



Coming to Peace with Science: Bridging the Worlds Between Faith and Biology

Darrel R. Falk

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Is a thoroughly Christian and biblically informed doctrine of creation compatible with widely held conclusions of modern science, especially biology? For Darrel R. Falk, this is not just an abstract question but one with which he has personally wrestled. A professor of biology, Falk brings together his biblically based understanding of creation and the most current research in biology. The result of his efforts to acknowledge the validity of science and the authority of Scripture is a new paradigm for relating the claims of science to the truths of Christianity. Written with the undergraduate student in mind, this book nonetheless will help anyone who is looking for a place to stand in the creation-evolution debate, fearful that they'll have to choose between intellectual integrity and the faith of the church. Calling for charitable discussions within the church, Falk shows how an original and ongoing interaction of God with creation is fully reconcilable with the kinds of development identified by current biological science.

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Date : Published May 6th 2004 by InterVarsity Press (first published April 30th 2004)

ISBN : 9780830827428

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Format : Paperback 235 pages

Genre : Science, Nonfiction, Christian, Religion, Christianity, Philosophy



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David says

Falk makes the case for a belief in Jesus and in evolution. He concentrates much more heavily on the scientific evidence for evolution rather than how Genesis and other scriptures can be interpreted to include evolution. He is wonderfully courteous toward opposing views within Christianity and exhorts believers to likewise be patient and open with others with different interpretations.

Paul Dann says

This is a very useful book for Christians who have grown up in or are currently living in an environment where belief in evolution is discouraged, but want to investigate the evidence for themselves. There seems to be very strong opposition to evolution in evangelical circles in the US, though that's far less true here in the UK.

For me, the issue mainly hinges on how to reconcile evolution with certain Biblical theology. For instance: if we believe the evidence points to humans having evolved over millions of years, how do we approach the question of sin and the atonement? At what point during the evolutionary process did God begin to hold humans accountable for sin? If sexual behaviour is evolved, why does God condemn homosexuality? How do we account for spirit and soul? These questions and many more are absolutely fundamental, in my opinion, following the acceptance of the evidence for evolution.

Sadly, this book covers none of the above questions. He does a wonderful job of presenting the scientific evidence for "gradual creation" (he's very careful to avoid the term "evolution"), but makes few attempts to reconcile the theological and philosophical questions it raises. He does make some references to scripture, but I felt they were a little half-hearted, and I was even quite unconvinced by his interpretation of some passages. I'm happy to accept that Falk's strong suit is science, and regrettably I'll need to look elsewhere for a theological angle.

I think this book could make a good reference in discussing evolution with other Christians who have been exposed to anti-evolutionary arguments in the past.

Arlen says

I thought this was a good overview of the theory of evolution. The author made a pretty convincing case for the common ancestry of species and the age of the earth as determined through various methods. The most disappointing part of this book was the shallow, borderline-inept manner in which scripture was handled. Not that I disagree with the author's ultimate point--namely, that Scripture is not in conflict with scientific evidence--but I think it became obvious that theology is not the author's core competency whenever he tried getting theological. This would not have been as annoying if the author did not keep reminding his six-day-literal-creationist interlocutors that they were "non-theologians"; he could have used the same reminder himself. All-in-all, I consider this book a convincing case for evolution with a hodge-podge of bible verses

stapled onto it. If I could have a conversation with the author, I would want to challenge him on his adherence to Sola Scriptura since the problematic nature of this 16th century theological innovation becomes apparent in quotes such as: "...we must be patient with each other and allow each other to follow truth as we see it in Scripture"; can this reply not equally be asserted by lesbian Lutheran Bishop Father Barbara as she appeals to her pet verses and self-developed criteria for how the Bible is to be "properly" interpreted when it speaks of homosexual behavior? This foundation for relativism, having been laid centuries earlier by European theological revolutionaries, is thus ground zero for the machinery of our modern moral relativism even as it sits next door to evangelical individualists who still insist that the every-man-for-himself model of Biblical interpretation works.

Kevin Johnson says

This book, like some others I've read on the subject, seems to me to be kind of an exercise in futility.

Why try to reconcile science with the Bible? Why not with the Hindu religion? Because the author, himself, is not Hindu?

He seems to make sense when discussing the science, carefully pointing out why each current scientific theory is believed to be true--backing it up with evidence. Then makes huge (ridiculous in my opinion) assumptions when speaking about religion. Like we all just assume Jesus rose from the dead, that the holy spirit exists, that God cares for us.

He offers little proof to support these assertions. This sort of thing makes me less inclined to believe in God. So, in a sense, the author has failed me, if not others.

Erin says

This book is a great introductory book to a gradual creation view. I'm still processing my full thoughts. As the author points out in the final chapter, his purpose in writing this book is not to convince creationists of his view, but to help them understand how a Christian can hold his view. He wishes to help foster unity among God's people with non-essentials, as Jesus and Paul both admonished us to do.

I will say, his final chapters also just made me really want to read John H. Walton's "The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate" even more. It is definitely on my list.

This is a good book, and I hope to own it as a resource in the future.

Scott George McCombe says

The issue of reconciling science, specifically biology, with the Christian Faith is one that has long interested me and is, I think, a significant one for anyone who takes an informed faith seriously. While I am aware that the mainstream scientific consensus is that humanity originated via the long process of evolution, I do think there is robust scientific case behind many of the arguments put forward by Intelligent Design proponents. The real issue, however, is not evolution per se, but the philosophical baggage that accompanies an acceptance of Darwinian evolution guided by natural selection. How does one reconcile evolution directed by random mutations and natural selection with a belief in a creator God? On a only slightly lower platform, how does one reconcile many basic Christian doctrines, such as Original Sin and Redemption, with the polygenism that necessarily comes with an acceptance of the standard scientific account of human origins? I cannot see how these can be reconciled but I am intrigued to hear the opinions of those who do. And it is with this attitude that I approached 'Coming to Peace with Science' by Darrel Falk. As I read the book I felt increasingly confirmed that a rapprochement between Darwinism and Christianity is not possible.

One should start with the good points of this book which are by no means minor or insignificant. His tone throughout the book is courteous and respectful. While polemics are often necessary, this is an area where too often the tone is strident and unhelpful. His understanding of the importance of respectful dialogue is set out in the last chapter where he emphasizes that 'we are one body and we must nurture and care for each other, all the more so when we think differently on some points'. This is even more commendable considering this is an issue he is evidently passionate about. His heartfelt desire to bridge two areas that he loves, that of biology and of Christianity, is soaked into these pages. His personal testimony which begins and concludes this book is, at times, quite moving. Thus it is no surprise that even William Dembski has written an endorsement and noted that this is an instructive book which adds to a necessary conversation.

The other good point is his straight-forward critique of Young Earth Creationism. His tone remains polite, but nobody can genuinely look at the science and remain convinced that the universe is only 6,000 years old. The arguments from YECs add nothing to this discussion and should be viewed, at best, as a frivolous intrusion. In this he is more respectful than I am.

Now on to the negatives. While he makes the case that the evidence overwhelmingly points to the universe and world being billions of years old, the scientific case for common descent is far less convincing. We obviously can see evolution in action in a minor way, and this can be interpreted to support common descent, but the crux seems to be that enough time will result in minor changes becoming major. Whether this happened and, perhaps more importantly, whether this could happen without divine intervention is something that is not proven. Even if common descent is accepted, there seem to be a number of convincing arguments which suggest this could only occur with outside intervention. Professor Falk does not address these issues in any depth and merely emphasizes that enough time will do the job.

The most obvious negative, however, is that he spends little time actually constructing a bridge between science and faith. While he professes his belief in 'gradual creation', there is no obvious reason why God is necessary in the Darwinian process that he defends. God comes across as one additional equation too many, hovering around in the background without much to do. In trying to distance himself from this image, Falk constructs a straw man and claims that we don't expect God to be intervening constantly in our lives. True, but most of us don't claim that God inspires us to make a cup of tea. We do claim that He is Creator which suggests that He is actively involved in Creation. How? Where? What? These questions are only addressed with vague platitudes. No explanation is offered on how random chance mutations guided by natural selection is compatible with divine creation.

His emphasis on faith comes across as a blind faith more in common with Fideism than the marriage of faith and reason taught by Church Fathers and great theologians. He claims that Christ's reluctance to broadcast miracles shows that our faith should be based not on scientific evidence but on faith. True, but this does not mean we should have blind faith. St Paul writes that if the Resurrection did not happen, our faith would be in vain. We know the Resurrection happened because people saw it, told others and wrote it down i.e. there is evidence for it. In one rather silly section, Falk writes that looking for scientific evidence for God's creative role could almost be considered 'Satanic'. This comes across as something a semi-literate Fundamentalist would espouse.

Finally, his attempt to marry Adam and Eve and Fall with Darwinian evolution just don't seem to add up. While a few token attempts are made, ultimately the Fall is viewed as simply being a description of the human condition. Well, yes, it is now, but there are serious theological ramifications with the idea that inherent sinfulness is part of original creation. These are not addressed.

Ultimately Professor Falk did not convince me that a bridge can be easily built between Christianity and the mainstream scientific view of human origins. At times he comes across as if he is trying square the circle. No doubt he seems happy to stand on this bridge. I'm doubtful that his words will persuade others that they can do the same. I do however appreciate his contribution to an important discussion.

Carolyn says

Definitely the best book I've read so far on the subject of origins - Falk lays out many of the conclusions I'd already drawn from previous reading but does a much better job than I would be able to do. He's gracious, knowledgeable, and plain-spoken. I'd recommend it to anyone interested in the subject - particularly Christians or scientists who think their profession prevents them from becoming a Christian. My only regret is that he doesn't address the concept of built-in age. Otherwise, very well done.

Harvey L. Long says

Very interesting and thought provoking. Many Christians accept evolutionary processes in the creation of the world and mankind, but Dr. Falk does not address God's experimentation in the formation of modern man. Such a discussion would be very interesting. A very good read packed with scientific data that can be understood by those without a science background. The dating of fossils and discussion of genes and . was excellent

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Mike says

Couldn't finish this...didn't feel the case he was making was satisfactorily thorough.

Lukas Szrot says

Wow... This was a great read. I picked it up for a 'theistic evolution' perspective while writing a sociology of education paper on teaching evolution. I found it greatly inspiring, accessible and filled with the kind of wonder I have come to expect from great popularizers of science like Neil deGrase Tyson or the late great Carl Sagan. I would highly recommend this book to any who think that traditional Christianity is not compatible with modern science.

I am not a man of faith, truth be told. I left the church in my teens, and never really felt as though I belonged to begin with. I might be called a freethinker or an enchanted naturalist. I might also be called an agnostic, for I have not stopped asking the question: Is there a God? It seems to be among the biggest and most profound questions a person can ask. I may never have the definitive answer of a believer or Nonbeliever, per se. Maybe it's the journey, the seeking itself, that holds the greatest meaning for me personally. Books like this one really inspire me to ask this question anew.

Jenmcclaflin says

Slow at times and sometimes a difficult read but an incredibly interesting topic and approach

Tuesday says

You are admirable for coming up to this kind of book!

Reilly says

He makes some interesting points, but I'm not completely sold. Some of what he says that supports a gradual creation just seems coincident and that he's trying to make it fit. Yes, a lot of it makes sense, but definitely take it - as with everything you read - with a grain of salt, and discern for yourself.
