FINDING OURSELVES AFTER DARWIN

Conversations on the Image of God, Original Sin, and the Problem of Evil

STANLEY P. ROSENBERG,
GENERAL EDITOR

MICHAEL BURDETT,
MICHAEL LLOYD,
AND BENNO VAN DEN TOREN,
ASSOCIATE EDITORS

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Making Space in a Post-Darwinian World

Theology and Science in Apposition

Stanley P. Rosenberg

Walking south along Parks Road in Oxford, UK, one comes across a pair of buildings that set the stage for this book. These two important buildings in the Oxford landscape stand in apposition (but not opposition) across the road from each other. On the east side is the Oxford Museum of Natural History, built of stone and begun in 1855.[1] Engraved over the neo-Gothic stone-arch entry sits an angel, holding a book and a dividing cell. The book represents one or more possible uses of the book as an icon in Christian theology—representing either the Bible, the book of life, or the two books analogy (the book of nature and the book of revelation). The cell directs one's attention to the work of a scientist. Studying life is affirmed at the highest level, by an angel representing the work and message of the divine. In this building in 1860 Thomas Henry Huxley and Bishop Samuel Wilberforce held their infamous

1. For an excellent discussion of the vision behind the building of the museum and the role that reflection on the cosmos played in its design, see Carla Yanni, "Nature as Creation: The Oxford University Museum," chap. 3 in *Nature's Museums: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005).

debate about Darwin's interpretation of evolution, which for the first time gave a cogent explanation of the mechanism of evolution (the general notion of evolution was not a novel or very contentious one in the nineteenth century). A compelling idea now had explanatory power but did not possess fully verifiable evidence, and it raised massive questions about our understanding of human origins and natural history. This was not the first time such a lag between inference and evidence had occurred. Scientific progress is replete with such stories: one of the most well known of these is Galileo's inferences supporting Copernicus, which could not be proven until the early nineteenth century, when technological advancements finally achieved the ability to create sufficiently clear, powerful telescopes and verify the transit of Venus across the sun.

Oxford's Museum of Natural History offers an architectural style directly reminiscent of the great British Gothic cathedrals, with an entrance and windows in the Norman style. In addition, it has a monastic kitchen (from the abbot's kitchen at Glastonbury) built alongside to represent chemistry, and its internal structure features a grand open space with columns and carvings like a Christian basilica and other Gothic buildings.[2] The style was employed not to mock or replace the church but to be a testament to the enduring connection its designers found between the book of life and the book of nature. So, this building—presided over by an angel of God and in an architectural style emphasizing the spiritual—offered the stage for one of the oft-reported, and frequently mispresented, debates between science and religion. Or was it such a debate?

But before reaching the museum, one comes to the other building, on the west side of the street: the chapel of Keble College, Oxford. Keble College was built to commemorate John Keble, the founder of the Oxford Movement, a reform movement within the Church of England that emphasized the sacramental nature of worship, sacramental theology, and the preparation of priests for service in parishes for the urban and rural poor, which the Church of England had seemingly ignored. Soon after the college's founding, a chapel was added—full of color, life, and images of the life of the church. A side chapel, added later, houses one of the famous paintings of religious

2. In contrast to the neoclassical style of prior generations, the Victorians created Gothic buildings and used Gothic flourishes, believing the Gothic style offered something more human and spiritual. On the architects Pugin and Scott and the Gothic revival, see Alexandra Wedgwood, "Pugin, Augustus Welby Northmore (1812–1852)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), available at http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22869 (subscription required); Gavin Stamp, "Scott, Sir George Gilbert (1811–1878)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, available at http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24869 (subscription required).

life from the period, *The Light of the World* by Holman Hunt. Unlike the museum across the street, built of dressed stone in the manner of Oxford's stately buildings, Keble College and its chapel are built of ordinary brick but with flourishes of design with blue and white bricks. The college's architectural design matches the vision for sacrament and beauty with the vision of serving the ordinary, the poor, and the overlooked (brickwork was viewed as ordinary and plebeian in contrast to the grandeur of stone). A college founded for the teaching of theology and the formation of priests to serve the urban poor (which quickly added the full science curriculum, to be sure), built out of a deep understanding of religious vocation, stands across the street from a natural history museum presided over by an angel of God welcoming the faithful into its exhibits. What an interesting if not ironic sense of apposition!

Yet this is not the most interesting part of the story of these two buildings. To learn more we must turn to their respective sources of funding. The Oxford Museum of Natural History was paid for by the royalties enjoyed by Oxford University Press through its sales of King James Bibles. The press's grant of £30,000, a princely sum then, provided for the building of the museum. The source of funding for Keble Chapel (begun in 1873) is equally interesting. The chapel was paid for thanks to the invention of nitrate-based fertilizer earlier in the century. The donor, William Gibbs, provided the grant to build the chapel. The funds came from the family business exporting guano mined in the South Pacific.[3] Guano was a major ingredient in fertilizer that, once discovered and exploited, enabled an agricultural revolution as well as the creation of more destructive armaments as witnessed by the horrors of World War I.

So a natural history museum built by the income from the sales of Bibles stands in apposition to a Christian chapel built by the income generated by the science of agriculture with the discovery of fertilizer and modern armaments. Elsewhere we find opposition. Our current intellectual climate illustrates the cultural, religious, and academic significance of the relationship between science and religion. Of pressing concern is the controversy and clash often sparked by cross-disciplinary interactions. Indeed, as C. P. Snow cogently identified more than fifty years ago,[4] a gulf exists between the humanities and the sciences, and evidence abounds that this has not abated in the intervening years. This gulf provides a fundamental context for interpreting some of the substantial challenges and rifts separating religion and science. Rhetorically fierce debates featuring high-profile figures abound and attract

3. "Chapel History and Treasures," Keble College, Oxford, accessed June 19, 2017, http://www.keble.ox.ac.uk/about/chapel/chapel-history-and-treasures.

4. C. P. Snow, *Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1959); the book is based on his Rede Lecture earlier that year.

media attention, but much of the debate is not founded on scholarship and balanced argument. Metaphysical arguments and various scientisms are too often passed off as scientific arguments (by both scientists and nonscientists, religious and nonreligious alike), and assertions made about the treatment of science at the hands of the ill-minded religious still depend on ugly, partial anecdotes. Of course, examples of scientists misrepresenting, misunderstanding, or otherwise mistreating religions and religious interpretations likewise abound. Myths have also had a prominent place in the popular and academic imagination, such as the nineteenth-century romanticized canard, promulgated by Washington Irving in his biography of Christopher Columbus, that the Christian West, until the discovery of Columbus, believed in a "flat earth."[5] For counterevidence one need only look at the common use of armillary spheres in late antiquity and in the early Christian, medieval, and renaissance worlds, along with the artwork dotting churches that portrays Christ astride a globe. Another nineteenth-century myth that has had massive currency—propounded by Draper and White, who invented and popularized the "conflict thesis"[6]—is that Galileo's trial was a simple suppression of science by the church, which many scholars and the popular press still cite despite innumerable studies demonstrating otherwise.[7]

Recently, evolutionary theory has been fine-tuned and developed through discoveries in the areas of epigenetics, statistics, mathematics, and game theory, and genetic research has advanced human knowledge in remarkable ways, with hugely important implications for agriculture, forensic science, history, demography, ethics, and theology. The contributors to this book are keen to model a healthy engagement with these new scientific discoveries and interpretations—not only for reasons of public relations but also out of a belief that Christians should be open and committed to truth, pursuing it wherever it may be found and following it wherever it may lead. Following the dictum of Augustine that "all truth is God's truth, wherever it is found,"[8] Wycliffe Hall—one of the institutional partners of this volume and the institution in which all four editors have held or currently hold faculty status—restates

5. See Washington Irving, *A History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, 3 vols. (New York: Carvill, 1828).

6. Andrew Dickson White, *The Warfare of Science* (New York: Appleton, 1869); Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1896); John William Draper, *The History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (London: Henry S. King, 1875).

7. Among the many options see the very accessible *Galileo Goes to Jail, and Other Myths about Science and Religion*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

8. Augustine, *On Christian Instruction* 2.18.28.

this as part of its own academic values, and we repeat it here as reflecting a commitment of this project and the book that has come out of it: "convinced that all such pursuit of truth will ultimately lead to, because all truth comes ultimately from, Jesus Christ."[9]

In this volume we seek to create space for honest investigation and dialogue. The science of human evolution has opened vast new pathways for exploration, brought verifiable data to bear on earlier inferences, offered new inferences, revealed new understandings of human and broader biological development, and offered significant new challenges to our self-understanding. We are now led to ask questions like, *After Darwin and the revolutions spawned in genetic research, who are we? And how do we define ourselves and find our past in light of these revolutions?* These simple questions require careful, balanced, and nuanced answers.

Ideas are often said to have a consequence, but what is sometimes forgotten is they also have a context. History and culture matter. Ideas are born in a time and place, though rarely full bodied all at once. Rather, ideas themselves are evolving products that reflect substantial development over time, are influenced by many different thinkers and issues, and are susceptible to the shape given by the context in which they are expressed and the histories on which they are constructed (often described as the geography of knowledge).[10] This is true of interpretive constructs, whether they be found among the faculty of history, theology, or the scientific disciplines. The facts may or may not alter, but their reception and the ways in which they are understood and interpreted do alter—often profoundly.

Hence we do not wish merely to tie our interpretations to contemporary scientific findings and interpretations, as those are provisional and subject to change. Churchmen working in the wake of the renaissance of the twelfth century made that mistake when they tied their theology and interpretations of the cosmos to the scientific methods and interpretations of the Aristotelian tradition. Fruitful as they found some of those theological products, the fruit ultimately proved sour, offering a scientifically and theologically limited view

9. Wycliffe Hall's Statement of Academic Values and Virtues is accessible at https://www.wycliffehall.org.uk/data/wycliffe/downloads/WH%20Academic%20Values%20and%20Virtues.pdf. This paragraph is based on part of the introduction to part 3 (written by the principal of Wycliffe Hall), which is devoted to the problem of evil in the light of evolution and modern genetics.

10. See, e.g., the many works by David N. Livingstone, who demonstrates how local issues and culture have shaped the reception of Darwin by different communities that otherwise share the same creeds and theology. For an important explanation of this phenomenon, see his *Dealing with Darwin: Place, Politics, and Rhetoric in Religious Engagements with Evolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

of the solar system and broader cosmos, tied as it was to the Ptolemaic and Aristotelian imagination of the cosmos. Preoccupied with crystalline spheres and the place of God outside the lunar orbit, they could not intellectually encompass the inferences and discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo. This led both to the scientific challenges posed by Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo, among others, and to the theological revisions posed by the Protestant Reformation.

The research group that produced this book, in examining theology in the context of contemporary science, wishes to use the discoveries and interpretations of contemporary science as a dialogue partner with historic doctrinal commitments. We are keenly aware of the bitter experience of misappropriating earlier scientific positions by overly relying upon them, or confusing prior scientific representations as theological facts. This provides a context to reflect on possible avenues for conversation—not to shut down conversation, limit the options, or tie ourselves to current interpretations that are necessarily finite and subject to change. That would demonstrate a failure to learn from our past. Most contributors to this volume participated in several colloquia in Oxford where ideas were presented and debated. Criticisms were lodged, defenses offered, judgments (however, tentative) rendered, reflection and investigation expanded, and positions defined. In this volume, you will find a variety of views and historical reflections offering differing ways of responding to scientific models and discoveries and working through key ideas attached to theological anthropology—that is, theological reflections on human nature. But it is not just scientific models that can differ; so too can theological and philosophical models that shape our vision of the world. These can differ and create differing ways of managing the science. This recognition has enabled the team—and we hope the reader as well—to explore whether differing theological traditions may have available resources, or whether there are resources from our own tradition that can be recovered, allowing us to respond to contemporary challenges.

The arguments in the ensuing chapters are not presented as necessarily offering contrasting opinions that negate one another and force the reader to choose between them. This is not a "four views" type of book presenting necessarily mutually exclusive positions. Some authors and their positions support one another, while others disagree; some positions are complementary or explanatory, while others may inherently critique each other. Rather than intentionally selecting competing viewpoints, we have assembled scholarship presenting different approaches and methods and insights, introducing a variety of models that may be considered and that just might, either individually or severally, provide a coherent path forward. So while some positions could

exclude *some* other positions on a given issue, this is not necessarily the case, and the book should not be read as offering such an oppositional strategy. The editorial team, with the support of the chapter authors, has sought to leave issues open, to create mental space to explore difficult issues amid a changing landscape. That is, we have chosen an appositional (but not oppositional) strategy. Even if issues are left unsettled, these need not be unsettling, as we acknowledge the complexity of the issues and the need for individuals of goodwill to come together to discuss frankly and openly, committed to truth while not foreclosed to particular answers, recognizing the limits of knowledge, imagination, and experience that bedevil us all. Intellectual and spiritual humility require a willingness to take such risks.

In chapter 2 Benno van den Toren reflects on the difference between a settled doctrine and theological systems that attempt to make sense of that doctrine. While a doctrine is something firm—or if creedal, extremely firm—the theological systems that grow up around a doctrine are much more exploratory, interpretive, subject to a culture (denominational, institutional, etc.), and thus often more tentative. The editors and contributors have approached our subject with a firm commitment to the doctrinal core but have agreed to a certain flexibility and openness to the systems that have grown up around them. So, for example, all are committed to the notion that humans are divine image bearers. But as to what the image of God means and what its implications are for humanity, we've agreed to hold a more generous approach, seeking to engage the many ways of interpreting that statement and evaluating the various views.

Following the introductory essays, the volume is divided into three parts: part 1, edited by Michael Burdett, addresses issues surrounding the *imago Dei*, or image of God; part 2, edited by Benno van den Toren, addresses issues surrounding original sin; and part 3, edited by Michael Lloyd, addresses issues surrounding theodicy, or the problem of evil. Each part follows the same basic pattern: it begins with a brief introduction by the relevant editor, followed by a leadoff article by a prominent scholar setting out key issues with which a thoughtful response must engage. This is then followed by chapters taking up the issues and offering differing approaches: biblical, historical, systematic, and contextual theology, intellectual history, analytic and continental philosophy, and so on. Different authors come at the central questions from different angles, and each part thus provides a wide-ranging discussion of the issues at stake. The editor then concludes the part with a reflection on the main threads of the essays and provides a brief list of further readings on the topic of the respective part.

This volume was made possible by a research grant given by the BioLogos Foundation as part of its Evolution and Christian Faith project. The project

team engaged with a group of theologians, biblical scholars, historians, ancient Near Eastern specialists, philosophers, physicists, geneticists, biologists, and chemists. We particularly wish to thank Ard Louis and Jonathan Doye, a biophysicist and chemist, who were members of the project team, and Emily Burdett, a cognitive psychologist, all three of whom were scientific advisers to the editorial team. Any mistakes in representing the science are our own, but these three have saved us from multiple factual errors and worked to ensure that the editors are aware of contemporary findings and interpretations. Conversation partners have been diverse and international, drawing on the British context at Oxford and the contributions from multiple colleagues from Europe, the United States, South America, and Africa. Everyone came together for the project, directed by Stanley Rosenberg and Benno van den Toren, titled Configuring Adam and Eve: Creating Conceptual Space for New Developments in the Science of Human Origins. The grant project itself was housed at Wycliffe Hall, a permanent private hall at Oxford University that focuses on ordination training for the Church of England and theological training more broadly as part of its key commitment to deeper theological engagement. The latter activity is taken up by its partner that managed the grant, Scholarship and Christianity in Oxford, or SCIO, which is the UK subsidiary of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. SCIO manages a visiting student program for undergraduates in partnership with Wycliffe Hall and conducts major research and pedagogical projects in science and religion and ancient texts, with grants from major funding bodies.

Did the team succeed at creating space at the interface of theological anthropology and evolutionary science? We believe it was hugely beneficial to all involved, and this volume is one of many products, along with numerous articles, that came out of it. But more importantly, the project, and this volume that came out of it, demonstrate how a group of diverse individuals reflecting varying theological traditions from the humanities and the sciences can come together to work in ways that complement, challenge, and engage one another—and not merely to win a skirmish but to seek deeper understanding and to find points of demarcation not in opposition but in apposition.