

Apologetic against atheism flawed by theistic evolutionary stance

A review of
*The Reason for God: Belief
in an Age of Skepticism:*
by Timothy Keller
Dutton, New York, 2008

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In the last few years, there have been several apologetics books by Christians, each of whom has put his own ‘spin’ on the Christian message. Timothy Keller joins their ranks with *The Reason for God*, a book based on some of the most common objections that he has heard to the Christian faith during his years as a pastor at a Manhattan church that he planted himself.

Keller begins by encouraging both atheists and Christians to reconsider doubt. He tells Christians that doubt is a healthy part of faith, and that those who do not ask hard questions about their faith are at risk and ‘will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic’ (pp. xvi–xvii). Believers should not only find the answers to their own questions, but also those of the people around them. Indeed, Jude 1:22 tells us to ‘have mercy on those who doubt’ (Jude 1:22), because doubt may lead to resolution, e.g. the firm confession of ‘doubting Thomas’ (John 20:24–29; note that neither this passage nor any other identify biblical faith with credulity, or disparage logic). However, this is different from doubt for its own sake (James 1:6).

On the other hand, he counsels skeptics to see the faith which underlies their own unbelief. He then divides the book into two sections: in the first part

he answers some common criticisms to faith, and in the second part he goes on the offensive, giving arguments for the truth of Christian faith.

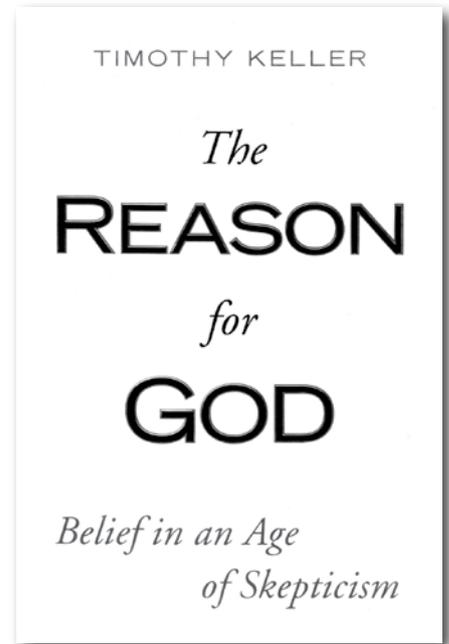
Answering the critics

Keller answers the standard questions that one would expect any apologetic work to cover, such as ‘Why would a good God allow death and suffering?’ (ch. 2)¹; ‘How could a loving God send people to hell?’ (ch. 5),² and so on. He gives the standard answers that most apologists give in a straightforward way that would be understandable to laypeople, if necessarily over-simplified in a few places. One is where he explains why the atheist regimes of the 20th century outlawed religion (which is in itself an over-simplification, as each tried to impose a secular religion of its own in the place of those it outlawed) (pp. 5–6).

Evolutionary stance makes for flawed answers on suffering

Keller is a theistic evolutionist, which causes him to give wrong or incomplete answers to some of the questions he attempts to answer in his book. For instance, in his chapter on pain and suffering (ch. 2), he says that God sometimes allows evil to happen in order that He may turn it to good in some way, and that Jesus died on the cross undergoing tremendous suffering to save humanity, proving that God’s reason for allowing suffering is *not* that he does not love mankind. He also points forward to the hope of resurrection and the end of all suffering.

While there is nothing necessarily wrong with this answer, it is still incomplete, because he does not



address *the* reason for pain and suffering—the Fall.^{3,4} The starting point should have been that humans go through pain and suffering because we are all fallen and sinful, and fallen people are capable of committing acts of tremendous evil. God is, of course, capable of overriding human will, but does not always do so, because He values human voluntary will (although it is impossible, of course, to know just how often God *does* intervene in situations). Another aspect of the Fall is that things do not work correctly at times, including our bodies, leading to disease and death. When these things happen and we feel as if it is wrong, as if it was never supposed to be like this, it is precisely *because* things are all wrong. Any answer to the question of pain and suffering that does not include this sort of explanation is seriously lacking.

Incompetent exegesis of Genesis creation account

Keller’s incomplete answer to the question of pain and suffering was an error of omission, but his chapter on science and religion (ch. 6) contains many errors of commission. He handles the issue of miracles versus science well,⁵ but cites the predictable theistic evolutionist line

on the Bible and evolution. He asserts that Genesis 1 is a poem (p. 93), that the interpretation is up for debate,⁶ and that many Christians with a high view of Scripture have no problem accepting evolution without embracing materialism (p. 87).

His claim is centred around the presence of prose-poetry couplets in the Bible, such as the historic account of Deborah's victory over Sisera in Judges 4, followed by the song of Deborah in Judges 5, in poetic form (93–94). But Keller is clueless about *the linguistic characteristics* of Hebrew poetry and history. Poetry contains *parallelism*, while history is dominated by particular verb forms known as preterites (or *waw* consecutives).⁷ A statistical analysis by Hebrew scholar Steven Boyd showed that perfect and imperfect verbs are dominant in undoubted poetic passages—including *Judges 5*, while preterites dominate in undoubted historical narrative—including *Judges 4*.⁸ And his analysis showed, 'the probability that Genesis 1:1–2:3 ($X^1 = 0.655$) is a narrative is 0.999972604'—i.e. its verb predominance was just like a passage that *Keller* agrees is historical.⁹

Also predictably, he does not deal with the fact that the rest of the Bible takes Genesis as a historical narrative,^{10,11} and so did nearly all Christian commentators for most of the history of Christianity.^{12,13} Keller asserts that belief in evolution does not necessarily lead to materialistic philosophy (p. 88), but does not offer any actual evidence to back up his statement, and also seems blissfully unaware of the problems regarding death and suffering before the Fall in any long-age system.¹⁴ His rationalization that skeptics 'should not allow themselves to be distracted by this intramural debate' and that they should 'concentrate on and weigh the central claims of Christianity' (p. 94) seems rather naïve, considering that the creation/evolution issue has been of central importance to many people; several people have come to

faith because of seeing the truth of the creation account in Genesis,¹⁵ and some have apostasized when they ceased to believe it.^{14,16} Interestingly, at the end of his chapter, Keller affirms that 'God did not originally make the world to have disease, hunger, and death in it' (p. 96). However, according to Keller's long-age evolutionary interpretation, disease, hunger and death were around from the beginning.

Positive arguments for Christian truths

In the second part of *The Reason for God*, Keller goes on the offensive with positive arguments for God's existence. Though there is no argument that will convince every rational person that God exists, because the evidence can always be rationalized away, Keller puts together several arguments which together are 'powerful and potent' (p. 141) in his view. From the existence to the universe to humanity's intuitive knowledge of right and wrong, he argues that certain clues point to the existence of God. From that foundation, he goes on to present the Gospel, starting with the problem of sin, the Cross as the antidote, and concludes with a defense of the Resurrection as a historical event and the doctrine of the Trinity. In several places, big bang cosmology and billions of years is assumed to be true, but does not factor much in this section of the book, with one exception: Keller's chapter on 'The Problem of Sin' (ch. 10).

Obviously, Keller's view of sin is warped by his theistic evolutionary beliefs; in fact, he identifies 'original sin' not as due to Adam's disobedience in Eden (as the Apostle Paul does in Romans 5¹¹), but as 'humanity's inherent pride and self-centeredness' (p. 167). He does not even reference the Genesis account of the Fall until the end of the chapter. He affirms that 'when human beings turned from God the entire warp and woof of the world unraveled. Disease, genetic disorders, famine, natural disasters, aging, and death itself are as much the result of

sin as are oppression, war, crime, and violence' (p. 170).

However, the fossil record—according to the secular time scale he swallows so uncritically—shows many of these conditions happening long *before* humans were around to sin—and to undoubted *Homo sapiens* long before any possible biblical date for Adam.³ The theistic evolutionist cannot believe that sin is the cause of death and disease, i.e. the biblical teaching that death is 'the wages of sin' (Romans 6:23) and 'the last enemy' (1 Corinthians 15:26). This is because according to his worldview, death and disease were around long before people. Though he traces its effects for the individual and society, his description is incomplete, as it does not sufficiently address the *origin* of sin, and seems to downplay the Genesis account of the Fall. This makes 'The Problem of Sin' perhaps the weakest chapter in *The Reason for God*.

Conclusion

Keller's book is a pleasure to read; he explains the concepts clearly for a lay audience and communicates well. However, there is not much original argumentation in his book; much of what is outlined in his book can be found in similar apologetic works such as Lee Strobel's *The Case for Faith*, or the works of C.S. Lewis, whom Keller quotes often, not to mention on websites like CMI's. However, his abject compromise with secular evolutionary theories should be a major drawback for young-earth creationists, especially as it affects his arguments regarding science and religion, sin and the Fall. Also, why would skeptics accept Keller's arguments for Christian faith and morality when he has already capitulated to them on history and science? While this does not make his book completely useless, it does limit its effectiveness.

References

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3. See Sarfati, J., The Fall: a cosmic catastrophe: Hugh Ross's blunders on plant death in the Bible, *J. Creation* 19(3):60–64, 2005; <creation.com/plant_death>.
4. Smith, H., Cosmic and universal death from Adam's Fall: an exegesis of Romans 8:19–23a, *J. Creation* 21(1):75–85, 2007.
5. Compare Sarfati J., Miracles and science, 1 September 2006, <creation.com/miracles>.
6. Is Genesis poetry/figurative, a theological argument (polemic) and thus not history? <creation.com/fh>, from Batten, D., Catchpoole, D., Sarfati, J. and Wieland, C., *Creation Answers Book*, ch. 2, Creation Book Publishers, 2007.
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11. Cosner, L., Romans 5:12–21: Paul's view of a literal Adam, *J. Creation* 22(2):105–107, 2008.
12. Sarfati, J., ref. 7, ch. 3.
13. Kulikovsky, A.S., Creation and Genesis: an historical survey, *CRSQ* 43(4):206–219, 2007.
14. Sarfati, ref. 7, ch. 6.
15. For example, see the testimonies of Joel Galvin <creation.com/galvin>, Sonia <creation.com/sonia>, and indeed my own <creation.com/lita>.
16. Wieland, C., Death of an apostate, *Creation* 25(1):6, 2002, <creation.com/apostate>.

Miller's meanderings: only the same bogus contentions

A review of
*Only a Theory: Evolution
and the Battle for
America's Soul*
by Kenneth Miller Viking
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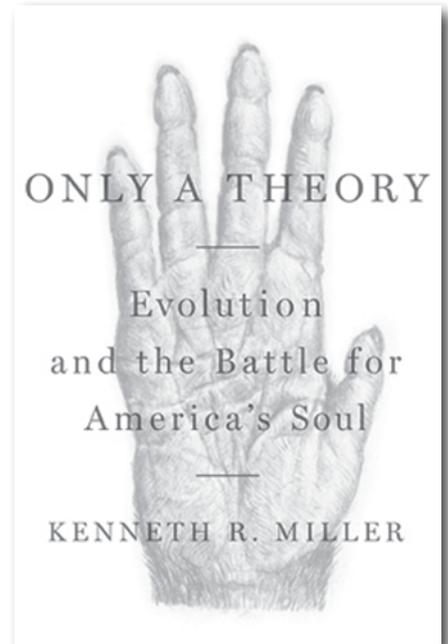
On the outer jacket of this book, Miller is praised as a brilliant and original thinker. To the contrary: Miller is simply dusting off and repackaging the same old straw-man arguments against creationists of decades ago and reusing them against ID.¹

Even the title is a straw man: creationists have long advised against saying that evolution is 'only a theory', since the evidence is far too weak to dignify it with the term 'theory'. Rather, it is just a conjecture or hypothesis.²

Throughout this book, the reader is constantly treated to the 'only naturalism is science' hubris. There are so many absurdities and *non sequiturs* in Miller's book that it is hard to decide what to write about in this brief review. The technicalities of Miller's contentions (e.g. regarding Behe, irreducible complexity, the immune system, etc.) have already been refuted by ID proponents, and will not be repeated here.

Disguising the atheism of evolution

In an obvious attempt to mollify the usually-theistic reader, Francis Collins, on the outer jacket, says that Miller's book is no atheistic screed, and that Miller is a devout believer. This is a smokescreen. Miller's views on the origins of the universe and of



life are, theological rhetoric aside, indistinguishable from those of the hardcore atheist.³ But Collins has long been shown to be just as confused as Miller is,⁴ just not as obsessively and viciously anticreationist.

Interestingly, Miller provides a table of nations and their rates of popular acceptance of evolution (p. 214). Besides secular Japan, the nations with the highest rates of the acceptance of evolution are the highly-secularized western European ones. Obviously, the enlightened secularists, no less than those big, bad, dumb American fundamentalists, reject the sugar-coated fluff, coming from the clergy of most religious bodies, which insist that God and evolution are compatible, or even apologize to Darwin.⁵

Irrelevant evolutionary considerations

Miller's comments on the horse series, transitional forms, convergence