

professor, or other ‘expert’, to get the intended meaning. This is a sad state of affairs, and Mr Gray has recently made it worse.

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Scripture and general revelation

Andrew Kulikovsky’s article ‘Scripture and general revelation’ (*Journal of Creation* 19:2, 2005) argued that Scripture alone must inform us what to make of the scientific evidence for the age of the earth. That is to say, apropos origins and dating, the Scriptures are the filtering backdrop that scientific discoveries must be cast through. Although Andrew doesn’t say as such, his is an address of the philosophical chestnut of presuppositionalism versus evidentialism, with Andrew firmly squaring off against the latter.

Andrew’s case for presuppositionalism makes four points:

1. the epistemological priority of special revelation over general revelation
2. the mind has lost sufficient ability to reason from the facts of the world and comprehend something of the world’s past
3. general revelation is unspecific, providing only a vague set of knowledge that God exists and is Creator, and
4. scientific data do not fall under the rubric of general revelation.

Andrew writes that ‘[t]he revelation of Scripture is the filter through which all else should be interpreted’. Is Andrew implying that the young-earth data lie hidden from the heathen; that these data can only be ‘seen’ when a believer reads the evidence through a scriptural screen? Such an epistemology automatically excludes all non-believers because they are not going to accept this presuppositional epistemic. And if the

data are mute, as Andrew contends, then the unbeliever’s mind will remain unaffected by the tangible, objective scientific evidence for a young world. Indeed, is the unbeliever’s understanding impenetrable until he or she is first ‘born again’?

Andrew’s own pessimistic view of the intellect (‘... our fallen nature also inhibits our ability to perceive, to reason and to assess’) draws support from R.L. Thomas. Thomas, with a suggestion of circularity, believes that in order for knowledge to qualify as revelation it must first be rejected by the non-Christian world. As I read Thomas, unless a person is Christian, he or she will never understand that the world is young or that God created. I know of no scriptural warrant for this claim.

Andrew’s case, and Thomas’, partly relies on a misunderstanding of Romans 1. Andrew conflates the knowledge people are *able* to infer from the creation with what *some* people *decide* to do with it. The apostle Paul makes this distinction quite clear when he says that there are men who ‘withhold in their memory’ the evidence of God’s existence and his work, despite their intellectually obtaining true information from the creation. Paul never claims that all men suppress the truth, but that God’s displeasure is against *all* the unrighteous suppression. If Paul had meant all men suppress the truth, then all non-believers would be homosexual (vv 26–27), which is obviously false.

Paul explains that the exercise of the intellect (νοούμενα) upon the things that make up the world (ποιήματα) delivers a mental apprehension (καθοραται) of God’s miraculous power (δυναμεις) and his Godhead or divinity (θειοτης). I would suggest that modern scientific endeavour, being a higher order and more precise investigative evaluation of the natural world *vis-à-vis* the prescientific enterprise of Paul’s time, is just another type of application of the intellect upon the bits and bobs that make up the world. In other words, the scientific data will reveal the miraculous essence and history of the natural world. These are not only

reliable pointers to a created world but are the residual evidence of a unique history the world has undergone. God made the world in one way, and one way only, and this will be signated through the entire created order because it *has* happened this way. These indelible vestigia inform us of this unique history and, in this sense, scientific data are revelatory.

Paul and the writer of Hebrews astutely argued the contingency of the material world, the creation *in toto*, requires explanation. Christian thinkers—in a line that stretches from Lane Craig, through Leibniz, right back to Philoponus—have argued that the existence of contingent beings requires a necessary being. Materialist cosmogony, with partial deference to the principle of Sufficient Reason (why is there something and not nothing?), either has head-in-the-sand claimed that the universe is a ‘brute fact’ and requires no further explanation, or, disingenuously, proffered ‘time’ as the ontological catalyst by which everything came from nothing. However, as a myriad of empirical and theoretical observations attest (*inter alia*, Haldane’s Dilemma, the excessive deleterious mutation rate, the rapidity of racemisation of organic matter, DNA decay), time is not the claimed panacea because an inefficacious short time period has elapsed that gives no succour to a philosophical naturalism. Consequently, scientific data have revealed that contingency and the brevity of existence are miraculous and thus data are revelatory.

Philosophical presuppositionalism that asserts data are mute—that meaning is derivative only after these data have been fed through a worldview, either an old-earth scenario or a young one—is belied by the following proposition: two worlds, brought into existence through two entirely different means, cannot rationally or in terms of vestigial evidence be indistinguishable from each other. An ancient world and a young world can never be identical because they neither share the same history nor were created through the same means. If the world is ancient, then all, or the vast

majority of, data will indicate that. If the world is young, then, likewise, the data will unambiguously or sufficiently point to this. I find it impossible to believe that a presuppositionalist would really suggest that one data set, representing one unique history, could logically and empirically be comfortably accommodated by two disparate worldviews.

Andrew's epistemological grounding, I suggest, 'shoots itself in the foot' because it itself is not drawn from Scripture. This is no cavil but a serious objection highlighting the ultimately arbitrary and question-begging heart of Andrew's epistemic. Its all-or-nothing approach deracinates the creationist apologetic from the visible reality creationists claim is there. However, more dangerously, it contradicts clear scriptural statement and quite possibly leads to a form of Gnosticism in which 'the Scriptures are the spectacles with which to read the book of nature [scientific data] and that the illumination of the Spirit is [first] needed to give us proper eyesight for the reading'. This is *gnosis* only for the elect and not, as Paul says, knowledge available to, and for, all.

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Andrew Kulikovsky replies:

I must admit to being rather surprised and confused over Marc Kay's objections and criticisms to my recent paper 'Scripture and general revelation'. Kay accuses me of holding to presuppositionalism over against evidentialism, when in fact my views are far more nuanced. There is great danger in using such sweeping categories to pigeon-hole people so this why I rarely, if ever, use such terms.

The main point of my paper is to show that Scripture is a superior revelation because it is in the form of human language. Moreover, empirical science is concerned with present day observations and can tell us very little

for certain about historical events.

I am not a presuppositionalist. I do not object at all to scientific evidence or reasoning but merely point out the limitations of the scientific methodology with regard to discovering truth about historical events. Special revelation does not suffer from this problem.

Kay attributes to me the belief that 'the mind has lost sufficient ability to reason from the facts of the world and comprehend something of the world's past'. Actually, what I said was:

'... it is impossible to discover the truth about creation by relying on our own knowledge, ideas and methods, simply because we are finite and fallen human beings. Not only does our humanity prohibit us from having exhaustive knowledge, but our fallen nature also inhibits our ability to perceive, to reason, and to assess. Moreover, the object of scientific study—the natural world—is also fallen. While it still reveals the glory and greatness of God, it is, nevertheless, "in bondage to decay" (Rom 8:20–22). The image it presents is to some extent distorted.'

Note the words 'prohibit' and 'inhibit'. It is impossible for us to gain exhaustive knowledge, and our fallen nature often prevents us from thinking and reasoning clearly. This is not to say that human beings are totally incapable of rational thinking and doing good scientific research, but our abilities are somewhat diminished and subject to error, either consciously or unconsciously. I never said, nor did I mean to imply, that our rational abilities are broken beyond all repair.

I prefer to describe my view of the intellect as 'realistic' and 'biblical' rather than 'pessimistic'. Romans 1 makes it clear that people willingly and knowingly exchange God's truth for lies, and the history of science makes it abundantly clear that even the greatest scientific minds were often spectacularly wrong.

Kay also attributes to me the belief that 'general revelation is unspecific, providing only a vague set of knowledge that God exists

and is Creator'. I never said general revelation was unspecific—I said it offered no specific information about the natural world. It is, however, quite specific in what it does communicate: 'that God exists, that He created the universe and everything in it, and that He is great and powerful'.

Kays asks: 'Is Andrew implying that the young-earth data lie hidden from the heathen, that these data can only be "seen" when a believer reads the evidence through a scriptural screen?' In many respects, yes! This has been the testimony of many creationists who were once committed evolutionists. Nevertheless, we all have the same data—it is not hidden. It is a matter of how we interpret this data. Everyone can see strata in the rocks. A creationist interprets these as a legacy of the Noachic Flood. An evolutionist (or old-earth creationist), assuming uniformitarian processes, interprets them as the result of slow deposition over a long period of time.

Kay objects to my (and Thomas') observation that humanity's default response to general revelation is rejection. He argues that we have misunderstood Romans 1. However, it appears to me that Kay has in fact misunderstood Thomas and myself. Our point is that Romans 1 makes it quite clear that sinful humanity willingly and knowingly suppresses the truth that general revelation makes plain to everyone. Therefore, we argue that appeals to general revelation in evangelistic discourse are futile because everyone already knows (even though they often refuse to admit it) that God exists and that He created the universe. In Romans 1:20, Paul makes it clear that the proper function of general revelation is *to remove any excuse for rejecting God's law and His moral order*.

Moreover, I never said that *all men* suppress the truth. I refer to humanity in a general sense. In fact, in footnote 26, I explicitly state that it is 'unbelievers' who suppress the truth.

Kay suggests 'that modern scientific endeavour, being a higher order and more precise investigative evaluation of the natural world *vis-à-*

vis the pre-scientific enterprise of Paul's time, is just another type of application of the intellect upon the bits and bobs that make up the world. In other words, the scientific data will reveal the miraculous essence and history of the natural world.' But, as I pointed out in my paper, general revelation would then only be accessible to scientists with advanced training and therefore it ceases to be 'general'.

Kay goes on to argue that because 'God made the world in one way, and one way only', then 'this will be signatored through the entire created order because it *has* happened this way. These indelible vestigia inform us of this unique history and, in this sense, scientific data are revelatory'. Kay then cites the work of various Christian thinkers and argues that their conclusions are evidence that such scientific data are revelatory. But again, this 'revelation' was not made known to all people in all places throughout time, and therefore, by definition, is not general revelation! Secondly, if scientific data is indeed revelatory, then why do so few scientists accept that the world was created by a personal God? Why aren't the overwhelming majority of scientists committed Christians? Most scientists think creationists (of any sort) are quacks and imbeciles. When presented with evidence of creation or a young Earth they routinely explain it away, ignore it, or reject it out of hand. But if scientific data was revelatory, as Kay insists, then surely the existence of God and His creation of the universe would be acknowledged by *all* scientists—even if not all of them choose to become Christians. That is clearly not the case. Thus, Kay's reasoning does not stand up to reality, and only reinforces my point that human beings' rationality is inhibited and we are all prone to erroneous thinking.

Kay asserts: 'If the world is ancient, then all, or the vast majority of, data will indicate that. If the world is young, then, likewise, the data will unambiguously or sufficiently point to this.' However, this is a particularly naïve position to take. Data is just

that—data. It does not speak for itself. It must be interpreted, and interpretation implies that we make assumptions that may be correct or incorrect. For example, everyone can see the rock strata and the fossils, but what do they indicate? This data can be explained scientifically in accordance with the set of assumptions comprising the foundation of the old-earth scenario. It can also be explained scientifically in accordance with the set of assumptions comprising the foundation of the young-earth scenario. This is where the special revelation of Scripture comes in. It allows us to determine which scenario is founded on the right set of assumptions. Scripture tells us that the earth is relatively young and that there was a catastrophic global flood that destroyed all living creatures on the land.

Kay states that he finds it impossible to believe that 'a presuppositionalist would really suggest that one data set, representing one unique history, could logically and empirically be comfortably accommodated by two disparate worldviews'. Again, since I am not a presuppositionalist his beliefs and objections about my consistency with presuppositionalism are irrelevant. Nevertheless, I have showed above how the same data can indeed be accommodated by two disparate worldviews.

Kay also posits that my epistemological grounding 'shoots itself in the foot' because it is not drawn from Scripture. On the contrary, my epistemological grounding *is* Scripture! In fact, Kay's criticism seems more applicable to himself since it appears that Kay's epistemological grounding is actually 'human reason'.

In conclusion, it seems to me that Kay has not read my paper carefully enough. I do not hold many of the views he attributes to me, so his criticisms and objections are against a straw-man.

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Linguistics: soft science a 'soft target'

None of the linguistics which has appeared in recent issues of *Journal of Creation* has convinced me, and as a creationist I am biased in its favour. I think I see some tendency to regard the academic discipline of linguistics as a 'soft target' for creationism that can be attacked without specialist knowledge.

There are many lay ideas about language which seem common sense, but they do not stand up to the scrutiny of proper study.¹ The most tempting of these is that there is some kind of directionality in language change. If language change is going in one direction only, in some sense, then arguments might eventually be mounted that languages can only be a few thousand years old, on the grounds that modern languages do not show evidence of hundreds of millennia's worth of unidirectional change. For example, if language change always made a language simpler, it could be argued that modern languages are not simple enough to be hundreds of millennia old.

This idea is expressed in French's recent article as follows:

'The oldest ancient languages man has studied, such as Latin ... are much more complex than any languages spoken today... . Languages become simpler over time by use—they never become more complex.'²

And in Duursma's: 'Linguistic theories are unable to adequately explain ... the sophistication and consistency in ... ancient Sanskrit and Greek.'³

I take the latter quote to mean that (a) languages are always becoming both simpler (less 'sophisticated') and more irregular (less 'consistent') and that (b) no language could ever have been complex and regular enough to be the precursor from say 100,000 years ago of Sanskrit and Greek.

There are three deep problems with such an idea. Firstly, concepts such as 'simpler' and 'more regular' are simply