

Evolution, Foreknowledge and Creation

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1. It is superficially surprising that the old war between science and religion has not finally wound down, even on the front where the evolutionary account of human origins confronts the concept of special creation. The Scriptures say many things that at face value conflict with late 20th-century scientific opinion, but they are not generally seen as problematic. The Psalmist's statement (Psalm 93:1) that the world is not moved no longer worries the Christian who accepts the Copernican theory of the Solar System. Nor does the assertion (Psalm 95:5) that God's hands have molded the dry land cast doubt on plate tectonics and the other mechanisms geologists employ to explain the formation of the continents. It is no longer widely assumed that representatives of all extant species rode on Noah's ark, nor that the flood covered the entire planet. Similarly, most Christians accept that the world is older, by several orders of magnitude, than calculations based upon biblical genealogies suggest. More generally, it is now widely taken for granted, even in conservative evangelical circles, that accepting the authority and perspicuity of the Bible as God's word does not involve accepting the ancient cosmologies presupposed by the various biblical authors, who envisioned, e.g., a flat earth with the heavenly bodies embedded in a dome overhead and below, subterranean depths inhabited by the shades of the dead.

One might have thought that, 135 years after Darwin made his theories public, the evolutionary account of human origins would have been painlessly integrated into the worldview of mainstream orthodox Christianity, with opposition to it confined to the margins of recalcitrant fundamentalism. So it is somewhat surprising that at this late date adherence to "creationism" and militant rejection of "evolution" has become a shibboleth of orthodoxy for large numbers of Christians, and it is even more surprising that leading Christian intellectuals are mounting serious criticism of what Alvin Plantinga calls the "Grand Evolutionary Hypothesis."¹ This is a source of frustration and embarrassment for Christians who accept the evolutionary theory of human origins and perceive no serious problem in reconciling it with belief in God as creator. They are tempted to attribute the widespread belief that current scientific opinion conflicts with the Bible to hermeneutic naiveté, manifest in the assumption that early Genesis ought to be read in a literal fashion.² Ernest Lucas concludes a discussion of early Genesis with the statement: "apart from the literal interpretation of Genesis, there is no strong theological reason for denying the possibility that God used an evolutionary process to bring into existence the life forms he wanted."³ A good deal of the continuing opposition to current scientific theories probably can be traced to misconceived readings of Scripture, but I believe there are serious conceptual, theological reasons for Christian theists to regard the "Grand Evolutionary Hypothesis" with suspicion.

Recent Christian critiques of the evolutionary account of human beginnings focus on its various unsolved problems, anomalies, and evidential insufficiencies. They are particularly aimed at proponents and popularizers who engage in "mere arrogant bluster"⁴ in virtue of claiming that the evidence for evolutionary theory is overwhelming, and that no informed rational person can reject it. The critics' primary aim is to show that the evidence for the scientific account of human origins is not so strong that we are rationally compelled to accept it.

Behind this lies the conviction that it is antecedently unlikely that evolutionary theory can be true if theism is true. There is nothing irrational or obscurantist in demanding very strong evidence before accepting a claim that is improbable, given something one already believes. Evidence that may be good enough for someone who is not a theist to accept the evolutionary theory may not be good enough for a theist

rationally to accept it, if theism renders the evolutionary account improbable. That the universe is billions, not merely thousands, of years old is something theists once saw as improbable, but they generally have come to accept it, because of the quantity and quality of evidence in its favor. One way to read the recent critics of the evolutionary explanation of human origins is as demanding as much and as good evidence for it, given its assumed improbability when theism is taken for granted. But the crucial issue is whether theism really does render the scientific story of human origins improbable.

In the second section of this essay I show that, when certain assumptions are made, it is reasonable to believe that theism makes the evolutionary theory of human origins improbable, and thus that it is reasonable for theists to reject it, at least until the evidence for it is significantly better. But in the third section of this essay I go on to argue that, when the particularities of Christian theism are taken into account, this probability judgment can be reversed, so that the current scientific theory has a high, rather than a low, probability given the assumption of theism. I examine some objections to this claim in the concluding section.

2. When conjoined with other, plausible assumptions, the evolutionary scientific theory of the origin of the human species seems to imply that God did not know exactly what he was doing when he created the universe, and that, even if he is causally responsible for the human species' existence, he is not its creator in the traditional sense.

There is a difference between what we may call creating something and merely being causally responsible for its existence. If someone creates something she selects it from among the possibilities and intends for it, rather than other possible things, to exist. And she acts in such a way as to cause it to exist because she wants it to exist, rather than any of the possible things she could have created instead. Once it exists, we can explain its existence, with its particular features, by appeal to its creator's intentions and actions. We consider, e.g., a painter as having created her painting; we explain the fact that it exists and has the particular features it has by appeal to her specific intentions. "Why this blotch of blue here? Why that oddly-shaped patch of green there? Because that's what the artist intended. This is what she selected for her painting."

This contrasts with someone's merely causing the existence of something: a clumsy house painter knocks some containers of paint off his scaffolding. In the course of its descent the paint leaves the containers and then lands on the sidewalk below, where it forms a particular pattern. Although the person who dropped the paint is causally responsible for the existence of this particular pattern of paint, we cannot explain its having the particular features it has by reference to his intentions, to his having selected some possibilities and rejected others. That this particular splash is there, rather than any of the other possibilities that he could have caused, is not due to his having made a selection of one possible pattern to the exclusion of others. He is causally responsible for there being paint on the sidewalk, but he is not the creator of the specific configuration of paint that is there.

The distinction between being a creator and being merely causally responsible for something is not clear cut. When the artist creates a painting there are any number of characteristics it has that cannot be explained by reference to her specific selections, intentions and actions. That such and such a molecule of paint has such and such a location is something that happened as a consequence of her intending to create the painting she created, but this particular feature of it is a matter of chance, due to features of the process of creating over which she exercised no control. We regard a human being as having created something, and not merely causally responsible for it, so long as enough of its relevant features are explainable by appeal to her having selected them from among the possibilities, where what counts as "enough" and "relevant" are contextually determined.

The traditional conception of God as creator implies that he did not simply cause the first human beings to come into existence, but that he was their creator in the strongest possible sense, i.e. that he selected this particular species from all the possible species that he could have brought into existence. The traditional view entitles us to say that the human species exists, and has the particular features it has, because of God's creative intentions for us. All the physiological and psychological properties of the first members of the

human species can be explained as due to God's specific intentions, as part of his plan for the universe. Nothing was left to chance and the "blind" mechanisms of nature. The first human beings existed, looked the way they looked and functioned the way they functioned, because this is precisely what God intended. Given certain assumptions about the nature of God and the universe the "Grand Evolutionary Hypothesis" conflicts with this traditional concept of God as creator of the human species.

According to the evolutionary account of human origins it is possible, at least in principle, to give an adequate explanation of the existence of the first human beings which is "naturalistic" in the sense that it involves no appeal to any special act of divine intervention, but invokes only natural laws and descriptions of initial conditions.⁵ The coming into existence of the first humans is not a miracle. It is possible to explain the origin of the human species in essentially the same way as we explain any number of other events in the natural world. In this way it differs from, e.g., the miraculous transformation of water into wine at the wedding in Cana, an event that cannot be explained adequately without appeal to divine intervention, and it resembles, e.g., the transformation of grape juice into wine that occurs in a winery's fermentation vats, an event that can be explained naturalistically.⁶

According to the standard interpretation of physical theory nature's basic laws are indeterministic. If this interpretation is correct, and the evolutionary account of human origins is also correct, the laws of nature can be used to explain human origins after the fact, but they could not have been used accurately to predict the existence of the human species, at least not when the universe was very young, billions of years before living things existed in it. Given natural processes operating according to indeterministic laws over vast stretches of time, scientific knowledge of the details of the future states of the universe is impossible. Anyone knowing only the laws of nature and the early state of the universe would not be able to infer that the human species was going to come into existence billions of years later.

On the assumption that the laws of nature are indeterministic, the evolutionary account of the origin of the human species can conflict with divine omniscience as traditionally conceived. God, knowing the world's laws and initial conditions, would have been able to know all the possible things that could become actual in this universe, as well as the probability of any possible thing becoming actual. And he would have had foreknowledge of whatever general features of the universe were virtually inevitable, such as the future existence of atoms, galaxies, stars, heavy elements such as carbon, iron and silicon, planets, living organisms, and persons.⁷ But the probability of the human species actually coming into existence was presumably extremely low, so low that God, as a perfectly rational being, would not have believed, and thus would not have known, that it was going to exist.⁸

Beyond whatever general problem this raises for traditional theism, which attributes to God exhaustive knowledge of the future, there is a specific problem with the traditional concept of God as creator of human beings. For any theory that explains human origins by means of indeterministic laws seems to imply that the existence of the human species is not explicable by appeal to God's creative intentions, to his having decided on this particular species. In bringing this universe into being out of nothing, with its initial conditions and natural laws, he would have set in motion a causal process that was going to eventuate in the existence of the human species, but he would not have known that the process he was initiating was going to eventuate in the existence of this particular species. On the assumption of an indeterministic universe it appears that the traditional conception of God as the creator of the human species would be mistaken since he would not have known it was one of the possible species that was going to actually exist.

However, there are ways to avoid this conclusion, strategies to safeguard divine foreknowledge of the existence of the human species and with it the traditional conception of God as its creator. There are interpretations of physical theory according to which the basic laws of nature are deterministic, so that someone possessing exhaustive knowledge of the early state of the universe and of its laws would be able to know everything about all its future states. In this way, God could have known precisely what was going to come into existence at the later stages of the universe. In selecting the laws and initial conditions of the universe he would have ipso facto selected the human species from among the possibilities. He would have created the human species in the strong, traditional sense, albeit indirectly, by way of secondary causes. To initiate a deterministic process knowing it will bring a certain thing into existence, and to do so because one

knows it will have this specific outcome, is a way to create that thing. Theists who reject the standard, indeterministic interpretation of the laws of nature need have no conceptual, theological objection to current scientific explanations of human origins. They need not suppose that the evolutionary account implies that God did not know precisely what was going to come about as a result of his creative act.

Another strategy open to the theist is to maintain that God possesses "middle knowledge." Middle knowledge is distinguished on the one hand from knowledge about what was, is, and will be actual, and on the other hand from knowledge of what is possible. If God has middle knowledge, he has always known truths of the form: "If I were to create this sort of universe, then this species would come into existence." If God has this kind of knowledge, then, since he knew he was going to create this sort of universe, he would have known that the human species was actually going to come into existence. God's knowledge of the relevant subjunctive conditional facts, together with his foreknowledge of his actual actions, would ground his foreknowledge of the actual future states of the universe. Knowing the relevant subjunctive conditionals, God would have had precise foreknowledge of our species' existence, even if the universe he created is indeterministic. Theists who think God has middle knowledge of this type need not regard naturalistic explanations of the beginnings of the human species as improbable. For they need not suppose that the scientific account implies that God did not know precisely what was going to happen when he created the universe.

Another way to safeguard divine omniscience and the traditional concept of the creation of the human species is to describe God as eternal. Many theists maintain that God is eternal in the sense of being timeless, as having no temporal properties, rather than as being everlasting in time. It is reasonable to believe that if God is eternal in this sense he has direct epistemic access to every temporal stage of the universe, and thus eternally possesses complete, detailed knowledge of every state of the universe at every time of its existence. Even if nature's laws are indeterministic an eternal God would eternally know exactly what he is doing as he eternally creates the universe. He would have the first members of our species, as well as the rest of us, eternally in mind as he eternally brings the universe into existence. Theists who believe in divine eternity need not regard the evolutionary theory of human origins as antecedently improbable grounds, even if they believe that the universe is indeterministic and that God does not have middle knowledge.

Given any of these three possibilities theists need have no conceptual (as opposed to hermeneutic or specific scientific) objection to the "Grand Evolutionary Hypothesis." They need not scrutinize the putative evidence for it as evidence for something that is highly unlikely, given something else they are convinced is true. One way or the other, it would be true that God brought the universe into existence knowing that it was going to give rise to the human species, and equally true that he created the universe the way he did in order to bring about the existence of this species, which he specifically selected from among the possibilities.

Probably, most theists accept at least one of these beliefs; some accept all three. So in the case of most theists, Lucas is probably right: the only plausible reason for rejecting the naturalistic account of human origins is a predilection for a literal reading of the Genesis creation account. On the other hand, there are theists who reject these views.⁹ For those who reject all three, there remains a presumptive conflict between the evolutionary explanation of the origin of the species and the traditional conception of God as its creator. For the only way left to preserve the idea that God knew precisely what sort of things were going to exist after he brought the universe into being appears to be by insisting that he always specifically intended for us to exist, and to make sure of this by intervening in his creation. A temporal God who does not have middle knowledge and who created a universe governed by indeterministic laws could still know that the human species was going to exist in virtue of knowing his own intentions and capabilities. He could know that he was going to intervene at a particular time (or at particular times) so as to cause the universe to develop in a certain way, and thus to ensure its bringing forth exactly the kind of living things he always intended it to bring forth. The traditional view of creation requires that God knew, eons before there were any humans, that they were going to come into existence. If the only way for him to have foreknowledge is for him to have intended to intervene, then the traditional view of the creation of the human species requires that he did intervene to bring it into existence. This implies there can be no

adequate scientific account of human origins, since it can be explained only by appeal to a special act or acts of supernatural intervention.¹⁰ The existence of the human species would be miraculous. Rejecting the evolutionary account of the human species' origin may be necessary in order to continue holding to the view that God knew there were going to be human beings among his creatures.

3. I see no compelling reason to think that given theism per se the evolutionary explanation is either probable or improbable.¹¹ When we conjoin theism with a literal interpretation of the Genesis creation story, then of course the evolutionary explanation is rendered improbable. More interestingly, when we conjoin theism with the belief that God is everlasting rather than eternal, that he does not possess the relevant type of middle knowledge, and also suppose the universe to be indeterministic, the prevailing scientific view of human beginnings turns out to be highly improbable.¹² If we start with simple theism and add further assumptions the evolutionary account will rightly seem improbable, and this is independent of any literal reading of early Genesis. It depends not on biblical literalism but on the connection between creating and foreknowing. However, something that is improbable given A and B may turn out to be probable given A, B, and C. The addition of further assumptions may reverse the judgment about the evolutionary account's improbability. I believe that there is a further assumption, grounded in considerations about God's revealed purposes in bringing human beings into existence, that does support a reversal of the probability judgment.¹³

This universe did not have to come into existence, and it did not have to contain human beings or any other persons. The universe with its contents exists only because God brought it into existence. He did not have to bring anything into existence. The universe is not a necessary emanation from God. God would have been no less good if he made nothing. The world exists as a result of God's free choice. God's choices are rational; he has reasons for bringing into existence a universe in which persons make their home. The facts about why someone does something can constrain answers to the question how he did it.

One of God's reasons for making this universe is his desire to know and love and care for persons, and for those persons to love and know and trust him. The biblical revelation is in essence an account of God's attempts to bring about and sustain that sort of relationship with some of his creatures. The God portrayed in the Bible is the maker of the universe and its contents, but he is the God of the Covenant as well. He has an overriding aim, demonstrated in the history of Israel, in the Incarnation and at the Cross, to have a particular sort of relationship with persons other than himself, with persons who have a degree of autonomy, insofar as they may, but need not, accept his invitation to enter into that relationship. They may, but need not, want what he wants. They may, but do not have to, see things the way he sees them. God intended there to be persons distinct from himself, capable of actions that are really their actions, not merely the remote causal consequences of his actions, so they can respond to his actions, and he to theirs, and so on.

I conjecture that God, wanting there to be such persons, would want not to know everything about the future, for he would not want to know exactly what they are going to do in the future, and thus that he would choose to create a universe in which their future actions are not always precisely knowable.¹⁴

Even if God, intending there to be free persons distinct from himself, created a world in which the future is not entirely knowable, this does not imply that he would have brought them into existence by means that preclude his knowing precisely what sort of persons he was making. However, further considerations support the idea that, when it comes to bringing another person into existence for the purpose of entering into an interpersonal relationship with her, it is appropriate to want only limited foreknowledge of her characteristics, just as it is appropriate to want only limited knowledge of her future actions. Prospective human parents who choose to conceive a child reasonably want some general knowledge about the thing they are bringing into existence. If they were going to conceive an armadillo or a hamster instead of a human infant they would want to know this before going any further. For many prospective parents this is about all they want to know. They are happy to start the process and let nature take its course to an outcome of which they have only this general foreknowledge. Some, but not all, prospective parents would like to know whether the child will be normal and healthy, and some would like to know what sex the baby will be.

A few prospective parents might like to know, because they would like to be able to select, all the child's characteristics. For them, designing a baby would be like designing a new house; as far as possible they want its specific features to depend on their specific choices. They do not want to be merely causally responsible for their child's existence; they want to create it. They want to select it, with all its characteristics, from all the possible babies they could produce. Most of us would rightly find this desire inappropriate, in conflict with the intention to bring into existence someone to relate to as a person distinct from oneself. We would not regard them as better or more caring or loving parents in virtue of making their child's characteristics depend as much as possible on their decisions. Parents really ought not to want to create their children; making a baby ought not to be analogous to making a house because to make a baby is to make a person distinct from oneself. In building a house it is entirely appropriate to try to ensure that it has just the characteristics one wants it to have, but it is somehow inappropriate to relate to another person as something one has created, in the sense of having picked all his or her characteristics. It undermines the "psychological distance" that authentic interpersonal relations require. One ought not to be able to regard another person as an extension or expression of oneself in the way things one has created are extensions or expressions of oneself, reflecting one's desires and choices to whatever extent allowed by one's power over the recalcitrant natural material. It's hard to imagine a human being who knows that his innate characteristics were selected by some other person as being capable of assuming responsibility for himself, his character, and his actions, or as being able to have a normal personal relationship with that person.

For human beings, limited in wisdom and power, it is typically easy not to know what it is better not to know about the future and typically difficult to know what we should know about it. But for God the situation is radically different: unless he acts so as to avoid it, he will know precisely what the future holds. Given God's revealed purpose of there being other persons for him to know and love, it should not be surprising that we find ourselves in a universe that appears designed to produce persons in ways that have precisely unpredictable outcomes.¹⁵

We should be cautious in relying on analogies between human relationships and relations between God and his creatures.¹⁶ There are good reasons for human makers of human persons not to select or even foreknow all the characteristics of those whom they bring into existence. There are cogent ethical objections to positive genetic engineering. We clearly lack the goodness, knowledge, intelligence, and imagination to take up this sort of responsibility, but none of these considerations apply to God. He would have done nothing wrong if he created persons by means that allow for his complete foreknowledge of all their characteristics. Perhaps he created the angels in such a way. But it would be incongruous for him to have brought human beings into existence in this way, given the intentions he has revealed.

I cannot prove that a gracious creator with unlimited wisdom and goodness who desires to enter into a loving covenant relation with created persons is more likely to make them without foreknowing everything there is to know about them than to make them in ways that allow for precise foreknowledge. But it does seem that there are things that are inappropriate for interpersonal relations, no matter one's wisdom and goodness. Analogously, I assume that it would be inappropriate for anyone, even an infinitely wise and good creator, to have complete control over another person's behavior, even if that person would behave in a better way and be happier than if he were permitted to act on his own. There would be no genuine interpersonal relationship here, or at least it would be a highly defective one, a relationship in which genuine love, trust, and mutual response could not be adequately realized. Christian theists rightfully believe that neither divine sovereignty over the universe, nor God's efficacy in creating faith in his people, involves this sort of control over them. The God of the Bible is committed to bringing about a real interpersonal relationship with real persons.

4. Some theists will find this idea of God setting natural processes in motion, without selecting the precise outcome, very unsatisfactory, particularly where the outcome is the coming into existence of human beings. Some will find it deistic,¹⁷ though I confess that I find it strange to regard as deistic an account of the world as designed by God to make possible his personally involving himself in the lives of created persons. Theists regularly accept that most events can be explained by appeal to natural law, without appeal to God's intervention, and that relatively few events should be regarded as miraculous. There is nothing interestingly

deistic about this, and so far as I can see, there is nothing deistic in thinking the origination of the human species can be explained without divine intervention.

Others may suspect that this account of human origins is inconsistent with human beings having a special status among creatures in virtue of being made in the image of God. The idea of our being made *imago Dei* admits of a variety of interpretations, many of them going beyond anything reasonably attributed to the author(s) of early Genesis.¹⁸ One is that our being made in God's image is a matter of the particular means by which he created the first humans from whom the rest of us descend. On this view he created the original humans in an essentially different way than that in which he created all his other creatures, i.e. he created the first human in a direct way, by miraculous intervention in nature. The view I have advanced in this essay is at odds with this since I hypothesize that the origin of our species can be explained by appeal to the same natural processes that suffice to explain the origin of all the other species on this planet.

Taken literally, early Genesis suggests that the first humans were created by divine intervention, and that the first humans were *imago dei*, but it does not say they were *imago dei* in virtue of being specially created by intervention, nor does it say they must have been specially created in virtue of being *imago dei*. Nothing in the texts rules out the possibility of something being God's image even if it is not brought into being by divine intervention. Nor do these texts exclude the possibility of God creating something by way of miraculous intervention that nonetheless would not be his image. So far as early Genesis goes, intervention appears to be neither necessary nor sufficient for our being made in God's image. They appear to be closely associated, but still independent concepts. Consistently, we can agree that humans are *imago dei* without accepting Genesis' literal claims about divine intervention. If being created by a particular means is necessary for being *imago dei* the evidence for this will have to be found outside the Genesis texts, presumably in some more fully developed theory of the content of the image.

Perhaps the most widely-held conception of human beings as the image of God construes it as our resembling God in certain ways. No plausible interpretation of the *imago Dei* maintains that it is our physical resemblance to God that is involved here, since he is not a material being. Any characteristics involved in humans resembling God, and thus being his image, are realizable in a variety of different material forms. If there were little green persons on Mars, their being biologically very different from humans would not suffice to prevent their being the image of God. So the supposition that God did not select and foreknow the specific physical form of the persons he wanted to exist does not conflict with this version of the "similarity" interpretation of the *imago dei*.

According to more plausible versions of this interpretation human beings are the image of God in virtue of resembling him insofar as we, like him, are rational, intelligent, free and morally responsible, creative, or inherently social. It must be granted that convincing scientific theories of how we came to have these characteristics are generally currently unavailable, and that the available theories are typically vague, speculative and controversial, among the least plausible parts of the "Grand Evolutionary Hypothesis." Various general considerations about human nature and the limits of scientific explanation have led many to the (in my view almost certainly mistaken) conclusion that this is not a temporary situation, because our possession of these crucial psychological and behavioral characteristics cannot be explained without invoking divine intervention.¹⁹ But in any event the assertion that these characteristics comprise the image of God adds nothing to the argument against the possibility of a naturalistic explanation of our having them. Suppose it is, e.g., our being rational that makes humans the image of God: in itself, that fact has no bearing on the question of whether our rationality can be explained in terms of the "Grand Evolutionary Hypothesis."

Other ways of construing the image of God are relational, describing our being God's image as a matter of what we do, or at least what we were intended to do, in the context of our relation to God. For instance, human beings might be God's image in the sense that they function as his agents in the created world, representing him as they exercise dominion over the creation. Alternatively, we might be *imago Dei* in virtue of our knowing and personally interacting with God, or at least in virtue of having the capacity for relating to him in this way. It is reasonable to suppose that human beings performing these functions presupposes their having certain characteristics. E.g. exercising dominion as God's agent would seem to

require intelligence. It is conceivable that humans' having these presupposed characteristics can be explained only as a result of divine intervention. But the fact that our having them is presupposed by our being *imago dei* would not in itself be a good reason to conclude this.

The revision in our idea of God as creator suggested in this essay is not deistic and it does not conflict with the idea of *imago Dei*, but it does require a change in the traditional conception of God's omniscience.²⁰ It implies that God had only general knowledge about what sort of creatures his universe was going to contain. Still, it is consistent with the important truth that doctrine articulates. Although God does not know everything about the future, cognitively he is as good as it is possible for anyone to be. His cognitive excellence is not a simple matter of the amount of knowledge he possesses. Knowledge, conceived as true belief that is rationally justified or otherwise warranted, is not the whole of cognitive excellence. A person can be cognitively superior to someone even when he does not know something the other knows, and that lack of knowledge can be due to his cognitive superiority.²¹ Our concept of knowledge does not perfectly map the biblical conception of God's wisdom, a concept better articulated in qualitative than in quantitative terms. Unfortunately, some theists seem so committed to the Hellenized deity of classical philosophical theism as to think God could not have made the world in such a way that its future is partially unknowable, and that he has to know everything about the future whether he wants to or not. To accept the modification in our concept of God's foreknowledge in no way impugns his greatness. It does not involve any necessary, nor any external contingent, limitation on God's foreknowledge. The limitation it recommends is one God takes upon himself, for his own reasons. Although God could have known the future exhaustively, he has the freedom to create a world with a future he does not completely foreknow. It seems implausible to think God lacks the power, or the wisdom, to make such a world.²² And a due regard for the biblical revelation of his purposes in creating the world suggests that he had a reason to make such a world. In the biblical perspective the glory and greatness of God is seen primarily in his love for, and condescension to, those he has made, not in his meeting the specifications of a philosophically-laden conception of greatness or perfect being. Some theists will regard the God conceived here as a "cosmic gambler," perhaps not even worthy of our love and worship.²³ But other conclusions are possible. Helmut Thielicke, describing God's creative work, wrote: "This venture of God in which he bound himself to man -- and exposed himself to the possibility of being reviled, despised, denied, and ignored by man -- this venture is the first flash of his love."²⁴

If God did not select the human species from among all the possible species of person, then the traditional way we have conceived of God as our creator is inadequate. This does not mean we should abandon belief in God as our creator and regard him as no more than causally responsible for the existence of our the human species. That things like us -- biological organisms that are persons -- came into existence is not, ultimately, a matter of blind natural law and chance. That there can be an adequate scientific explanation of human origins does not preclude there being a further, more comprehensive explanation. The explanatory laws and initial conditions of natural science can be embedded in a framework of theological explanation. That explanation of our existence invokes the intentions God had when he brought this universe into existence, and these original intentions are intimately tied to God's later actions in human history and to our personal responses to him as acting in this universe on our behalf. We are properly grateful to a God who brought us into existence by natural mechanisms of the sort indicated by the "Grand Evolutionary Hypothesis." A child of human parents may correctly believe she exists because her parents wanted her to come into existence so they could know and love her. It would be a mistake for her gratitude to them to be undermined by the discovery that they chose not to engage in genetic engineering so as to select her from among the possible children they could have brought into existence. Analogously, it is fitting for us to be grateful to God for bringing us into existence and to praise him as our creator, even if we are products of a causal process whose specific outcome was once inherently unknowable.

With these divine purposes in view, it is antecedently probable that whatever persons there are in this universe came into existence by way of nature's indeterministic causal processes, without divine intervention. Perhaps not from a "generically theistic" point of view, but from a specifically biblical, Judeo-Christian perspective, we should be disposed to find evidence that God did not select us in the sense required by a traditional understanding of creation, and instead left the "selection" a matter of indeterministic natural processes.²⁵ We may view the evolutionary account of human origins as

antecedently probable, rather than improbable. While this gives us no license to accept uncritically current evolutionary theories, ignoring their alleged inadequacies or denying whatever real deficiencies they have, we should be at least as ready as intellectually honest non-theists to accept the "Grand Evolutionary Hypothesis." If it is essentially correct, it can be an important component of a powerful, winsome account of this world as made by a gracious God.

1 E.g. Alvin Plantinga, "When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21(September 1991), pp. 8-32, Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin On Trial*, (Washington: Regnery Gateway, 1991) and J.P. Moreland, ed., *The Creation Hypothesis* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1994). Particularly under attack is the assumption that the first living things came into existence by way of natural chemical processes and the Neo-Darwinian explanation of speciation ("macroevolution"). Other parts of the "Grand Evolutionary Hypothesis" such as the Big Bang theory and the various theories that purport to explain the formation of particles, galaxies, stars and planets, are not typically subject to criticism.

2 See William Hasker, "Evolution and Alvin Plantinga," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, 44 (September 1992), pp. 150-162.

3 Ernest Lucas, *Genesis Today: Genesis and the Questions of Science*, (London: Scripture Union, 1989), p. 96.

4 Plantinga, "When Faith and Reason Clash," p. 20.

5 This rules out any version of "theistic evolution" which says that God "guided" the natural evolutionary processes, at least if guidance is construed as a matter of interventions that unobtrusively involve the violation or suspension of natural law.

6 I assume that no matter what we may be inclined to say about the need to avoid construing God as an alien intruder in the world that he in fact in some way sustains in being we still want to make a relatively clear distinction between events that are miraculous, that in principle cannot be scientifically explained, and those that are open to scientific explanation. The distinction can, however, break down, as it does in the view that some, or even all, events that the quantum theory describes as uncaused are actually the immediate results of God's free acts. Because the fundamental laws of nature are indeterministic divine intervention need not involve a violation or suspension of those laws. Some theists are attracted to this idea of God at work in the "explanatory gaps" left by contemporary physical theory, but as I will argue in this essay, we have good reasons to believe God has created this world in such a way as to make its future depend on real, as opposed to merely apparent, chance events.

7 This of course depends on the supposition that, given the initial state and laws of this universe, it was virtually inevitable that some sort of intelligent life was going to come into existence somewhere. Given current scientific knowledge this is speculative, but it rests upon the fact that this universe is, in its most basic laws and physical constants, apparently "fine tuned" so as to make intelligent life possible and perhaps probable (see, e.g., John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986) and upon reasonable assumptions about the strong adaptive value of intelligence and consciousness in at least some parts of the universe. Were it to turn out that the evolution of persons of any sort was wildly improbable and, like the existence of any particular species, unpredictable at the beginning of the universe, and if there were no other way for God to know the universe was going to contain persons of some sort, the most reasonable conclusion might be that human origins are miraculous, for the unacceptable alternative would seem to be that God, in bringing this universe into existence, was not decisively acting so as to realize his purpose of there being persons other than himself and thus not our creator, even in the modified sense I propose in this essay. Even Stephen J. Gould, well known for his insistence on the radical contingency and non-inevitability of our species, appears to restrict his claim to the unpredictability of specific outcomes and not to extend it to more general outcomes, such as there being some sort of conscious being. See "George Canning's Left Buttock and the Origin of Species," in *Bully For Brontosaurus* (New York: Norton, 1991), pp. 30-31. The two claims that Gould seems to want to make, that

it was extremely improbable that intelligent life of any sort would appear on the Earth, and that it was extremely improbable that human life would exist anywhere in the universe, are both consistent with, and indeed presupposed by, the view of creation I propose in this essay. Daniel Dennett helpfully examines some of the ambiguities in Gould's assertions in *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), pp. 299-312.

8 Murray Gell-Mann writes "the universe is quantum-mechanical, which implies that even if its initial state and the fundamental laws of matter are known, only a set of possible histories of the universe can be calculated" *The Quark and the Jaguar*, (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1994), p. 24. Stephen J. Gould refers to the "awesome improbability of human evolution," *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (New York: Norton, 1989), p. 24, and writes that the existence of human beings is "explainable after the fact" but that this eventual result could not have been predicted at the outset, p. 51. Against the view that the existence of biological organisms exactly like humans is very improbable, see Stephen R.L. Clark, "Does the Burgess Shale have Moral Implications?" *Inquiry*, 36 (1993), p. 368.

9 E.g., Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz, eds., pp. 77-98, rejects divine eternity. William Hasker rejects divine middle knowledge (in the parallel context where the issue is God's foreknowledge of free human action) in *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989). Peter van Inwagen, "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God," in *Divine and Human Action*, Thomas V. Morris, ed. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988), makes the case for the consistency of believing that there are chance events in a universe created by God. I was led to the views expressed in this paper in part by my inclination to believe that God is everlasting, rather than timelessly eternal, that he doesn't have middle knowledge, and that the laws of nature are indeterministic.

10 This approach to the problem of human origins provides no general solution to the problem with the traditional idea of divine omniscience. There will be many other things about the distant future of an indeterministic universe a temporal God who does not have middle knowledge will not know.

11 Actually, I think there is some reason to think the evolutionary account to be antecedently more probable, in virtue of it being antecedently more likely that God would make things by a beautiful, elegant process than in some other way.

12 Indeed, if it were not for the fact that for all we know there is some other way for God to foreknow the specifics of his creation, we would have to say it is impossible, not merely improbable.

13 By analogy, given the claim that Marvin lives in Sioux Center, Iowa, the claim that Marvin is an Episcopalian is improbable. (Fewer than 1% of that Dutch community's inhabitants are Episcopalians.) Adding more information, say that Marvin's surname is van Hook, makes it even more improbable that he is an Episcopalian (Less than .5% of persons with Dutch surnames are Episcopalians). Nonetheless, adding another piece of information, that Marvin regularly conducts services at St. George's, the local Episcopal parish, now makes it probable that he is an Episcopalian, since the chances that someone who regularly conducts such services is not an Episcopalian are even slighter than a van Hook of Sioux Center being an Episcopalian.

14 I present a case for this in "Divine Omniscience and Human Freedom," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Philosophical Society*, 34(1991):49-64.

15 Various apparent features of this universe that are problematic on traditional views now become what we should expect: Why should the universe be indeterministic, and chaotic, so that small random events can have large long-term effects? Why is the universe so old and so large? Why all the extinct species? Why does it have so much in it that seems to have nothing to do with God's purposes? These are features we could reasonably expect the universe to have if it is explicitly designed so as to produce complex

biological organisms in such a way that the general outcome (persons of some sort) is knowable, while the details of the outcome (the particular types of persons) are inherently unpredictable.

16 On the other hand, I do believe that in general our practical knowledge of human relationships is a better guide to God's nature and character than a priori ontological and ethical considerations. Overwhelmingly, God reveals himself in Scripture in terms of his faithfulness, lovingkindness, steadfastness, i.e. in terms of personal relationships. As William Hasker has pointed out, even if we accept a "perfect being" conception of God, we should not jump to conclusions as to what his perfection consists in, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker and David Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994) p. 132.

17 Or as Plantinga suggests, "semideistic," avoiding genuine deism only in virtue of maintaining the assumption that God is constantly acting to sustain the universe in existence, "When Faith and Reason Clash," p. 21.

18 For a construal of these texts that tries not to go beyond authorial intent see J. Richard Middleton's "The Liberating Image? Interpreting the Imago Dei in Context" *Christian Scholar's Review* 24(September 1994) pp. 8-25.

19 Rejection of the possibility of successful scientific explanation of these characteristics often springs from a commitment to mind-body dualism. Science can only explain features of the material world, so if human beings are immaterial substances rather than human bodies, our possession of these characteristics cannot be explained scientifically. For the dualist evolutionary theory could at most explain the origin of the human body; it could, in principle, tell us nothing about the origins of the immaterial human person as such.

20 For a general defense of this kind of modification in the traditional conception of divine omniscience independent of the issue of human origins see the essays in Pinnock, et al, *The Openness of God*.

21 See Catherine Elgin, "The Epistemic Efficacy of Stupidity," in *Reconceptions in Philosophy*, Nelson Goodman and Catherine Elgin(Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988).

22 On this point see Pinnock, *The Openness Of God*, p. 123.

23 David Basinger, "Middle Knowledge and Classical Christian Thought," *Religious Studies* 22(1986), p. 410.

24 *How the World Began*, trans. John Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. 204.²⁵ It is worth noting that it may be that most of the possible living things cannot become actual in this universe, that they are excluded by its laws and/or initial conditions. If so, then in choosing to create this universe God in effect selected a relatively very small subset of possible living things, leaving it to the inherently indeterministic workings of nature to "naturally select" which of them were to become actual. If this is the case, then there is a sense in which God's selection would be a significant factor in the explanation of the existence of the human species.

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