

Darwin's Pious Idea

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Preacher: Dr. Olav Slaymaker

[0 : 00] Thank you, Bill. The future of Bill's introductions is that one learns more about oneself than one had ever known. May we just turn to prayer and start.

God, our Father, we are just sinful, inadequate, before your word and before yourself. We ask for a spirit of humility, a spirit of teachability, as we consider this controversial topic. Thank you for the inspiration of meeting with you this morning, for the privilege of being here in your presence, and for all the gracious generosity that you show towards us. In Jesus' name, amen. Just a brief reminder that we are, as Learners Exchange, following a quadrilateral, consisting of four major themes, the Bible, Christian character, Anglican heritage, and issues that are in touch with the world.

[1 : 37] Today's topic comes under the heading of issues that are in touch with the world, but I would hope that they have some bearing on other aspects of the quadrilateral as well.

This quadrilateral, by the way, was approved in August of 1999, so we are in the 12th year, operating under those conditions.

The topic is, well, it started off being a book review. A book review of this remarkable tome, Darwin's Pious Idea.

After I worked on it for a few weeks, I found that I was in deep wood. It's a very heavy book, not only in a book, but also in terms of its content.

Connor Cunningham is the Associate Director of the Institute for Philosophy and Theology in Nottingham. He's a deeply Christian, conservative individual.

[2 : 52] But the virtue of the book, almost uniquely, is that it deals with science, theology, and philosophy equally seriously.

Those of you who have been caught up in any of the nonsense that is produced by people like Dawkins, who are neo-Darwinians, will know that he's an expert in science, but knows nothing about theology and philosophy.

And so the value to us as a Christian community of a book which deals equally seriously with science, theology, and philosophy is rather special.

So I commend it. I commend the book to you for that reason. On the other hand, it's a huge labor. And what I want to do today is to try to make it perhaps unnecessary for you to expand all that labor.

But if you are intrigued by my reflections on this book, then of course you know where to go in order to find out more.

[4 : 12] Unfortunately, I have five headlines here. Normally we would have a little more time, but today with the abbreviated time, I have still got five points that I want to make, and so they will be made quite briefly, and I hope adequately.

First one is, what do the Bible and the Creed say about creation? Second one, what did Darwin say about evolution? Thirdly, what do the Neo-Darwinians say about both creation and evolution?

Fourthly, where is the root of the confusion, and wherein lies the piety in Darwin's idea, according to Mr. Cunningham? And finally, there is a conclusion.

Sometimes in the past, I have been accused of not having a conclusion. Let me then wait right into it, and reflect on the fact that in June, we were treated to two wonderful presentations, one by Shen, not just because he's in the front row, one by Shen, and one by Martin Barlow, dealing with the relationship between faith and science.

Shen talked about the lost world of Genesis, and Martin Barlow talked about the question of cosmology, and its intersection with Christian belief.

[5 : 49] So today we deal with the intersection of Christian faith with the subject of evolution. I want to just first of all, then, my first point is to find out what the Bible says, and note that Hebrews chapter 11, John chapter 1, Colossians chapter 1, give very effective summaries of the biblical perspective.

Hebrews chapter 11, It is by faith that we understand that the world was created by one word from God, so that no apparent cause can account for the things we can see.

Genesis chapter 1 says, In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. John chapter 1 says, In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, and the word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, says, By the Father's Son were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

[7 : 19] These are very familiar verses to all of us. And our creed is also very familiar to us, but I'm not sure that we have reflected very much in public on the balance of the creed.

The Nicene Creed, which we repeated already this morning, starts, I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ. That we know. But have we considered the fact that there is actually one third of the total length of the creed? That we go from the statements about creation and about God as creator, directly to the incarnation, the second third, and directly from the incarnation to our life as a Christian community today, the third third.

It seems to be significant, and you may wish to take up this point, but it seems to be significant that creation stands as an absolute rock against which nothing can be can prevail.

It says nothing about mechanisms. It is not in any way a part of a fundamental creed to talk about mechanism. I'll say more about that later.

[8 : 44] The second point, what did Darwin say about evolution? In 1838, Darwin picked up the idea of the universal struggle for existence after reading Mr. Malthus on population and the crisis that he envisaged that would happen as population increased and resources became exhausted.

The simple idea of struggle for existence then prevailed in the way in which he reasoned about variations that are useful to any organic being occurring, then those organic beings will have the best chance of being preserved in this struggle for life.

this principle he said I have called natural selection. In his autobiography which has been edited by Francis Darwin, Charles Darwin says another source of conviction for the existence of God impresses me as carrying weight.

this follows from the impossibility of conceiving this immense and wonderful universe including man with his capacity of looking far backwards and into the futurity as the result of blind chance.

When thus reflecting I feel compelled to look at a first cause having an intelligent mind in some degree analogous to that of man.

[10 : 22] and I deserve to be called a theist. That is what Darwin conceived of himself as. Not a believer but a theist.

The fact is that he continued to believe in God as far as we're aware and so he's dead. So it is then the third point which is the source of the battleground that exists today rather than I would suggest Darwin himself.

As in so many cases the disciples distort the truth that the prophet discovered. Darwin's discoveries have to be fruitful but his contemporary disciples known generally as neo-Darwinians or ultra-Darwinians have come to some conclusions that are quite different from those which Darwin himself drew.

Contemporary neo-Darwinian believes that evolutionary biology removes the rationale for a creator God. The theory of neo-Darwinians which is entirely materialist appeals to the prejudices of a materialist society.

George Gaylord Simpson who I have to admit to having taken the course from and you may detect the distortions that he has introduced to my thinking but nevertheless George Gaylord Simpson who is really the high priest of neo-Darwinism believes that all attempts to answer the question what is man before 1859 are worthless and we will be better off if we ignore them completely.

[12 : 13] The spirit of humility is not abroad in the Odoinian. Genetics does explain microevolution at the scale of the gene but microevolutionary changes in gene frequency cannot turn a reptile into a mammal or convert a fish into an amphibian.

Paragraphically the more we learn about the genetic material from molecular genetics the less we seem to know about what exactly the gene is. Claims for the primacy of the gene have distorted the whole of biology says Simon Conway Morris.

I recommend to you looking at Simon Conway Morris' website for some very interesting thoughts on neo-Darwinian perspectives. So instead of genetic reductionism with its love of randomness and of chance we as Christians should perhaps concentrate on the phenomenon of convergence and the crucial role of form.

And the idea being that there are two scales at which change in living organisms occur both at the micro scale and at the macro scale.

The macro scale is the form and structure of the organisms which we have inherited. Focusing on the organism and not on its parts demonstrates the artificiality of the idea that natural selection is the only game in town.

[13 : 55] The fourth point is the comment about Connor Cunningham's book which is unusual in the fact that it is equally sophisticated in biological science theology and philosophy.

The general problem he suggests is that the debate between science and religion on the topic of evolution has been hijacked by extremists.

Both fundamentalist creationists that's creationists with an uppercase c we're all in this room creationists with a lowercase c I trust both fundamentalist creationists who reject evolution outright and fundamentalist neo-Darwinians who claim that Darwin's theory rules out the possibility of God are equally mistaken.

Like many enthusiasts fixed on a single idea neo-Darwinian hardliners have vastly overstepped the valid reach of their evidence.

Their dismissive attitude towards consciousness is their Achilles heel for they have denied the feature of mind that generates human culture. This is a comment by a non-Christian observer philosopher Berlin Donald and if we read Polanyi's personal knowledge we read that objectivism has totally falsified our conception of truth by exalting what we can know and prove while covering up with ambiguous utterances all we can know and cannot prove even though the latter knowledge underlies and most ultimately sets its seal to all that we can prove.

[15 : 52] Neo-Darwinism and creationism are equally misguided heresies Cunningham suggests neo-Darwinism ignores theology and philosophy altogether that's the characteristic that the documents read and creationism ignores science neo-Darwinism says there is no God creationism reduces God to a 21st century watchmaker this unholy alliance of atheists neo-Darwinians and religious fundamentalists misconstrues Darwin's theory neo-Darwinians have turned Darwin's thoughts into a universal philosophy this is dangerous both to religion and to science if we have a proven designer as God he would scarcely be worth worshipping creationism the danger of creationism is that it implies a limiting conception of God while adding nothing to the pursuit of scientific exploration creationism to worship this god would be like worshipping a whale or a mountain because it is big this is an idolatrous notion of God as a very large and powerful creature creationism in fact is itself guilty of scientism it also presumes that science is the sole criterion of truth creationist interpretation of genesis is that of a secular atheist worship of science creationists have imbibed the modern spirit of rationality and accepted the thought that not even the bible can be true unless it passes muster as science therefore it seems that both creationism and neo-darwinism are guilty of looking at current science and extrapolating a metaphysical position but the first point which is my conclusion and which is the most important point is wherein lies this pious idea that Mr.

Cunningham feels that he has identified many of us have read books about saying that evolution is a good thing and we ought so somehow or other to say solute it as a respectable idea but there are very few books that raise the thought that Darwin had to the level of being pious or what is the meaning of the word pious a deeply religious idea this is now referring to Darwin's not the neo-Darwinian perspective that we've been going on there are it seems to me three lines of argument which this is the part where I'm trying to short circuit the need for reading the book but if you find this confusing then I guess we have to go to the book after all the three lines of reasoning which Conor Penningham feels demonstrate the pious or deeply religious nature of Darwin's insight

firstly creation and redemption are two sides of the same coin namely creation initiates material processes of growth and change in a similar sense to that of redemption leading to spiritual growth and change both creation and redemption are God's act unambiguously when God intervenes in creation and in redemption he sets in motion processes that could not have been predicted prior to those events it's interesting from my point of view although I'm not necessarily endorsing Cunningham's argument here but to note that this really is two thirds of the creed creation and redemption are the two thirds that we frequently recurse by insisting on Jesus being the word and redeemer and present at the very beginning as in the prologue to John's gospel the ontological significance of both creation and redemption is absolute this whole ontological significance thing is very important in other words that really has deep meaning the argument against worrying about the details and mechanisms of evolutionary theory are that these are important observations of the operation of the world but they're not in themselves endowed with deep meaning so that one does not have to worry about the description of the details of the mechanisms much of which we don't know much of which vary from one century to the next if we married to the insights of science of today we will be widows tomorrow that whole area of being somehow tied to the findings of science which has caused the church a lot of difficulties in the past is something that is totally unnecessary and irrelevant creation and redemption as two sides of the same coin if this is the core of Connor's argument there are others coming to two others in a moment if this is the core of his argument it seems to me it has a lot of implications for us as Bible believing

Christians I'm sorry Dr. Packer isn't here because I can recall a recent event when I did make the comment in his presence that the Bible of which he was the lead director has an extensive series of commentaries on the redemption story but it has a very superficial discussion of the creation story seems to me that we as Bible believing Christians have got the redemption side of the story pretty well clear and we are grateful as redeemed people for this understanding and of course in many ways the Reformation reinforced that but the creation part of the coin seems to me we have lost sight of to a large extent and again I've said this before and I'm not sure whether I should keep on saying it but that we lost the game on the creation's side of the story because we haven't given it the sort of promise that the

Bible does and that the Creed does that's clearly a perspective that you may wish to challenge just one other thought about creation and redemption as two sides of the same coin and I noticed in Harvey's outstanding introduction last week that he talked about the fact that there's a difference between the original word as given and the word as interpreted in other words we seem to have got very good interpretation on the redemption side it's questionable whether we've got a good interpretation on the creation and change side well that's the first part of his argument it goes into considerable detail developing that point second part of his argument talking about the pious idea that it is deeply religious in essence is that the evolutionary record rather magnifies

[23 : 58] God this is an argument that is well presented in several of the early church fathers who argued that an evolutionary interpretation of the genesis record was the only way to take the book seriously now evolution at that time was of course very different than what we understand by evolution today nevertheless it was a perspective that saint augustine wrote great detail about in his essay entitled the literal meaning of genesis genesis now if you read that you'll be shocked to see what he means by the literal meaning of genesis he doesn't mean a word by word literal meaning of genesis he means that it's the understanding of what genesis originally meant to say which is the literal meaning when he attempts to interpret genesis literally he says specifically i'm only trying to establish what the text is telling us that truth for saint augustine and for many of the early church fathers was always a revelation of man's relation to god not some sort of forensic description of so called historical events i'll read that again because i think it's very apropos the truth in genesis for augustine and for many of the church fathers was always a revelation of man's relation to god not some sort of forensic description of so called historical events by that is meant that if we are hung up on the details of the mechanics of what happened in the first six days of creation that we are missing the central point of the story the metaphorical use of language is much more important much more relevant in the context of a time period in which there were no people around context interpretation of what god did has been doing through history and so cunningham makes the point that he feels that the reformation was indeed rather unsuccessful he talks about some of the limitations of the impact of the reformation in that it tended to wipe out what we inherited from the early church fathers in terms of the nature of biblical interpretation and then he goes on to say this is cunningham now that a theological vision of nature makes very good sense with Darwin's

fascinating portrayal of life so the second argument after creation and redemption are seen as two sides of the same coin the second argument is that the evolutionary record rather magnifies

God and this is consistent with the early church fathers the third part of his argument again talking about the essentially religious nature of the insight that Darwin had consists of detaching evolution from creation specifying that the mechanism of evolution is enormously complex and appropriately studied in its own mechanistic terms to display the plenitude of God's gifts the beauty of his creation and the fruitfulness of man's investigation of God's handiwork Darwin himself said there's a grandeur in this view of life that he suggested in relation to the ideas of natural selection and of the struggle for life and the richness of the organic evolution which is recorded in the historical record the pre-historical record fact that the evolution and creation are really totally separate in their ontological significance creation is the ontologically significant point and evolution is a mechanical description of what we know about or we think we know about what has happened since the time of creation is a very important distinction and Darwin himself was careful to make that point in the context of admitting his theism and indicating that his ideas with respect to natural selection had only to do with the change that has occurred since the creation original action by God and that God and Jesus inhabit the processes of change in exactly the way it is described in Colossians and in other parts of Scripture and in the Psalms he gets that whole sense of the way which God inhabits the processes of change and the mechanics is something which is essentially decided to point from a Christian perspective Latinx is like condensation of the actually I've done by one of the time so there's my chance to address questions but the whole conclusion that I tried to give you is the three points of Tanya Tanya's argument that he sees those three things as critical to the use of the word pious in the title of the book and that's a unique feature of the book which attracted my attention to it in the first place it's not in the second place

Harvey told me about it first and then I called up it after that so it's been a bit of a rush so I really come back over each of the points as you see quite interesting thank you so drawing on your long experience with students and fellow academics do you think that the efforts of well-meaning Christians to state a narrowly literalistic interpretation of Genesis have been a significant factor in discouraging people from taking the gospel seriously or do you think it's just one of maybe a minor cause well I think it's a major problem not just in our relationship to students but in our relationship to our own children

I think when the discussion has become heavy over dinner or wherever it is that we meet our children our children are so totally indoctrinated in the materialist perspective that if we take a materialist defense which I think is what a literal word by word defense is then we're guaranteed to lose and I think that our younger people whether children are children or students have been impeded from getting to the truth I mean there's much more profound reasons why people don't come to Christ that if we believe that conversation is important dialogue then it seems to me that we need to know where the battleground is battleground I agree entirely with Cunningham

[32 : 45] I'm not quite sure that I agree with his term highest but I think I do agree that battleground is the essential wickedness and limitedness of materialism which is being produced by the school that's where we need to fight so that's my thought you can come back and challenge some of you well do you think that at some level that materialism represents a failure of imagination it's been called nothing but elementary particles that are combining in various ways randomly they vibrate themselves into a DNA molecule and then presto rest quality but it just seems so shallow to me that anyone that swallowed that as being as closing the story that I just wonder is it is it actually some neurological problem that

Dawkins and company have they can't imagine I think we have so prejudice to get a good answer to that I mean I guess it's a failure of imagination but on the other hand we as Christians have failed in our imaginations too I mean it seems to me that the think of the way in which the psalmist thinks about creation and about change of life and form around him that shows what a Christian imagination can do which means we don't talk about it I mean I have been accused of Pharisee many times that said we just don't get any of this from the pulpit I think that the reason we don't get much from the pulpit is that there hasn't been the thought and the imagination put into it that has been put into the other side of the coin that we have put an enormous amount of effort into and we praise God that there has been that perspective brought in through largely the reformation tradition but as you try to compare the amount of work done and the amount of thought put into the creation side from a

Christian perspective it's relatively less that's why creationism in its crude form has become sort of seen as a rescue rescue action before defeat the opposition sin I think one of the important parallels between creation and redemption is the parallel between Adam and Jesus does the author talk about Adam at all?

Did you hear that in the back? A suggestion by Shen is that one of the important parallels that considering creation and redemption as two sides of the same coin is the relationship between Adam and Christ.

So that there's a sense in which the scripture talks about the first Adam and the second Adam as beginnings and as new events of profound significance.

[36 : 27] Did you have some further thoughts on that? What did the author say about it? How? I can't remember if I was.

It's not a big picture of the discussion. But it does talk about it. Yes? I have a question about, I think it's the second point that Cunningham talked about, separating meaning from the mechanics of evolution, you know, and just saying that theists theists should not be so tied up in the actual working out of evolution and trying to attach meaning to how it actually works out.

I guess I struggle in dealing with that thought because if, as you said right after that, you said the psalmist said that God inhabits these processes.

How do we reconcile those two thoughts? On the one hand, we have this mechanical working out of evolution, which we're not supposed to attach meaning to, and yet we know that God inhabits those processes.

How do we make sense of that tension? It seems like the one is telling us that if he's inhabiting the process, then actually it's God working in the world, and clearly that would have meaning.

[37 : 49] That's right. Right? That's a very good question. I mean, this seems to me to be exactly the point that we're talking about in talking about the Psalms. I mean, that is the way in which we recognize God's presence in the world.

So that the way in which God inhabits the processes is itself critical, that it doesn't matter whether it is done by a process that we today describe as being natural selection, or whether it is by some other mechanism still to be discovered in the future.

It's a fine point, I suppose, but it seems to me that the idea of the question about imagination is highly relevant here. To what extent do we explore the creation around us with that view, to find out more about Christ, more about his work in the world, and his work in the generous plenitude of what is given to us in the environment.

So I think that perhaps the wording is bad when I say that it's not important what the mechanism might be.

I think what I'm trying to say is that the mechanism will change, has changed over the years.

People's perception of the mechanisms have become extremely complex.

[39 : 26] who are understanding of the mechanism. Yes, yes, yes. But the issue of whether God's creation is fruitful and is continuing to produce new insight into God's nature and into the relationship between God and Christ in creation, I think that's where the challenge comes from.

But I can agree that this is a point of tension. I read a strange article about a gorilla that has learned a thousand or more words and can communicate by sign language and so forth with humans in a certain way, which I think it would be the doctor did, but what's the point I'm trying to add?

That the journalist who was introduced to the gorilla was very carefully warned that don't look at this gorilla in the eye or it would get emotionally disturbed and possibly violent.

And then the rest of the article, how gentle the gorilla was and was able to reassure the journalist that the gorilla cared for the people like that.

So, the idea that that gorilla is something connected to humans was not established, although it was a very careful article.

[41 : 32] Like, they've connected us with chimpanzees. I heard a talk at BBC about that. And I totally reject such an idea.

My mother didn't. She always called me a monkey. But the Bible itself, in one place, I can't remember where it was, says that the earth is wearing out like a carpet.

And so, after the fall of Adam, everything went downhill. Life was limited. Nature had to be farmed. This type of thing. And so, my simplistic attitude towards creation and evolution evolution is that the Bible does a good job for me.

Anyway, it does a good job. And as soon as it gets highly scientific when you talk about evolution, I'm lost.

[42 : 40] Totally lost. I just can't presume. That may be the pea brain that I have responding to it. But I really don't lose any sleep over the talk anymore.

Well, I guess if, you know, it's a question of pea brain. It's nothing to do with the pea brain, Bill. I think that you have a faith in the word.

And that's that's where you are. That's nothing to do with the pea brain. That has to do with everything that is important as a question. But we're talking about the part of the quadrilateral which says relationship to the world.

And whilst you may have convinced your children or your students at BCIT that your position was effective, I think it's very difficult to take that perspective and to expect to have another one.

So I totally respect your confidence in the word and I hope that you will agree that I also have confidence in the word.

[43 : 59] And it's a question of when you talk about the relationship to the gorilla, you know, it's not a necessary article of faith that some sort of identity between the two.

The argument has to do with the nature of the body into which we have been placed. The nature of change of bodies over long periods of time is more of a completely document so that there are there are apparently connections with respect to bodies which don't necessarily reflect anything about the soul.

Does it come under the heading of adaption? You might even watch squirrels growing longer hair in the winter. It gets back to the usual squirrel winter.

Right. Yes, please. Well, Bill has put his finger on something that's very important. It's really the crux of the conflict.

Although we've forgotten that because the neo-darwiners that you talk about have gone far beyond that. But their origin is actually the origin of this conversation is the 19th century argument with Thomas Huxley for instance and with the churchmen of the day to use the title of a well-known book of intellectual history to feel like it is Apes, Angels, and Victoria.

[45 : 46] So, it wasn't so much that Darwin had his theory of natural selection.

It was that his resistance had been associated with the eggs. in terms of enlightenment, we had a very nice order of things and you had all of the animal kingdom and plants and animals but then you had human beings on top of the pyramid and separate in the state.

So, what was going on was that pyramid collapses in his historically kind of linear and the churchmen of course didn't like that and still doesn't like it but this is part of the crux of the situation and so great creationism in the 19th century with a capital C is a follow-through to our fundamentalist threats today and how do you follow-through to our neo-Garwinist atheist but you said something that was very important here you mentioned Malthus but also the idea of evolution as a process goes way back to the Greeks and so forth he was from

Erasmus Garwin I think he was uncle he was a very prominent man in his day and he was around and he played together the very first point which is well taken this is a much longer history and the nature of the argument with respect to associations of people the case was something that became particularly hostile during the Victorian era as a slightly trivial response to that I have to report that at the University of British Columbia we have an association of professors emeritus and if you work through the acronym UBC 8 we have had quite serious discussions amongst those professors who felt that they need to put in

UBC association of professors and librarians association so it can be called UBC Apple and not UBC 8 so I still resistances to this association well I have to stand at this point reluctantly there's a 10 o'clock service that wants to start 10 o'clock and we need to be a part of that we need to be a part of that we must make a million just about now thank you very much thank you thank you so then how would that really see you