

COMPARING THEISM AND NATURALISM IN ORIGINS THEORY

Virgil Warren, PhD

A formal similarity could be seen between “emergent evolution” and progressive creationism. The “emergent points” of emergent evolution might appear to correlate with the “intervention points” of progressive revelation. From a scientist’s viewpoint, we could consider the possibility that a connector in a progression is a natural one rather than a supernatural one, as previously supposed. We may not already know that a natural “force” exists for accomplishing this complexification. There is a difference, however, between keeping the natural category potential for explanation in such cases and making it the necessary category for explanation by disallowing the supernatural category in principle. The latter is what methodological naturalism does by assuming that its method, good in itself, somehow becomes the only legitimate method. Creationists, however, want to keep the supernatural category open after the initial creation of mass-energy. The formal similarity is limited because of the internal-external variable in the respective formats at their correlating junction points.

The countering charge could be given that the exogenous-endogenous distinction has the essential value of pronouncing methodological naturalism wrong. It might be nothing more than trying to “dispense with a method by mere definition.” But the approach does more than give a variant definition of the same phenomenon; it gives a different explanation of it. The approach objects to the presupposition that all answers must be naturalistic even though it allows for appealing to natural explanation in any individual case and therefore allows for any corresponding research or theorizing in terms of natural explanations. The creationist conviction that not all individual cases will, or can, be naturally explained comes (1) not from factors that we do not know, but in an increasing way it comes from factors that we do know and know scientifically. Stated in terms of likelihood, the more we learn about the higher-than-previously-thought complexity-level of things, the less likely it becomes that random operation of fundamental natural laws can account for the emergence of some relatively complex entity by endogenous complexification from the nearest less complex item “below” it. The same is true of specific organs like the eye, the brain, the reproductive system, etc. Prior to the discovery of DNA, chromosomes, genes, the double helix, and other genetic features, evolution was easier to hypothesize than it is now, because in reproduction and development we are evidently dealing with cybernetics more than sheer chemistry.

Furthermore, (2) as cases that mosaics highlight (a feathered-mammal type, e.g.), the problem is not just a straight-line progression from fewer to more (change of number or degree), but a change of kind—a change from one gestalt to another. It is more than a matter of intensifying the degree of a characteristic or a set of them, adding and subtracting parts, modifying the form and function of homologous parts, or even all three. It is a matter of changing kinds, which brings in the harmonious, necessary, reciprocal interdependent operation of subunits to make a whole. It is not possible to seriate the origin of reciprocating parts necessary for the viability of the whole and the parts themselves, especially given the huge number of such parts in even the “lower” life forms. It is not possible to bring about the gradual origin of a reciprocating gestalt—at

least without using external mind, which involves intervention, and we are right back to exogenous complexification again. In the case of interdependent parts, all parts must be present from the beginning, fully functional, and interactive. It would do no good somehow to get everything involved in a bisexual mammalian self-replicating organism except getting the other sex, except getting the instincts for copulation, except getting the drive to care for the offspring—or worse yet, except having the mechanisms for birth contractions and other related factors. Besides, this process must happen twice simultaneously nearby and variant in an interdependent way between two sexes so as to produce both sexes in a subsequently combinational way.

Finally, (3) there is an essentially historical source of information (scripture) that indicates the supernatural origin of the material realm at the level of the whole and apparently excludes endogenous evolution as the explanation for at least every sub-unit within it. This third point, of course, has to be worked out relative to reasons for accepting Jesus Christ as Messiah and the concomitant acceptance of his view of things, his disciples' views of things, the general reliability of the records of such views, *etc.* The reliability of scripture's view of a matter like origins cannot be dealt with individually and directly.

Now the hermeneutical aspect of this last observation may not be absolutely foolproof. An evolutionary explanation of mankind's origin is surely outside the limits of what one would ever suppose scripture intended by what it says about origins and by the associated records it preserves regarding human history. If creation was not the case with humans, it is less likely that they were the only discrete creation within a whole as large as this creation. Even if people were the only life form originated exogenously, the essential theological point would already be made: human beings are not so much like animal "below" them as they are like God "above" them in whose image scripture says they were created and should then live. Pragmatically speaking, the crucial issue in the creation-evolution controversy is the anthropological one. Our view of ourselves is our most important concern both in theory and practice, because it sets the category in which our subsequent considerations take place and establishes the most fundamental factor in ethical theory.

Speaking of "likelihood" brings up a point in applying the law of parsimony. It does seem sensible to say that, all things being equal, the simpler explanation is more likely correct. Both methodological naturalists and Christian theists appeal to parsimony in their respective approaches to origins issues, but they appeal to it in different ways. On the one hand, materialistic scientists see the simpler explanation rightly as one that involves fewer causal components; it is "less complex" because God is not added to the picture. We, too, are normally more prone to suppose a medical explanation than a supernatural one even though we affirm with all our being that there is a God, that he relates to his creation, and that he answers the prayers for the sick among his people. Christians, on the other hand, see it as "simpler" to emphasize sufficient cause. For us it is not so much the lower number of factors that makes an answer simpler but the sufficiency of the factors whatever their number. Natural causes operating randomly are not adequate for explaining the origin of the truly new and therefore the kinds of results already present. The real situation, then, is apt to combine fewer and better factors, which keeps God in the picture.

Some authors have expressed the opinion (Till, *e.g.*) that it would be incoherent for a God who created the universe over eons of time to turn around and create humankind by fiat. It is not clear how the first observation, if granted, relates to the second. Being eternal in both directions, God need not hurry nor drag things out. The very notion of long *vs.* short time within endless time loses much of its coherence by losing much of the framework for establishing relativity. The “urgency” factor implied by finiteness does not obtain in an eternal God’s circumstance. Also, much of what is theorized about the formation of planets after big bangs, *etc.*, is more conceivably explainable on naturalistic lines because, for one thing, it lies in the inorganic realm. If natural causation can effect such results, God might simply let the system run until it did what it could; the length of time would be a function of method, and method would derive from endogenous capacities. In the case of originating a life form like humankind, however, no amount of time could generate the effect because nature lacks the mechanisms for doing it. If a result comes by creation, it is quite naturally instantaneous.

