis's novels *Perelandra* and *The Magician's Nephew*, the Christian doctrine of creation¹ has inspired countless poets, composers, authors, and artists to celebrate the beauty and artistry of God as Creator. Yet in his recent book *Saving Darwin: How to Be a Christian and Believe in Evolution* (2008), theistic evolutionist Karl Giberson writes dismissively of the Christian doctrine of creation, insisting that it is but "a secondary doctrine for Christians. The central idea in Christianity concerns Jesus Christ and the claim that he was the Son of God."² Giberson's point seems to be that so long as people accept the divinity of Jesus, their view of God as Creator is unimportant.

Early Christian thinkers would have disagreed vigorously. For example, when Irenaeus (c. 130–200 AD) began his refutation of Gnosticism in Book II of *Against Heresies*, he started not with the doctrine of Christ, but with what he called "the first and most important head," namely, the doctrine of "God the Creator, who made the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein."³ Similarly, the Nicene Creed, which reaches back nearly 1700 years and is accepted by all the major branches of Christianity as authoritative, begins by affirming "one God, the Father Almighty" who created "all things

visible and invisible."⁴ Many other affirmations of God as the Creator can be found in the early centuries of the church.⁵ Thus, far from regarding the doctrine of creation as secondary, early Christians took it as the indispensable starting point for their theology.

Why were early Christians so insistent about the doctrine of creation? One obvious reason is that without God as Creator, the rest of the Christian story makes very little sense. Church historian Philip Schaff rightly observed that "without a correct doctrine of creation there can be no true doctrine of redemption."⁶ According to the traditional Christian narrative, redemption is understood in light of the fall, and the fall is understood in light of a prior good creation. Thus, efforts to disassociate the doctrine of creation from the doctrines of redemption and the fall are likely to result in theological incoherence.

But there was another, more pressing reason why early Christians emphasized the doctrine of creation: They faced sharp opposition to the idea of God as Creator from the intellectual elites of their day. In many ways, that opposition foreshadowed debates over God and evolution in our own time. Perhaps there is no better way of gaining clarity about what is at stake theologically in today's debates over evolution than by understanding what was at stake in the conflicts over creation in the early church.

THE EPICUREAN MATERIALISTS

DURING THE FIRST FEW centuries of the church, two distinct groups opposed the idea of God as Creator. Followers of the Greek atomists Democritus and Epicurus comprised the first group. They explicitly denied that the wonders of nature were produced by a designing intelligence, asserting that everything ultimately arose through a blind and impersonal material process involving the chance collisions of atoms.⁷ In the century prior to the Christian era, the Roman poet Lucretius popularized Epicurean materialism in his epic poem *De Rerum Natura* ("On the Nature of Things"), where he proclaimed that "neither by design did the primal germs 'stablish themselves, as by keen act of mind." Instead, the colliding atoms continued "blow on blow, even from all time of old" until at last they combined fortuitously "into those great arrangements out of which this sum of things established is create[d]."⁸

Responding to the Epicureans' repudiation of design in nature, early Christians repeatedly argued that nature in fact provides compelling evidence that it was the product of a supreme intelligence. In their view, not only was design in nature real, it was plain and observable. Writing to Christians in Rome in the first century, the Apostle Paul argued that "since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Romans 1:20, NIV). Writing in the second century, Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch (c. 115–188 AD), likewise contended that "God cannot indeed be seen by human eyes, but is beheld and perceived through His providence and works."⁹ What are these "works" through which we can see the intelligent activity of God? Theophilus went on to list the functional regularities of nature from astronomy, the plant world, the diverse species of animals, and the ecosystem. His conclusion? Just "as any person, when he sees a ship on the sea rigged and in sail, and making for the harbor, will no doubt infer that there is a pilot in her who is steering her; so we must perceive that God is the governor [pilot] of the whole universe."¹⁰

Writing in the third century, Dionysius, then Bishop of Alexandria (c. 200–265 AD), made similar arguments against those who claimed that the features of the universe were "only the works of common chance."¹¹ According to Dionysius, such persons fail to observe that "no object of any utility, fitted to be serviceable, is made without design or by mere chance, but is wrought by skill of hand, and is contrived so as to meet its proper use."¹²

Writing in the latter part of the third century and the early fourth century, Christian thinker Lactantius (c. 240–320 AD) likewise declared that "it is more credible that matter was made by God, because He is all-powerful, than that the world was not made by God, because nothing can be made without mind, intelligence, and design."¹³ Lactantius went on to ask:

If you had been brought up in a well-built and ornamented house, and had never seen a workshop, would you have supposed that that house was not built by man, because you did not know how it was built? You would assuredly ask the same question about the house which you now ask about the world—by what hands, with what implements, man had contrived such great works; and especially if you should see

large stones, immense blocks, vast columns, the whole work lofty and elevated, would not these things appear to you to exceed the measure of human strength, because you would not know that these things were made not so much by strength as by skill and ingenuity?

But if man, in whom nothing is perfect, nevertheless effects more by skill than his feeble strength would permit, what reason is there why it should appear to you incredible, when it is alleged that the world was made by God, in whom, since He is perfect, wisdom can have no limit, and strength no measure?

Such citations from the fathers of the early church could be multiplied.¹⁴ Early Christians clearly and repeatedly taught that nature provides convincing evidence of God's design.

The debates between the early Christians and Epicurean materialists bear a striking resemblance to debates in our own day between theists and the so-called "new atheists" such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett.¹⁵ Like the Epicurean materialists of old, today's "new atheists" repeatedly assert that nature is wholly the product of impersonal material forces rather than intelligent guidance. In the words of Dawkins, "[t]he universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference."¹⁶ While materialists in the ancient world drew from the atomic theories of Democritus and Leucippus for support, the "new atheists" are inspired largely by the work of Charles Darwin, who is supposed to have shown how the apparent design observed throughout the biological world was actually produced by a blind and undirected process of natural selection acting on random variations. Much as early Christian thinkers responded to the Epicureans by pointing to the evidences of design in nature not easily explained as the result the chance collisions of atoms, today's intelligent design theorists have responded to the "new atheists" by pointing out evidences of design in physics, astronomy, cosmology, the origin of life, biochemistry and other fields that resist impersonal and purposeless explanations.¹⁷ The scientific data being discussed today may be new, but the overall debate is not. The controversy over design in nature is one of the great and continuing debates in Western civilization.

Yet Epicurean materialists were not the only opponents of the idea of God as Creator in the early years of the church, and in many ways, they were not the opponents who most worried the early church fathers. That distinction fell to an eclectic group of writers and thinkers who became known collectively as the Gnostics. Unlike the materialists, the Gnostics considered themselves Christians. But that made matters worse in the eyes of the early church fathers, because it meant the Gnostics had a greater potential to confuse and mislead otherwise orthodox believers.

THE GNOSTIC HERESY

WHAT BECAME KNOWN AS the Gnostic heresy was complicated and esoteric, with many variations. Regardless of their differences, most Gnostics shared two key beliefs about God and the natural world: First, they denied that nature was created good—in their view, matter was evil and the material world was flawed from the start. Second, because the material world was evil, the Gnostics denied that God actually created it. Instead, they claimed that the world was created by another entity usually called the Demiurge (an idea borrowed from the ancient Greek philosopher Plato but modified in the intervening centuries). In creating the world, the Demiurge acted as if he were God, but in fact he operated blindly and ignorantly apart from God. According to Hippolytus:

For the Demiurge, they say, knows nothing at all, but is, according to them, devoid of understanding, and silly, and is not conscious of what he is doing or working at ... he himself imagines that he evolves the creation of the world out of himself: whence he commenced, saying, "I am God, and beside me there is no other."¹⁸

The Gnostics' point was to disassociate God from any direct role in His creation, and thereby to deny that the world was the intentional and good result of God's specific design.

The leaders of the early church rejected the Gnostics' effort to distance God from His creation. Indeed, according to Irenaeus, the Gospel of John was written in part to counter these teachings of the Gnostics, especially of an early Gnostic known as Cerinthus: "Cerinthus ... taught that the world was not made by the primary God, but by a certain Power far separated

from him, and at a distance from that Principality who is supreme over the universe, and ignorant of him who is above all."¹⁹ It was to counter this claim that John 1:3 insists that "all things were made through" Christ who was God himself—not through a secondary entity like the Demiurge. Those today who intimate that Christians can dispense with the doctrine of God as Creator so long as they affirm Christ, run into a problem with John 1:3. The Apostle John couldn't be any clearer: If one denies that God was the direct agent of creation, one is also denying Christ. The same teaching is articulated by the Apostle Paul in Colossians (Col. 1:16) and by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 1:2).

Just as the debates between early Christians and the Epicureans resemble today's debates with the new atheists, the debates between early Christians and the Gnostics bear striking similarities to contemporary debates over theistic evolution. Indeed, in a certain sense, mainstream contemporary theistic evolution might well be regarded as a revival of Gnosticism.

Because the phrase "theistic evolution," like Gnosticism, can mean different things to different people, it would be helpful to define how the term is being employed here before going on. Broadly speaking, theistic evolution is an effort to reconcile Darwin's theory of unguided evolution with belief in God in general and Christian theology in particular.

Theistic evolution encompasses a wide array of approaches and views, which has generated considerable confusion about what its proponents actually believe. To a large extent, differences in opinion among theistic evolutionists are determined by how theistic evolutionists define both "theism" and "evolution." Does theism require a God who actively and intimately guides the development of life? Or does it allow a passive God who may not even know how the development of life ultimately will turn out? Alternatively, does evolutionary theory require an undirected process (as Darwin insisted)? Or can evolution include a process guided to specific ends by an intelligent cause? One's conception of theistic evolution will be markedly different depending on how one answers these questions.

In the initial decades after Darwin proposed his theory, theistic evolution typically was presented as a form of *guided* evolution. In this respect,

most early forms of theistic evolution were incompatible with orthodox Darwinism. Theistic evolutionists of Darwin's era accepted the idea that there was a long history of life and that animals developed *via* descent with modification from a common ancestor. But they largely rejected Darwin's core contention that the development of life was a blind, undirected process dictated primarily by natural selection acting on random variations. As historian Peter Bowler points out, many of Darwin's contemporaries (including those in the scientific community) embraced the non-Darwinian idea "that evolution was an essentially purposeful process.... The human mind and moral values were seen as the intended outcome of a process that was built into the very fabric of nature and that could thus be interpreted as the Creator's plan."²⁰

It is important to recognize just how strongly Darwin himself revolted against the view that evolution could have been guided toward particular goals. Darwin repeatedly made clear that natural selection neither required nor involved intelligent guidance:

The term "natural selection" is in some respects a bad one, as it seems to imply conscious choice; *but this will be disregarded after a little familiarity*. No one objects to chemists speaking of "elective affinity"; and certainly an acid has no more choice in combining with a base, than the conditions of life have in determining whether or not a new form be selected or preserved.²¹

Indeed, according to Darwin, his law of natural selection provided a definitive refutation of the idea that the features of the natural world reflected a preconceived plan:

The old argument of design in nature, as given by Paley, which formerly seemed to me so conclusive, fails, now that the law of natural selection has been discovered. We can no longer argue that, for instance, the beautiful hinge of a bivalve shell must have been made by an intelligent being, like the hinge of a door by man. There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings and in the action of natural selection, than in the course which the wind blows.²²

Darwin was dismayed that the theistic supporters of evolution in his day rejected his formulation of evolution as an unguided process, and he was appalled when fellow naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace published an article advocating the idea of guided evolution.²³ Wallace shared credit with Dar-

win for developing the theory of evolution by natural selection, yet Wallace had concluded after looking at the evidence that human evolution had been guided by a “Higher Intelligence.”²⁴ Darwin’s most distinguished champion in the United States, Harvard botanist Asa Gray, espoused similar views. Not only did Gray believe that evolution was guided, in private he confessed that his teleological version of evolution was “very anti-Darwin.”²⁵

This widespread view of evolution as a purposeful process began to disintegrate early in the twentieth century after Darwinian natural selection underwent a resurgence due to work in experimental genetics.²⁶ Once Darwin’s theory of undirected evolution became the consensus of the scientific community, the task for mainstream theistic evolution became considerably harder: Now one had to reconcile theism not only with the idea of universal common ancestry, but also with the idea that the development of life was an undirected process based on random genetic mistakes. How could God “direct” an “undirected” process? Modern theistic evolutionists have not offered clear or consistent answers. Instead, in recent years an increasing number of theistic evolutionists have explicitly advocated embracing evolution as an undirected process. Like the “new atheists” who draw on Darwin’s theory in support of their views, these “new theistic evolutionists” appeal to Darwin’s theory to justify a new theology that will fuse Christianity with unguided Darwinism.

But this new theology of theistic evolution turns out to be a repackaged version of the old theology of Gnosticism. Like the Gnostics of old, a growing number of theistic evolutionists explicitly deny that God actively guided the development of life, and they further deny that the material world was ever created originally “good.”

NATURAL SELECTION AS THE NEW DEMIURGE

THE GNOSTICS OF OLD distanced God from his creation by assigning the creation of the world to a third party, the Demiurge. The Demiurge of the new theistic evolutionists is natural selection acting on random mutations. Just like the Gnostics’ Demiurge, the Darwinian process acts ignorantly and blindly and apart from God’s specific directions, allowing theistic evo-

lutionists to disentangle God from the responsibility of a world they view as botched.

According to many new theistic evolutionists, God chose to “create” the world by setting up an undirected process over which he had no specific control and about which he did not even have foreknowledge of its particular outcomes. In a very real sense, God created a world that creates itself. In the words of Anglican theistic evolutionist John Polkinghorne: “an evolutionary universe is theologically understood as a creation allowed to make itself.”²⁷ This view is hard to reconcile with traditional conceptions of God’s foreknowledge and sovereignty, which becomes apparent when one reads the writings of leading theistic evolutionists. Former Vatican astronomer George Coyne claims that “not even God could know ... with certainty” that “human life would come to be.”²⁸ Biologist Kenneth Miller of Brown University, author of the popular book *Finding Darwin’s God* (used in many Christian colleges), flatly denies that God guided the evolutionary process to achieve any particular result—including the development of human beings. Insisting that “[e]volution is a natural process, and natural processes are undirected,”²⁹ Miller asserts that “mankind’s appearance on this planet was not preordained, that we are here ... as an afterthought, a minor detail, a happenstance in a history that might just as well have left us out.”³⁰

No doubt recognizing that many of his fellow Christians would revolt at such a claim, Miller also states that “given evolution’s ability to adapt, to innovate, to test, and to experiment, sooner or later it would have given the Creator exactly what He was looking for—a creature who, like us, could know Him and love Him.”³¹ But Miller is engaging in double-speak. He plainly does not believe that mankind (or any other outcome of evolution) represents an “exact” intention of God. In Miller’s view, God apparently knew that the undirected process of evolution was so wonderful it would create *something* capable of praising Him eventually. But what that “something” would be was radically undetermined by God. Just how undetermined? At a 2007 conference, Miller admitted that if the history of evolution were to run again, the result “might be a big-brained dinosaur” or even “a mollusk with exceptional mental capabilities” rather than human beings.³²

Modern theistic evolution is sometimes regarded as more “deistic” than theistic, but that comparison seems unfair to deism. Even deists typically believe that God originally designed and created the world before He left it to run itself. According to leading proponents of theistic evolution, however, God did not even do that much. God created an undirected process that then created the world, producing creatures He neither foresaw nor foreordained. Sometimes theistic evolutionists try to defend their view by claiming that just as God created human beings with free will, he bestows on nature the “freedom” to create itself without His direction.³³ While it is certainly a logical possibility that God could choose to create a world in this way, Christian theology provides scant support for the idea that this is how God actually acted in creating our world.

To the contrary, according to historic Christian teaching, God alone was Creator of our world. He did not delegate the task to an undirected third-party. No matter how metaphorically (or literally) one interprets Biblical discussions of creation, and no matter what the actual process God employed for bringing his creation into existence, the consistent claim of both the Bible and historic Christian theology is that the original creation embodied God’s specific intentions. This does not mean that God could not have worked through secondary causes in creating the world. God very likely did, but they were not *undirected* secondary causes. That is the essential point. In historic Christian teaching, God—not a third party—is unquestionably the “master craftsman” as well as the artistic genius behind the exquisite order and beauty of the natural world.³⁴ By contrast, if one accepts the position of many theistic evolutionists, the only kind of artistry God seems to be permitted is that of the modern painter who creates a work by splattering paint haphazardly on empty canvass. God is more like Jackson Pollock than Michelangelo.

Some contemporary theistic evolutionists seem to recognize that their Darwinian conception of God creates tensions with traditional Christian theology. Perhaps that is why they tend to obfuscate just how much they adhere to Darwinism’s conception of evolution as an undirected process. This seems to be the approach of those affiliated with the BioLogos Foundation started by Francis Collins to advance the cause of theistic evolution.

Although Collins and his foundation promote the books of champions of undirected evolution such as Kenneth Miller, its directors are more circumspect—or at least more muddled—about how undirected they think the evolutionary process might be.

Consider the writings of current BioLogos Vice President Karl Giberson (originally the Foundation's Co-President). On the one hand, Giberson says that “[a]s a believer in God I am convinced *in advance* that the world is not an accident and that, in some mysterious way, our existence is an ‘expected’ result.”³⁵ On the other hand, Giberson states that he “side[s] with Darwin in rejecting the idea that God is responsible for the details.”³⁶ Giberson glosses over what sorts of events in the history of life he considers “details.” Are human beings a “detail” that God himself may not have intended? Giberson does not say in his book, and he did not provide much more clarity when asked publicly about his views at a forum at Biola University in 2009.³⁷ Just like Kenneth Miller, Giberson first stated: “I think there is reason to suppose that creatures like us were so predictable given the scenario that was provided that God anticipated that.” But also just like Miller, Giberson indicated that “creatures like us” simply meant any “creatures that could have a special type of conscious awareness in relationship to the creator.” He further admitted that “I think it’s very hard to make a case that this particular form that we have is exactly what God intended.” So would Giberson accept or reject a claim that human beings reflect God’s specific intentions? “Well I’d want to know what ‘specific’ I guess meant there. I can’t imagine that God just had to have creatures with five fingers and opposable thumbs and so on and until he got that he wasn’t quite happy because that was his specific intention.” When pressed on Miller’s claim that Darwinian evolution was so undirected that it could have produced thinking clams or big-brained dinosaurs instead of us, Giberson responded:

Well that’s sort of an oxymoron. Because if you’re thinking, you’re not a clam, and if you’re a clam you’re not thinking. I mean he’s making a point. We don’t want to be a literalist. It’s one thing to be a literalist with God’s word; it’s quite another to be a literalist with Ken Miller’s word. I guess I would say that when Ken Miller is saying that he’s saying that one could imagine a world where this kind of intelligence we have is embodied in a clam or in a dinosaur—that the image of God

and what God had in mind for our physical structure doesn't require the forms that we see before us.

We need to be clear that the issue here is not whether God *could* create rational beings other than human beings (of course he could), or even whether features like “five fingers and opposable thumbs” are necessary to being created in the image of God (of course they aren't). The issue is whether God was so uninvolved in the “details” of the evolutionary process that he did not determine whether evolution would produce thinking clams or thinking human beings. It is one thing to contend that Michelangelo could have created many other kinds of masterpieces than his famous statue of David. It is quite another thing to insist that he was so uninvolved in the sculpting process that he neither knew nor cared whether his sculpture would turn into the statue of a man or the statue of a clam—or, for that matter, a statue with twenty fingers instead of ten.

The trouble with trying to reconcile undirected Darwinian evolution with Christianity is not that God did not have the freedom to create the world differently, but that in the Darwinian scenario, strictly speaking, God is not the creator. At most, He set up a cosmic lottery to produce the forms of life and knew that with enough time He would eventually win some kind of jackpot. Whatever one thinks of this view of God, it is not the view offered by the Bible and the Christian intellectual tradition.

Like his colleague Giberson, Francis Collins is fuzzy about how far he is willing to go down the path of genuinely undirected evolution. On the one hand, Collins leaves open the possibility that God “could” have known and specified all of the outcomes of evolution (more about Collins's discussion of this possibility below). On the other hand, Collins delivered the keynote address to a 2008 conference on science and open theism (open theism is a position that explicitly denies God's exhaustive knowledge of future events).³⁸ Collins also sometimes writes as if he believes that significant parts of the history of life were in fact undirected by God, even when it comes to human beings. His discussion of so-called “junk DNA” is particularly instructive. He claims (wrongly, it turns out) that “roughly 45 percent of the human genome [is] made up of ... genetic flotsam and jetsam.”³⁹ While conceding that

“some might argue that these are actually functional elements placed there by the Creator for a good reason, and our discounting of them as ‘junk DNA’ just betrays our current level of ignorance,” Collins ends up dismissing this explanation: “some small fraction of them may play important regulatory roles. But certain examples severely strain the credulity of that explanation.” The clear implication of Collins’s discussion of “junk DNA” is that he believes the human genome is “littered” with non-functional “junk” produced unintentionally during the undirected process of Darwinian evolution.

But Collins tries to shift the discussion from whether God knew and planned human beings to whether human beings really need their current set of physical features to be made in the image of God:

How is this [idea that evolution “is full of chance and random outcomes”] consistent with the theological concept that humans are created ‘in the image of God’ (Genesis 1:27)? Well, perhaps one shouldn’t get too hung up on the notion that this scripture is referring to physical anatomy—the image of God seems a lot more about mind than body. Does God have toe-nails? A belly button?”

This is a diversion. *Contra* Collins, the issue isn’t whether God could choose to create a creature in his image without toe-nails. It is whether human beings as they do exist reflect God’s specific choices and exquisite artistry or are the unintended by products of an undirected process.

To his credit, Collins seems to recognize there is a serious problem here for traditional Christian theists, and so after discounting the design of human beings in various ways, he offers an escape hatch for those who might be uncomfortable with his argument’s trajectory. But the escape hatch has theological problems of its own.

GOD AS THE COSMIC TRICKSTER

COLLINS SUGGESTS THAT GOD might have known and determined the outcomes of evolution from eternity but nevertheless created the world to *look* like it was produced by a random and undirected process:

In that context, evolution could appear to us to be driven by chance, but from God’s perspective the outcome would be entirely specified. Thus, God could be completely and intimately involved in the creation of all species, while from our perspective, limited as it is by the

tyranny of linear time, this would appear a random and undirected process."⁴⁰

Collins's assertion that the biological world looks like the product of a "random and undirected process" places him in the peculiar position of being even less open to intelligent design in biology than Richard Dawkins, the world's foremost Darwinian atheist. Unlike Collins, Dawkins readily concedes that the biological world is rife with "complicated things that *give the appearance of having being designed for a purpose*."⁴¹ In other words, Dawkins believes that things in biology look like they were designed; he simply thinks that Darwin's theory of unguided evolution provides sufficient reason for ignoring the clear appearance of design. Collins, by contrast, insists that the things in biology look "random and undirected," and only through the eyes of faith can we know that this appearance of non-design is deceiving. So Dawkins insists that things looked designed, but aren't, while Collins asserts that things don't look designed, but are.

Collins's escape hatch has the merit of being logically compatible with a more traditional understanding of God's sovereignty. His view would allow God to actively (if secretly) guide the development of His creation. But it still seriously conflicts with the Biblical understanding of God and His general revelation. Both the Old and New Testaments clearly teach that human beings can recognize God's handiwork in nature through their own observations rather than special divine revelation. From the psalmist who proclaimed that the "heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19) to the Apostle Paul who argued in Romans 1:20 that "since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made," the idea that we can see design in nature was clearly taught. Jesus himself pointed to the feeding of birds, the rain and the sun, and the exquisite design of the lilies of the field as observable evidence of God's active care towards the world and its inhabitants (Matthew 5:44–45, 48; 6:26–30). As discussed earlier, the observability of God's design in nature was a key theme in the writings of the early church fathers as well.⁴² In his effort to head off a direct collision between undirected Darwinism and the doctrine of God's sovereignty, Collins seems to depict God as a cosmic trickster who misleads

people into thinking that the process by which they were produced was blind and purposeless, even when it wasn't.

Whether Collins himself actually believes in the theological half-way house he has constructed to preserve God's sovereignty is unclear. As noted earlier, some of his other comments (e.g., his advocacy of the "junk DNA" argument) imply he harbors serious doubts about how much God actually directed the evolutionary process. Regardless of Collins's own view (and perhaps his own mind is ambivalent on the subject), many of his colleagues among the new theistic evolutionists forgo the half-way house and enthusiastically embrace the position that God neither knows nor intends the specific outcomes of evolution, which brings them to a position very similar to that of the early Gnostics. Just like ancient Gnosticism, much of modern theistic evolution replaces God as the active Creator of the world with a third party outside of God's specific direction and control.

Down playing God's active role as Creator is not the only way modern theistic evolution reinvents ancient Gnosticism. A second and equally striking parallel is the denial that the world was created originally good.

DENYING THE FALL

THE GNOSTICS REJECTED ORTHODOX Christian teaching that human beings were created good and then fell through a voluntary act of disobedience. In the Gnostics' view, the material world was never "good"; it was evil from the start. Leading theistic evolutionists today adopt a remarkably similar position. In their view, evolution makes unacceptable the idea that human beings were originally created good, which overturns the traditional Christian idea that human beings were created good and then fell into sin by a free choice. In 2001, Anglican Bishop John Shelby Spong explained how in his view Darwin made the traditional Christian account of redemption "nonsensical":

I live on the other side of Charles Darwin. And Charles Darwin not only made us Christians face the fact that the literal creation story cannot be quite so literal, but he also destroyed the primary myth by which we had told the Jesus story for centuries. That myth suggested that there was a finished creation from which we human beings had fallen into sin, and therefore needed a rescuing divine presence to lift us back to what God had originally created us to be. But Charles

Darwin says that there was no perfect creation because it is not yet finished. It is still unfolding. And there was no perfect human life which then corrupted itself and fell into sin, there was rather a single cell that emerged slowly over 4½ to 5 billion years, into increasing complexity, into increasing consciousness. And so the story of Jesus who comes to rescue us from the fall becomes a nonsensical story.⁴³

Bishop Spong is widely known for his heterodox views on a variety of traditional Christian teachings, but one finds a similar denial of a real fall among some leading evangelical theistic evolutionists. Karl Giberson in *Saving Darwin* explicitly repudiates the idea that “sin originates in a free act of the first humans” and that “God gave humans free will and they used it to contaminate the entire creation.”⁴⁴ In a section of his book subtitled “Dissolving the Fall,” Giberson essentially argues that since human beings were created through Darwinian evolution, sin was there in human beings to begin with: “Selfishness ... drives the evolutionary process. Unselfish creatures died, and their unselfish genes perished with them. Selfish creatures, who attended to their own needs for food, power, and sex, flourished and passed on these genes to their offspring. After many generations selfishness was so fully programmed in our genomes that it was a significant part of what we now call human nature.”⁴⁵ So in Giberson’s view, human beings were sinful and flawed from their inception.

Giberson’s repudiation of the traditional doctrine of the fall is obscured by his continuing usage of the term “fallen” in his book and public talks. Yet it is clear that for him the term “fallen” merely means that humans continue to be sinful, just like they were from the beginning. There was no actual “fall” in his view, as he frankly acknowledged during his appearance with me at Biola University in 2009:

John West: Why do you continue to even use the word “fall”? ... Isn’t your use of the word “fall” ... importing a theology that in fact you reject because there is no fall [in your view]? In your book you seem to say we’re sinful to begin with: Selfishness drives evolutionary process so there wasn’t a fall from anything—that’s how we were originally developed, so the creation was flawed and sinful to begin with. Is that your view?

Karl Giberson: Yeah, no that's a fair description of my view. I was trying to be sort of consistent with the way theological language is used. There are a great many theologians—I remember reading essays by Karl Barth and Emil Brunner kind of arguing about original sin, and they talk about Adam and Eve and the fall in ways that sound almost fundamentalist, but neither of them accepted Adam and Eve as actual historical characters or the fall as an historical event. But that's theological language that has a particular meaning apart from what the English word itself entails.⁴⁶

Francis Collins has been more circumspect on this topic in public than Giberson. In his 2006 book *The Language of God*, Collins gingerly skirts the issue of an historic fall, preferring to focus instead on whether Christians must believe in a literal Adam and Eve who were specially created by God with no biological antecedents. Collins appeals to a passage by C. S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain* as his authority for believing that orthodox Christians can embrace the idea that the first human beings arose through a long period of animal evolution.⁴⁷ Although Collins fails to note Lewis's growing skepticism of Darwinism later in life,⁴⁸ he is right to point out that Lewis saw no theological objection to human beings sharing a common ancestor with the lower animals. The real problem with Collins's discussion of Adam and Eve is that it sidesteps the most serious challenge Darwinism poses for the Christian account of salvation by focusing on two lesser issues.

The literal existence of Adam and Eve and whether the first humans shared a common ancestor with other mammals are significant questions for many Christians. But there are two even more crucial ones: Did God originally create human beings morally good? And did the first humans become alienated from God by their own free choice? The historic Christian answer to both questions is an unequivocal yes, and C. S. Lewis himself forcefully articulated this historic Christian answer in the very passage Collins quotes, although Collins removes with ellipses some of Lewis's strongest comments on the subject.

Collins neglects to mention that his redacted quotation of Lewis comes from a chapter titled "The Fall of Man" in which Lewis explicitly defends an historic fall against those who contend that science has refuted it. According to Lewis, human beings really were morally good before the fall. "God came

first” in man’s “love and in his thought,” and God received from man “obedient love and ecstatic adoration: and in this sense, though not in all, man was then truly the son of God, the prototype of Christ.”⁴⁹ Lewis concludes his discussion by explaining that “the thesis of this chapter is simply that man, as a species, *spoiled himself*, and that good, to us in our present state, must therefore mean primarily remedial or corrective good.”⁵⁰

Yet Darwinism directly undermines this traditional Christian teaching. As Collins’s friend and colleague Giberson points out, the Darwinian account of human evolution suggests that human beings were selfish and flawed from the very start. Hence, there can be no “fall” in the orthodox Darwinian view.

In *The Language of God*, Collins carefully refrained from either endorsing or rejecting the idea of an actual fall. But two years later he wrote a glowing foreword to Giberson’s *Saving Darwin*, which contains Giberson’s Darwinian repudiation of the idea. Giberson subsequently became a leader of Collins’s pro-theistic evolution BioLogos Foundation. Given these facts, it might be reasonable to surmise that Collins agrees with Giberson’s position. At the very least, he has no qualms about helping Giberson to promote his view.

Giberson rejects the idea that there is anything heterodox about his rejection of the fall, insisting that the fall “is inconsequential for our need for our salvation.”⁵¹ As he explains it, “I don’t understand why we have to have been perfect and then fallen in order to be saved. I don’t get this at all. It seems to me that no matter how we become sinful we can still be saved from that sin.” Well, yes, if one is flexible enough, one can redefine the Christian concept of salvation to mean whatever one wishes. The point is that it will then be something very different from historic Christianity. In the traditional Christian view, salvation is the result of a perfect and holy God lovingly working to restore his creatures to a right relationship with him. In the new view of theistic evolution à la Giberson, salvation becomes the attempt of an absentee God to rescue his creatures from his own flawed creation in order to bring about a relationship that never existed.

Although Giberson may believe that his reformulation of the Christian narrative does no damage to the traditional concept of salvation, Darwinists who are former Christians might beg to differ. Noted historian of science Ron Numbers at the University of Wisconsin is a case in point. By his own admission, Numbers abandoned his belief in Christianity because of Darwinian evolution, and in an interview he outlined with stark clarity the theological implications that some theistic evolutionists do their best to evade. According to Christianity, said Numbers:

We humans were perfect because we were created in the image of God. And then there was the fall. Death appears and the whole account [in the Bible] becomes one of deterioration and degeneration. So we then have Jesus in the New Testament, who promises redemption. Evolution completely flips that. With evolution, you don't start out with anything perfect.... There's no perfect state from which to fall. This makes the whole plan of salvation silly because there never was a fall.⁵²

Contemporary theistic evolutionism—perhaps more accurately described as theistic *Darwinism*—is often presented to the public as a simple and common-sense solution to the conflict between Darwin and Christianity. But as the experience of Ron Numbers suggests, the problems raised by Darwinism for Christians are not so easily assuaged.

A NEW THEOLOGY?

TODAY'S PROPONENTS OF THEISTIC evolution like to insist that the only tensions between Darwinian evolution and Christianity derive from narrow “fundamentalist” and “literalist” readings of the Bible. Given the negative connotations of the word “fundamentalist” in American culture, this charge is rhetorically clever. But it is also untrue. Darwin's conception of evolution as a blind and undirected process contradicts not just “fundamentalism” (whatever that is), but what C. S. Lewis liked to call “mere Christianity”—the core theological claims held in common by all major branches of Christianity for the past two millennia. Indeed, by rejecting directed evolution, the observability of design in biology, and an historic fall, mainstream theistic evolution proposes reconciling Christianity with Darwin by throwing overboard significant portions of historic Christian theology.

It is precisely because the disconnect between traditional Christian theology and mainstream evolutionary theory is so great that theistic evolutionists are now having to push for an overhaul of the traditional Christian message. Thus, Francis Collins has expressed a desire to bring together leading scientists, theologians, and pastors in order to “develop a new theology,”⁵³ while Karl Giberson has praised the “creative theology” of those seeking to reconcile Christianity with Darwinism.⁵⁴

But as we have seen, the “new” theology of contemporary theistic evolution bears a striking resemblance to the old theology of Gnosticism that was repudiated by the early church. Before embracing this heterodox new theology, pastors and theologians need to be absolutely sure they have good reasons for what they are doing. Yet, as the next chapter will show, the reasons behind the resurgence of theistic evolution leave much to be desired.