Understanding Genesis and Science Together in a Secular World

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Date: 12 May 2013

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[0:00] Good morning ladies and gentlemen. As you see I'm sitting down because my leg being what it is today, I probably wouldn't be able to stand up for an hour.

However, I'm concerned though, we're all of you in the back, or I can barely see. If you can hear me good, if you have any trouble at some point, raise your hand and I'll do the best I can, projecting from this position.

Okay, understanding Genesis and science together in a secular way. We're going to talk about all of those in a slightly different way. I'm going to say very little about Genesis actually. You've all read it. You all understand it perfectly.

However, what I'm doing as Dr. Packer suggested, is I'm going to give you an overview from my perspective, which is only my perspective. Probably isn't anyone in the world who will agree with everything I say.

And that's fine. If you don't understand something, and very particularly in terms of what I did say, please ask. Otherwise, leave your questions to the end, and I'll be here as long as you are to address anything you want to talk about.

[1:30] In addition, don't be surprised if I don't send you off to read two or three books. And I can provide you with a bibliography in a new course. In addition, don't be surprised if I don't know.

As a way in which human beings can understand the whole of the world, including those things that are religious or spiritual or beyond the capacity of human beings to understand.

Like, how did we get here? What's the origin of our surroundings, of the world, of the universe? What do those stars mean up in the sky? All of those things which we have in terms of cosmology and cosmogony, the origin of the universe, the order of the universe, and daily life in terms of things like science.

How is it that the world is ordered? In some kind of rational way, it seems to be. We have very good scientists and engineers who are very good at providing rational explanations and using their knowledge to provide the world we live in.

And that has changed over time, of course, as have the cultures and the societies and the way science and religion are used in those cultures over time.

[3:16] So, at one level, we're talking about the whole of humanity around the world, over the whole of human existence. But more particularly, we're talking about Christianity and science as they relate in Western civilization, particularly in the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, which is more than enough.

I'm going to begin with a proposition that I'm going to talk about four distinct areas of concern.

Call them disciplines, if you like, academic disciplines, which is what they really are. The first is paleoanthropology, which is one of the things that gets the scientists in trouble with some of the people in the churches, obviously.

You look at Charles Darwin and the history of Charles Darwin and images that are in cartoons of Darwin, you find Darwin as a gentleman who was one of the leading scientists of the 19th century, who was really a gentleman farmer, if you will, independently wealthy, and he didn't do much except do his own research.

He was a reclusive guy. He really wasn't a gregarious man. He rarely went into public life. He stayed home and did his scientific work and had a very large family and a fine wife, and they had a very good home life, very intensive situation, in his own little village of Down in England.

[5:06] So Darwin started off becoming well-known for taking the voyage of the Beagle in the 1830s.

It was about four and a half years, I think, and they went around the world. They started from England, went down the coast of South Africa, South America, rather, came up the western coast of South America, visited the famous Colossal Islands, but then ended up going west rather than east to go back to England.

They ended up in Australia and then in India and then farther, all the way back to England. That takes a year or so to do all of that, even in the best of circumstances.

This is a little boat. This is not a big ship. This is not the world where we have airplanes or cruise ships. This is a working vessel.

More on Mr. Darwin later. He was also, as one of the most renowned field scientists, he was also pictured often as some kind of monkey, because he dared to say that human beings were related to all those other things out there, including what are known generally as the hominids, the closest to related animals in the animal kingdom to human beings are the hominids, chimpanzees, monkeys, great apes, orangutans, and if I listen to a gentleman I spoke to two weeks ago on the road in Northern California, sasquatches.

[7:04] He hasn't proved that to me yet. But if sasquatch turns out to be what he thinks it is, and what some people think it is, if they could ever prove it and produce one, or the evidence of one, in a scientifically valid way, we'd have to add sasquatch to the list of hominids, in a very, very distant role.

So the first discipline I mentioned is paleoanthropology, the study of those mammals which started off with large mammals, which are not hominids, before hominids, in the archaeological record, and then later became evolved into the hominids, the critters I just mentioned, of which human beings are one of several.

This, of course, poses one of the great challenges of this whole discussion. Human beings are very egotistical, or rather anthropocentric, and also are fond of anthropomorphism.

Let me explain those two terms. Anthropocentric means they view the world in terms of human beings. They start there and they end there.

And I don't know of any particular time when they don't, really. Religion is a very anthropocentric activity for the most part, not always, but for the most part.

[8:53] Anthropomorphism is a habit, usually misleading, almost always false, of attributing human characteristics to animals, other animals, like your cat, and your dog, and your horse, and anything else you like.

But that includes a whole range of things. We have, in fact, if you look at the animal kingdom, a variety, a large variety of things, but we only really think about and consider a small number of animals that have value as icons, totems, or relations to human beings in particular, or particularly large, or particularly distinctive, or particularly dangerous.

So we all pay attention to grizzly bears and polar bears. We'd rather not be invited to lunch until we see the menu. we also have a lot of attention where other things we know, like ravens, and many of the animals that you see in the zoo, but care less about all manner of other animals which we don't know about, and we never see, don't interact with.

but we attribute human values or activities or relationships with animals. The problem here is fundamentally human beings in various ways like to be in the center stage.

and the first problem with evolutionary theory and especially with things like natural selection and with the thrust of science in terms of evolutionary theory and a whole manner of other things is that in the enlightenment in the 18th century and then even more so in the 19th century the position of human beings was knocked off at the pedestal everywhere.

[11:24] If you think of it and this is very clear in a whole variety of ways in the Bible especially in Genesis we are created as a special creation we are important as human beings we are a special creation of God we are not in with all our other rabble so if you look at the animal kingdom as some kind of pyramid of activities and relationships in the 18th century we are not even on the pyramid we are not even at the tip of the pyramid like the ornament at the top of the Christmas tree we are we are not even in that discussion we are above it.

What happened was essentially instead of being way up here like that we are like that in the great chain of being sloughed down 80 90 degrees and now if you look at biology human beings are just one animal after another however biology is packaged by human beings who don't really believe that except there are many ways in which we see ourselves responding very much as we are mammals we are all mammals and if you don't believe me just take your cute little kitty cat and your little puppy and strip down naked in the bathroom lock the door and compare the two animals you and the dog there are all kinds of similarities and if you don't think you are an animal like all the other animals in the animal kingdom I can prove that in five minutes or less because you can't hold your breath you have to breathe and you have to eat and do all the practical things as well as all the religious or spiritual things so human beings as we know it have been around at least 100,000 years or so maybe 150,000 years the numbers change but that's okay the numbers themselves are so large they don't really matter the process that's important once you go beyond that point then the next important thing is not the physical being of human beings as a physical animal which is still at the same time a special case shall we say the children of God the chosen people because we do both at the same time what we then do is have to add in the important thing which the scientists and the religious people tend to neglect is the concept of culture the concept of culture is if anything the distinctive attribute of human beings by definition

I could spend several hours dealing with concept of culture but I won't of course with the development of the physical attributes of the human being the larger brain with various physical features like the ability to move the tongue and the mouth voice box down here so I can talk to you I don't roar I don't chirp I talk that means with the mental capacity we also have the capacity for language I'm going to say somewhat unfairly but definitely language is the one particular thing distinguishes human beings from all other animals and it's fundamental to the concept of culture and the way we exist as cultural beings we also have the hand and the thumb we can do a lot with that rather than a paw we have facial features that are individual we have the ability to go beyond what are things we call instinctive we are very adaptable we can do things that no other species can do our friend the polar bear has a nice white rug on his back he's not cold we're not cold if we live with the

Inuit way up there in the middle of the winter because we can put something on we have clothing so we can take that big coat and exist in the cold or we can take the coat off and exist where it's very hot and on and on and on all animals eat and are eaten ultimately but human beings not only eat they have fire and they know about cooking the raw and the cooks are eaten and prepared in very elaborate ways and we have a very elaborate range of food that we actually consume including a lot of things that you don't think we could consume including a lot of things that we rather weren't consumed and so forth so we have ways of satisfying human demands for the fundamentals of food shelter and so on but more importantly we have language we have social organizations we have cultures that allow us to do all manner of things and this is where religion comes in as far as

I know there are no animals that have religions other than human beings we have the capacity to have religion the capacity to wonder and to receive the word of God if you will where no other animal does now if you have a dog or a cat who is converted to Christianity we might have a conversation but I don't know of any ravens may have a raven god ravens we don't know about ravens we don't know about whales we don't know about a variety of very social animals because we don't know how to speak to them and they don't speak to us very well so there's great mysteries out there about what I'm saying at the edges but fundamentally culture is our capacity to be human beings and that includes the capacity to engage in religious activities and religious thoughts and to have in fact the original thoughts that can only be answered by religion or by appealing to a god furthermore our adaptation allows us to function and to change and do a whole variety of things and we're very successful as generalists the human being are really not very good mammals they're not very good at anything they're not very fast they don't have big mouths with big teeth they simply they can't really grade grass all day but they can eat just about anything they can imagine with cooking and so forth and if they can't necessarily outrun the lion or the cheetah or the bear but it can carry a spear or now a rifle which will take down the bear you hope before the bear gets view and that's what culture is about but it's much more sophisticated in our modern world where everything changes very rapidly and we do things that are far more complex than any mammal in the animal kingdom is able to do that's our ability for culture which gives us that capacity to be human in at least the biological sense in the broad sense

[21:08] I'm using it and also in the large scale of culture and the organization of human beings the third area is one you know well it involves biology and geology paleontology primarily this is where Mr. Darwin comes in this is where we have a entirely different attitude about how things change and how things relate we'll come back to that and the fourth area is one you know well and that's essentially religion and the study of religion the history of religion and the whole realm of philosophy and theology through Western civilization we could expand that easily around the world with other religions but we're going to stay in Christianity where there's more than enough to do in the beginning of the 19th century there were at least at a minimum a competition between scientists who had been striving to explain and understand the universe the planet the solar system

Galileo who was active in the 16th and 17th century was attacked and fortunately for him only placed under house arrest because the Pope was a personal friend who put him under house arrest and then nonetheless he was merely using a telescope he was doing nothing different than what's done by thousands of people today we just have bigger telescopes and more sophisticated mathematics and so forth in 1993 Pope John Paul the second officially forgave Galileo for his indiscretions and that is important because it brought the

Roman Catholic Church in particular into the modern world officially however today this is going to a variety of very elaborate very complex scientific installations called observatories where the astronomers are still very active doing precisely the same thing Galileo was doing trying to figure out what is out there but to look at what's out there is really a very complex thing at one level Galileo was put under house arrest and many others were punished some were killed many of his era wrote various scientific tracts but left them on the condition that they were not to be published until the author was dead for practical reasons but

Galileo was dealing with something called heliosensism and that was the notion that the sun was out there and the earth goes around the sun as opposed to the other way around and that was heresy and he paid for that and that's all part of the history of science most of what I'm talking about here is the history of science and the history of ideas now today if you go to an observatory like the Lick Observatory which is south of San Francisco or many of the other major scientific installations there are people who spend their careers in very elaborate little rooms that's full of computers and ways of observing taking the data from the telescopes and they are still trying to do the same things only more so today at the

Lick Observatory there's a gentleman who spends his career trying to find the origin of the universe although he doesn't quite put it that way he knows he can't find the origin of the universe because you can't logically you can't do it God comes in very handy that way logically if you go out with the telescope to 13 million years you still have something out there so you have to get a better telescope tomorrow so you can go out 13 and a half million years which is about how far they're out today so the astronomer looks out 13 and a half million years and he's trying to find the end of what is known as the big bang in astronomy so the universe starts with a big bang as the theory is and it's spreading out rapidly and we're just here over here in one corner so we have to go out as far as they can and distance is measured in terms of time so we know the big bang is somewhere beyond 13 and a half billion years and they'll keep flowing now I have an interesting little video put out by the

[27:38] University of California it's only seven minutes long interviewing the astronomer I just described and he's a very fine professional I can tell by what he was doing and how he described his job interesting enough at the end of the video they don't leave him in his office with all his gadgetry in front of him they have him out on the balcony looking at the sunset there's some things that can't be digitized and quantified and that's part of the human qualities that we have and those are the things that are most likely going to remain outside the realm of science whether it's aesthetics or whether it's religion interesting enough we've passed some real changes because now we can do things that we really couldn't do before we now know we now can find images of the back side of the moon those images exist so I have seen both the front side the one we see every night and the back side together two orbs that is if anything heresy from a scientific point of view that's it think of all the things that we've said about the moon the romantic moon the cow jumping over the moon moon of green cheese and all of that and then we have this scientist well we have two rocks which are really one rock together and we have men called astronauts walking on the place so all our images of the natural world have been greatly altered in recent times simply by the works of science that's a fact but at the same time we live in appreciation of all of it together let's go to our old friend charles darwin charles darwin did not discover or even promote necessarily more than anyone else the theory of evolution the theory of evolution is in our brain as a way of explaining change over time it's been around since classical times aristotle used evolution at various times for instance one of darwin's important relatives erasmus darwin who was his uncle i think it was had a very elaborate theory of evolution that he wrote about him what darwin did was go on his great voyage and look and examine the natural world as he thought very carefully and meticulously and there were several other people doing that in the 19th century it was a great age of exploration an age which is now more or less past us because we have data from almost every square inch of the earth now some better than others there are few mysteries to be found very few islands in the middle of the pacific ocean or something that no one's ever seen before there might be one out there

somewhere it probably has dinosaurs on it but darwin found the galopso silence well known people were living there but he was able to interpret what he found actually he brought back a lot of data and what he did with his data and his field notes and all of his specimens he rather cleverly farmed them out to his colleagues in england and there were actually a dozen or so very good scientists who divided up the specimens and the data and the field notes and they became the actual scientific basis for the origin of species and much of his later work as well darwin had this great voyage around the world then he went home to england and never left england again he stayed home on his farm and didn't even see very many people he spent most of his time corresponding with people not seeing them face to face anyway he was one of the greatest natural selection things is his contribution to biology and so far as we know it is his lasting contribution it has met the test of time what it is is the notion that there is a continuous process of competition in nature either be eaten live or don't or die and the responsibility for the species is to live and reproduce itself and it will over time change in response to the conditions in man and this is done on a continuous basis not necessarily on a random basis but on a continuous basis that is natural without any human interference or any other explanation just a natural process that keeps going on the problem with natural selection for some people is precisely what I said before it operates independently of human existence and does not necessarily or the Darwin certainly does not require and he was quite unhappy when people insisted that it require any divine intervention nature natural selection survives today very well in the theory of evolution even though in the 19th century there was very little knowledge of genetics or of concepts like mutation although analogies existed and there were a lot of things which have been greatly improved on

Darwin knew implicitly what we think of as science and ecology or the the whole business of living within the confines of a habitat and living with those concerns of the external environment natural environment but he didn't have those concepts that we take for care and it even non-scientists have in their head just simply by osmosis Darwin was challenged immediately after the publish of the origin of species he was challenged primarily on the grounds that he had disrupted the order of things and excluded religious explanation and excluded any necessary involvement with

God or with religion that difficulty exists today but one of the first things to be published in 1860 was actually a treatise by Lord Kelvin who if you know your physics you will know gave his name to the Kelvin scale of temperature ultimately and his objection was simply that Darwin left out God it turns out Darwin demanded that natural selection exist solely on its own and the conflict comes when people try to mix the two together

Alfred Wallace some of you may have heard of great biogeographer of the 19th century a colleague of Darwin's who was said to be the second discoverer of natural selection he he's the one who prompted Darwin to finally publish his series because Wallace would come back from what is now Indonesia and publish it but so he had to get his stuff done so he could get credit and so forth Wallace had a position above all others as his second author of the origin of species if you will but in the 1880s

[38:11] Wallace in fact wrote a tract where he simply wanted to add in a theist aspect of evolution that is to put inside of the notion of scientific evolution the notion that you could have divine explanations of what was happening in the natural world and you see the same kind of conflict on the theological side by analogy is what do we expect in terms of relationship with God and to what point did God relate to daily activities for instance does it do any good to dear God help me with my problem today pray to

God so you can get an A on the next test does that work well some people try that I guess but is that the relationship you have with God well that's the relationship that the natural world has with God or at least with the scientists who are interpreting the natural world and we have a whole category of middle ground of evolutionary theism which has been through the whole literature since Darwin's origin of speech in 1859 Darwin really objected to that because that would destroy the fundamental perspective of natural selection Darwin as I said was a solitary man he doesn't like crowds he leaves his farm very seldom he had already arranged to be buried in the local churchyard

Darwin was a Christian his entire life he was wandering around a little but he had a very strong very devout wife Emma Wedgwood Darwin Wedgwood as in the China and all of that two wealthy prominent families they were cousins and they also were husband and wife Darwin was when he was home at the farm with Emma he was just a general local husband and wife 10 kids who went to church especially in the affairs of a small town down in England when he went to London to meet with his friends the scientists the royal society he would fit in with them as an agnostic he was a strong man but he had his doubts and he wobbled around and we look at the world today and we understand that he did not reject

Christianity he did not go off and join the atheist or any of that and he didn't walk around in a monkey suit the important thing about Darwin understand that anything you hear or read it says Darwinist Darwinism Darwinian forget it Charles Darwin has nothing to do with any of that it's all his name being used his career and writing being used later on by people advocating all manner of things from one extreme to the other ultimately ironically Darwin the private man was buried in Westminster Abbey in 1882 the pallbearers at his ceremony funeral were

Thomas Huxley Joseph Hooker Hooker Hoffer Wallace and other prominent scientists the event was arranged by the Royal Society the prominent scientists of the day he didn't he wasn't buried in the local church that said a lot now take all of that scientific thought and what what do we say about the relationship of God in all of this and we say well the whole animal kingdom is part of an evolutionary series of events over many millions of years and we can document all of that very easily anyone who says that the world is 6,000 years old 10,000 years old or 100,000 years old is just nuts all of creation if you say those same things should you slightly show them the door and tell them they can go over there and to their own zoo and have fun no validity whatsoever but we simply can handle most of the questions about origins and about all these activities of the natural world in a very simple way here's where we get to

[44:25] Genesis Genesis begins with the very familiar beginning be at Luke in the beginning let there be life and all of that that you all know and we'll simply go to the Nicene Creed which you all have memorized I believe in one God the Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth and all things visible and invisible dot dot dot dot what else do you need to know science and religion are entirely compatible they run parallel they run in two parallel lines they don't intersect we have theists who try to leap across over the fence we have atheists like

Richard Dawkins who's an aggressive atheist he tries to leap and I have a name for Richard Dawkins who's a distinguished evolutionary biologist who in recent times has spent more time being a very poor philosopher or theologian scientists generally don't become very good theologians or philosophers when they do these things there are a few people who have made that crossover and did very well and comfortably in both Christianity and science and weren't quite distinguished in both places two examples are Dennis Alexander and Francis Collins and there are others however Dawkins is an aggressive atheist he's a nasty man he actually read his stuff

I call him the Archbishop of the Atheist Church of England however those people really can't get anywhere and most theists are just trying to somehow relate to both sides and they do it imperfectly we're all imperfect in this enterprise science my thesis is that science exists independent of religion religion exists independent of science there's two different perspectives on the world two different languages if you will they as long as they stay in their own realms they're okay once you try to mix them you're in trouble and you have all kinds of conflict much of it are good questions but you don't need the conflict in the way it is often played out science and religion contradict each other in many ways they're inconsistent but the inconsistencies and contradictions are there to be worked through not by breaking down the walls between the two and that's my basic thesis and conclusion the other thing

I'll say again our biggest problem in Christianity is the reputation of the fundamentalist creationists they have warped the conversation with their notions of evolution and trying to be to outdo the scientists with scientific data that they don't understand and don't use very well and they have been totally a total failure because they've lost their 19th century argument in the 19th century and they're still going the important thing there realized is that the creationists now are tarnishing the whole image of Christianity in the secular world world I have experienced a student in my own course I once taught on prehistory that is human prehistory geography environment and human activities hunters and gatherers and the origin and distribution of domesticated plants and animals all those kinds of things fundamental stuff yet this one individual in the second week of course told me basically he didn't believe any of that that didn't go over very well

I have friends who are not religious they're not atheists they're not aggressively involved in anything they just don't participate in religious thought at least not publicly and some of the worst memories are creationists attacking us for what they were teaching I have friends colleagues who have said quite simply that they would never support anyone who didn't believe in evolution in 2008 our distinguished biologist at the University of Oregon told me who was a personal friend this came up in a conversation it wasn't part of the mainstream of the conversation but it was 2008 in the middle of the presidential campaign and he said that he would never vote for Michael Huckabee the governor of Arkansas because he was a southern

[50:37] Baptist preacher and he didn't believe in evolution he would never vote for someone who was a creationist I've heard that many times so that's part of the context as well so we have to take our friends off in the corner and let's try to figure out some other way to respond to being lost off the pedestal in the enlightenment and incorporate the modern perspectives with the older Christian perspectives thank you very much applause applause applause applause applause applause applause applause jets if one heard■ groß i■ serost