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What Hath Darwin to Do with Scripture?
Comparing the Conceptual Worlds of the Bible and Evolution

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The book of Genesis might be the most Darwinian text of the ancient world. Can the ideas of Scripture and evolutionary science be mutually illuminating? Biblical scholar Dru Johnson calls us beyond creation-versus-evolution debates to explore the continuities and discontinuities between biblical themes and those of Darwin and modern science.

Beyond the Creation-Evolution Debate

The culture wars of evolution have set our minds on two paths—more like two ruts. Our creation theologies can ride or die with the Jesus fish or the Darwin fish on their bumpers. Ironically, a devout Christian driving that Jesus-fish car, a vehicle that resulted from centuries of applied science, pooh-poohs “those scientists” for promoting an anti-Christian agenda. Elsewhere in the world, a theoretical physicist naively dismisses religion as blind faith in invisible spirits. I do not want to contribute to the supposed conflict between science and faith. I want to do something much more disruptive. I want us to read Scripture for its own views on natural selection.

The Hebrew creation accounts (specifically Gen 1–2, among others) sew together the same three concerns that Darwin eventually identified as the central topics of natural selection: scarcity of resources, fittness to habitat, and their combined impacts on sexual propagation. My goal here is to consider the parallels among Darwin’s natural selection and later conceptual developments in evolutionary science, then compare them to the conceptual world of the Bible. We will see both where the two views jive and where they diverge.

Even if it is a grand coincidence, the overlapping concern with genealogical selection in Scripture and in Darwin’s thinking deserves some attention. After all, both views supply stories about the beginning, middle, and future of the cosmos.

These biblical and scientific folktales mean to speak realistically about our beginnings. Both stories intend to say something true about the natural history of the universe (even if one thinks the biblical authors do so poetically or analogically). Hence, I use the terms *folktale* and *mythology* as positive terms, not pejorative ones. *Folktale* does not relate to scientific or historical value but to explanatory purpose. Like all folktales, these two views about creation are designed to explain what we see and how it came to be.

The biblical authors constructed polished and concise stories of human origins to reason with their audiences (which later include us) about the invisible and organizing features of our cosmos. Because the biblical literature consistently develops these metaphysical views, we will do well to trace their metaphysical assumptions from beginning to end. The metaphysics that the biblical authors want us to understand is not a complex abstract system but a version of our material world reimagined with a different orientation.

Whether you read biblical texts as history or mystery, they are not just telling stories; they are selling an intellectual tradition rooted in creation. We will soon see the same with some folktales from the evolutionary sciences.

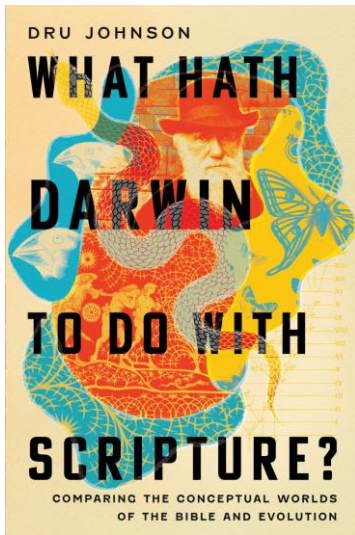
Some of these folktales from the evolutionary sciences differ from the biblical ones on this front: they offer no vision for the way things *ought* to be. For many, if not most, there simply is no particular way in which the material universe is supposed to be oriented. For most versions of the story in the evolutionary sciences, the cosmos *now is* as it always *has been* and ever more *shall be*. Not so for the biblical authors, from the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) to the New Testament. Understanding that pivotal reorientation of the cosmos (what I am calling the metaphysical aspect) illuminates how the biblical authors singularly frame the intersection of scarcity, fit, and sex in the process of genetic selection.



Karin DeHaven, academic publicist
kdehaven@ivpress.com or ivpress.com/media

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Overlaying the maps of these two intellectual worlds—the Bible’s and evolutionary science’s—will show us the various routes they each forge to conceptualize the world we know today. The biblical authors’ persistent dealings with communitarian ethics, scientific paths to knowledge, metaphysical principles, and causal physical relationships make the biblical intellectual world remarkably relevant for us. Even more, it is relevant for us in ways that other ancient intellectual worlds are not.

I will argue that the intellectual world of the biblical authors makes our world existentially, ethically, and physically coherent in a way that could be harmonized with many of the findings of science—depending on how one construes both enterprises.

—Taken from chapter one, “This Is Not the Creation-Evolution Debate You’re Looking For”



Karin DeHaven, academic publicist
kdehaven@ivpress.com or ivpress.com/media



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