

It is perhaps ironic that after 200 years of research and data collection there is still little unanimity in the development and acceptance of the theoretical understanding of the development of the earth's scener—its geomorphology. Even though many geologists would argue, incorrectly, that the retreating stage of the biblical Flood is a religious rather than a scientific view, the landscape is a living testimony to this event. This is the legacy of the book.

Flood by Design is eminently readable, very well illustrated and should provide the interested person with a wealth of material to ponder and to develop in their own research. It will change the way you look at the world. I thoroughly recommend this book to all who would seek to better understand the scenery and natural features around us. It is a welcome addition to the creationist literature. The arguments are clear and concise and the examples are spectacularly depicted in photo and diagram. As the book cover states:

'*Flood by Design* takes you into a fascinating aspect of the Genesis flood you may never have considered.'

As I read this book I could not help but be reminded of the Scripture in Romans:

'For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse' (Romans 1:20).

References

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Not God, actually!

A review of
God, Actually
by Roy Williams
ABC Books, Sydney 2008

Marc Kay

The author and the book

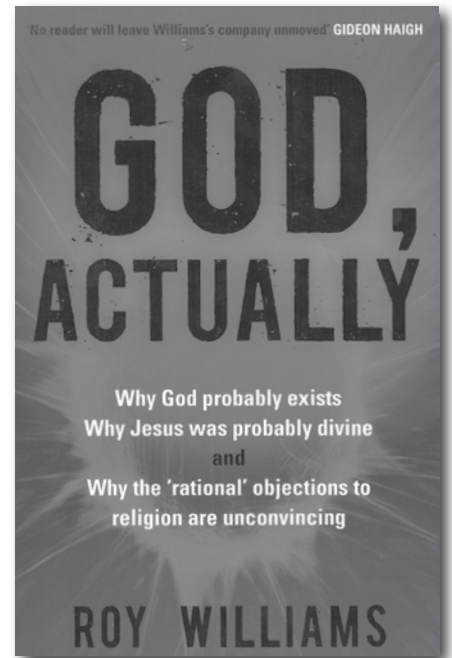
Roy Williams is a former lawyer. Sceptical concerning Christianity's claims for the greater part of his life, Williams became a Christian approximately a decade ago.

His book is an apologia for theism generally, Christianity specifically, and is divided into three sections. The first gives reasons to believe in God, the second for Christianity, and the last addresses common objections from non-Christians. A substantial part of the book concerns itself with matters of origins and it is on this I'll concentrate.

The sponsor

For those unfamiliar with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, this organisation is the nation's tax-funded, commercial-free radio and TV organisation, run more or less along the same lines as the BBC. To a large measure it retains independence from the incumbent government but this does not necessarily guarantee objectivity or fairness. Among conservative Christians, the ABC has been a well-known hawk of liberal ideologies and its science programmes are preponderantly slanted toward promoting evolution and ridiculing creationism.¹ Orthodox Christian theology suffers a similar fate. (The same goes for the BBC, but at least some of them have admitted their anti-Christian bias and love of political correctness.²)

And this is why getting the ABC to publish this book must have seemed



somewhat of a coup for the author. This publishing accomplishment may partially explain the book's receiving much high praise from well-known Sydney conservative enclaves. I also initially thought this bucked the ABC's anti-Christian trend. However, it was soon after I began reading this book that the penny dropped as to why the ABC would welcome this book with open arms.

The curse of certain knowledge

My principal, and nagging, criticism of the book is that, according to Williams, God's existence and Christianity's claims are only *probably* true. He claims that 'an irrefutable explanation of God is, literally impossible [because] its very impossibility is a fundamental concomitant of God's creation, and of the uniquely simple but simultaneously intricate nature of Christian belief' (p. 11). If it were possible to provide such a proof then 'there would be no such thing as Christianity'. A corollary of Williams' case, then, is that unresolved doubt is tenable and, incredibly, outright denial of God's existence is rationally plausible. In fact,



Sketch from <www.wikipedia.com>

Williams is influenced by Kierkegaard who demanded a 'leap of faith' in the face of an 'objective uncertainty' about God. The Bible, on the contrary, claims that the creation clearly demonstrates the existence of the Creator and a young world.

Williams insists that 100% certainty of God's existence would kill off free will and replace it with a 'fearful and slavish obedience to our perception of God's wishes'. Chillingly, he believes that certainty about God's existence is the work of the devil (p. 15).

Williams' position is logically and biblically indefensible. God's existence and Christian claims are either true or they aren't. If God exists and the whole created order is due to His work, how could there empirically be any evidence for God not existing in the universe or that there could be real evidence that not-God brought the universe into existence? The Apostle Paul says as much when he emphatically states that knowledge about God is not just probable but *apodictic* (necessarily true or logically certain): 'What may be known of God should have been obvious to them, for He has made it plain. Actually ever since the world began the invisible character of God, His eternal power and divine being, has been discernible in His handiwork. So [the pagans] have no excuse' (Romans 1:18–21).

Williams' tepid epistemology arises from two fundamental mistakes he makes about the Bible. The first, apparently in admiration of

Danish existential philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, posits the spuriously all-too-familiar dichotomy of faith and knowledge. Kierkegaard believed that evidence is a good thing, but then you must make a leap and leave reason behind. Leaning upon Hebrews 11:1, Williams argues that faith would not be faith if faith were 'capable of unanswerable demonstration; it would be mere knowledge' (p. 12). Not only has he misunderstood the point, but Hebrews is saying the exact opposite of what Williams is claiming.

The Greek word for 'faith' (synonyms 'truth' and 'persuasion'), πίστις (*pistis*), is derived from a primary root πείθω (*piethō*) meaning 'to convince by argument'. I am unable to see, then, how this leaves room for Williams' insistence that a less than certain demonstration of God's existence and the Christian argument is perfectly acceptable. Furthermore, verse 3, echoing Paul's Romans 1 argument, links a person's being rationally persuaded by evidence, and thus being assured in the mind (νοούμεν *nooumen*), with the objective truth that the world was made by God. It necessarily follows that the reductionist philosophy of matter giving rise to everything is an intellectually debile worldview.

The second calumny—and I do not use this term lightly—is his disdain for the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis. *Inter alia*, he writes of a metaphorical Fall (strangely he upholds a genuine marriage principle and bases it on the text in Genesis 2) and that holding to a literal 6-day creation 'allows agnostics and atheists an easy way out of tackling the most important questions.' After all, such 'literal' interpretations 'fly in the face of contemporary knowledge of the world' (p. 22).

At least he's honest

There are no slippery lawyer's tricks with Williams. He's quite ingenuous when it comes to laying out the basis of his view of Scripture. However, in doing so he commits a rather pedestrian, though fatal, logical fallacy, namely, denial of the Law of

the Excluded Middle (i.e. either P is true or its negation, not-P, is true). He holds that 'To assert of the Bible that "either it is the word of God or it is not" is to set up a false choice.' Confessing up, he admits that 'I do not believe that the Bible is inerrant' (p. 21). For someone who sides with John Shelby Spong (the former Episcopalian bishop who argued that David, John and Paul were homosexual³) on condoning homosexual behaviour because '[those condemnatory] passages must be seen as reflecting the *human* superstitions of a different era, it was not known that homosexuality is biologically ingrained' (p. 269), refusal to uphold inerrancy hardly comes as a surprise.

Consequently, given that William's intellectual, epistemological and hermeneutical crimes are numerous and grave, the best overall advice he gives is that 'you should give God the benefit of the doubt.' But atheists are rightfully scornful at such quasi-Pascalian attempts to water down Christian certainty to the merely probable. Even so, Williams' counsel seems a bit hypocritical given that he's not even sure there was a literal meeting between God and Moses in Exodus 3 (p. 145). If you throw out inerrancy and an historical Genesis, expecting a non-believer to assent to the existence of God takes considerably more faith than believing that life evolved from a primeval chemical soup.

A mutated theistic evolution

What would you expect from a man who routinely attempts to sidestep the Law of the Excluded Middle? A Designer who uses evolution? Definitely, but with a nuance that eludes me: 'Unlike many people who fall back on theistic evolution, I am not uncomfortable with the notion of periodic interference by God in natural processes. But nor am I wedded to the notion. When it comes to reconciling Darwinian evolution with God—or, rather, finding a strong pointer *towards* God in Darwinian evolution—it is another consideration that looms largest for me' (p. 57). What Williams seems to say—I say 'seems' because he is largely irresolute

when tackling the specifics—is that the necessary mutations are among those ‘finely-tuned phenomena—laws, processes and events—which have combined to produce life on Earth’ (p. 59). Mutations caused by ‘X-rays, cosmic rays, radioactive substances, various chemicals, and other genes known as “mutator genes” ... account for the development of life [which] came about in the ordinary statistical course of things, as a result of “natural processes” [but] that still does not make mutations truly random.’ This is the problem with theistic evolutionists, Williams’ protestations notwithstanding that he isn’t a purist, they never flesh out exactly why Jesus, the Creator, would zap life with rays and other phenomena to cause mutations in order to ‘improve’ his perfect creation. ‘The devil is in the detail’ is ironically apposite.

After scoffing at biblical literalists who take Genesis 1 seriously as an historical record, and after substituting

the plain meaning of these verses with an evolutionary one, Williams sums up his whole epistemological and hermeneutical exercise by suggesting non-believers ‘go back to the opening of the book of Genesis’ and asks them if ‘it now makes any better sense?’ He hopes it does and then approvingly quotes the Italian academic and writer Umberto Eco who stated, ‘once you say that the seven days of Creation are an expression of poetic license and can be taken figuratively, Genesis seems to allow Darwin everything’ (p. 60). Creationists would wholeheartedly agree—including *not allowing the Creator anything*—the very atheist position that Williams says he is arguing against.

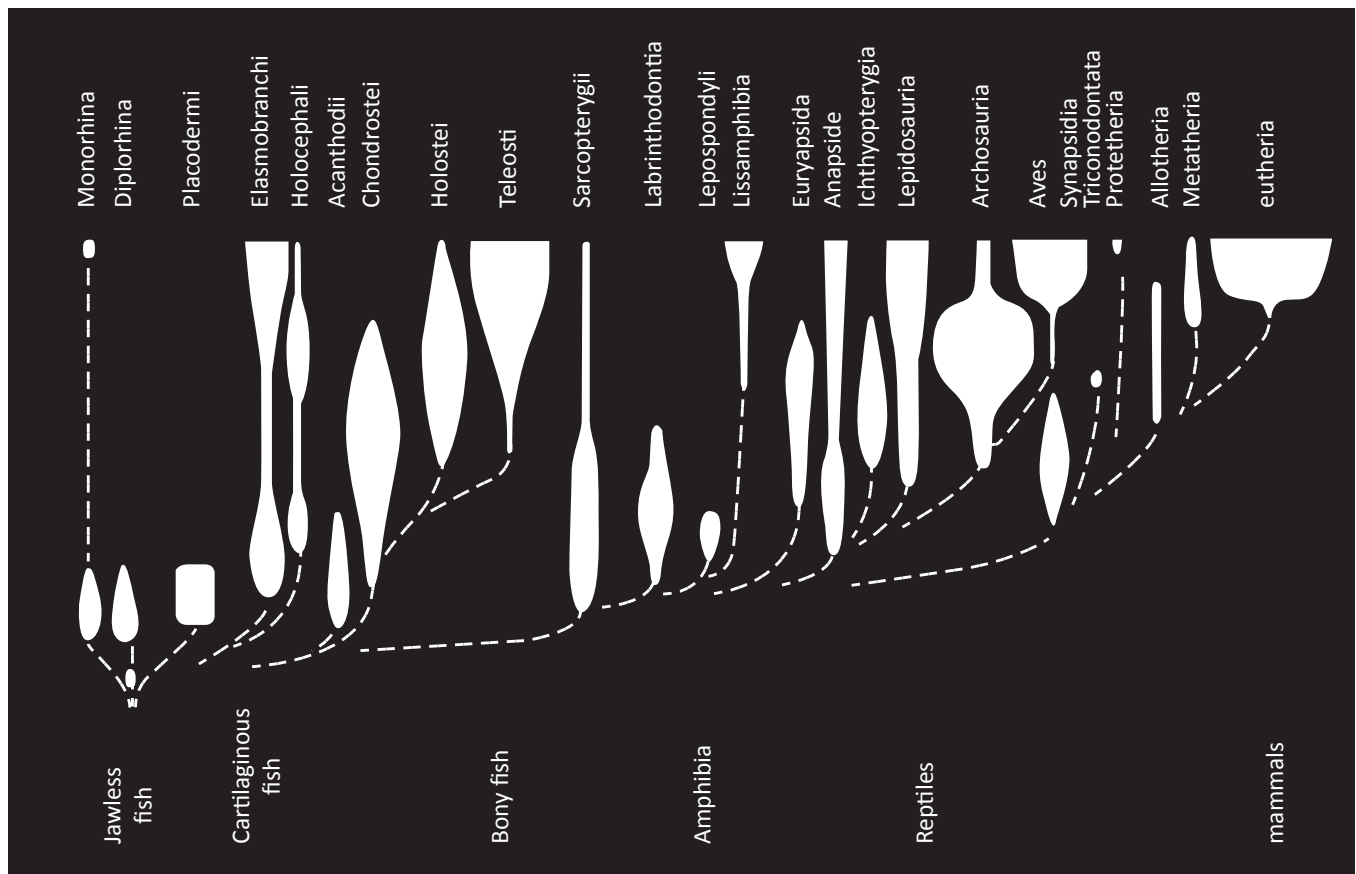
A plethora of errors

Williams believes that Darwinists have a strong scientific case against creationists who insist there is no evidence for descent from a common

ancestor. He believes that although there are gaps in the fossil record, this is explainable because ‘most organisms do not get buried in aquatic sediment’ (p. 55). But even so, the fossil record is still able to demonstrate this descent because it contains ‘quite abundant evidence of “intermediate” organisms connecting major groups.’

Organs he claims are ‘vestigial’ are proffered as evidence, as well as biogeography, various theoretical just-so stories about the human eye evolving from ‘primitive’ features found in flatworms, and the putative apodictic conclusions for the age of the earth and fossils derived from ‘radiocarbon [*sic*] dating’.

All this egregious tendentiousness may be—repeat, may be—excused because Williams is a poor scholar who is clearly deeply enamoured with this age’s pagan myth of origins. What is unpardonable, however, is his libellous manipulation of early theologians to suit his own ends. He calls creationists



Williams’ putative ‘quite abundant evidence of “intermediate” organisms connecting major groups’ is belied by the real situation. (After Carroll, ref. 7, p. 218).

‘blinker’ and then enlists, arguably, after Paul, the greatest Jewish scholar, Moses Maimonides, to support his view that Genesis 1 is mere metaphor. This claim is quite difficult to accept. In his most famous work, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides does make one comment that ostensibly seems to indicate a non-literal approach: ‘the account given in Scripture of the



Image from <www.wikipedia.com>

The Medieval Jewish scholar Maimonides held to a literal 6 days, not a metaphorical week as Williams claims.

creation is not, as is generally believed, intended to be in all parts literal’ (Pt 2, Ch. XXIX). However, Maimonides’ point is that certain words, indeed, the whole chapter, can have dual, ‘hidden’ meanings, which need intense study to comprehend the *actual events in detail* of that week. Not withstanding this, it’s clear from this and successive sections that he has no desire to transform Genesis 1 into allegory. Although Maimonides’ explanation does have its problems, he never refers to the days as anything but actual first, second, etc. normal day periods. He writes,

‘I told you that the foundation of our faith is the belief that God created the Universe from nothing; that time did not exist previously, but was created; for it depends on the motion of the sphere, and the sphere has been created. ... When the Universe was created, all things were created with size, intellect, and beauty fully developed, i.e. everything was created perfect ... The account of the six days of creation contains ... the statement: “Male and female created he them”, and concludes with the words: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” and yet the portion which follows describes the creation of Eve from Adam, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, the history

of the serpent and the events connected therewith, and all this as having taken place after Adam had been placed in the Garden of Eden. All our sages agree that this took place on the sixth day, and that nothing new was created after the close of the six days. None of the things mentioned above is therefore impossible, because the laws of Nature were then not yet permanently fixed’ (Pt 2, Ch. XXX).

Elsewhere he writes concerning why the Sabbath should be honoured:

‘... in order to confirm thereby the principle of Creation which will spread in the world ... For when the question is asked, why this is done, the answer is given: “for in six days the Lord hath made ... Thus God commanded us to abstain from work on the Sabbath, and to rest, for [this] purpose ... That we might confirm the true theory, that of the Creation, which at once and clearly leads to the theory of the existence of God”’ (Pt 2, Ch. XXXI).

Williams throws in the old furphy that Darwinian processes ‘account for variations within species (i.e. micro-evolution)’ (p. 49). He couldn’t be implying genetics because Darwin was singularly clueless about a discovery that arose from the creationist monk Mendel. And if Williams means natural selection, then this too is an ill-informed oversight because, as the late Loren Eiseley stated, ‘the leading tenets of Darwin’s work—the struggle for existence, variation, natural selection, and sexual selection—are all fully expressed’ in a paper written by creationist Edward Blyth in 1835.⁴

Heresy upon heresy

Williams again and again, quite forcefully, argues that ‘belief in God

is not inconsistent with belief in some form of Darwinian evolution; indeed, there are aspects of the process of Darwinian evolution that strongly suggest the existence of God’ (p. 47). Putting it in a much stronger claim, he states he is convinced that ‘the existence or otherwise of God does not hang on the truth or falsity of macro-evolution’ (p. 48). Here we go again: yet another Christian who wants to tell the atheist that he doesn’t even understand his own worldview. *Chutzpah* in abundance!

The question that I would like to ask Williams, as I ask anyone who has an opposing worldview, is, ‘What would falsify it?’ Judging by Williams’ admission it would seem nothing would. This is an untenable and philosophically dangerous position to stake out. He writes that blind chance is not satisfying as an ultimate explanation but that ‘it would not shake my belief in God if science were, eventually, to discover a self-replicating molecule or otherwise to expound some other purely physical explanation’ (p. 47). So there we have it: the atheist’s ultimate dream is Williams’ too. If all possible explanations are theistic, then who, may I ask, is this God of the Bible who declared to Moses, ‘I am who I am’?

So what does Williams believe? Confused, he states that it is ‘difficult to know who or what to believe in this debate’ (p. 56). Yet, quite confusingly, he writes a paragraph later, ‘The “choice”, then, would seem to lie between the Darwinian view that all mutations are truly random, and the view that most of the important mutations down the ages were not random, but deliberately planned and bought about.’ Williams odd inclusion of ‘choice’ with inverted commas signifies in fact no choice; for there is an outright proscription against a young-earth view because that would make one a ‘fundamentalist kook’ (p. 48) who is an ‘anti-intellectual [living] in the West ... fixated on the Creation/evolution debate [which] is more a product of deep disgust with modernity than reasoned study of the scientific and theological issues’ (p. 56). Fancy that!

It is ironic that Williams believes he has, by inference, undertaken a reasoned study of the scientific and theological issues. He believes that all those mutations caused by cosmic rays and the like are a sign that God is behind evolution (on p. 235, he connects it directly with the grace of God!). To support this final contention that one can be an intellectually fulfilled theistic evolutionist, he draws upon Darwin's supposed final affirmation of God. The irony, one that Williams even indicates but obdurately refuses to face, is that Darwin's faith was finally 'shattered by the death of his daughter'.⁵ In all likelihood, she died because of one of those mutations or disease-causing germs that Williams believes clearly points to God, ignoring the Fall.

However, Williams isn't satisfied for he has to universalize death and turn it into a 'good'. Logically flowing from his acceptance of a pagan theory of origins and his diminution of the historical passages of Genesis' first few chapters, Williams makes the extraordinary statement that 'human life is made meaningful by the inevitability of death. It is a positively good thing—an essential thing—that the human body, like all living organisms, is vulnerable to a thousand natural shocks. Otherwise we would all live forever. In short, a perfect physical world is a contradiction in terms. God would not have bothered creating it' (p. 134). Elsewhere, Williams juxtaposes the two alternatives: God intended the world to have suffering or there was a Fall and death entered the world because of it. His answer? '... suffering must always have been a part of God's plan ... [and approvingly quoting Paul Johnson] death is... absolutely central to [God's] concept of creation' (p. 219). If Williams thinks this is Jesus' 'Good News', then he has yet to comprehend the Gospel, e.g. where death is called 'the last enemy' (1 Corinthians 15:26).⁶

As I've already indicated, Williams' book is generously laced with sardonic comments levelled against young-earth creationists. This seems to be a catalyst for some rather biblically wayward ideas. Young-earth creationists are frequently charged with being divisive,

yet the extent that Williams goes to in order to deride creationists is clearly hypocritical. Williams certainly has never bothered to examine young-earth evidence, let alone engage with disinterest. As a consequence of not taking the data that support the young-earth hypothesis in an intellectually honest manner he stumbles over the theological significance. Williams, in an appalling obtuse outburst to defend his old age evolutionary heresy, states,

'The fact that God went about things in this way was extraordinarily wise, and it is surprising that neither atheists nor young-Earth proponents can see why. Try to imagine a world in which it were received *scientific fact*—and not merely the sincere though mistaken belief of a minority—that the Earth and Man were only a few thousand years old, a "sensible" age. Would there then be much, if any, room for doubt that both the Earth and Man had been created from nothing by a supernatural being? What role, if any, could faith play in human affairs? How would the psyche of modern Man cope with such knowledge?' (p. 137).

He then takes to task the legitimate atheist complaint against an evolutionary God who periodically intervenes, over billions of years, and who watches over the extinction of species and even phyla. He charges the atheist with irrationality for believing such a God a 'fumbling fool and a blunderer' and for concluding such a God could not exist. Would I be out of line to state that here is proof that the atheist understands the biblical God's character better than Williams?

A final word

My now deceased friend Brian Austin of The Mustard Seed bookshop in London used to say that the Church is yet to have its own Copernican Revolution. By this he meant that the Church's widespread support for evolution is proof that Aristotelianism is still a very powerful influence upon its thinking. Aristotle believed that 'God' was ultimately unknowable, did not really affect the creation and

his mind did not engage at all with it. Williams' support of mutations and the like being, somehow, God's 'creative' method is very much in this vein of an unknowable God. The Apostle Paul was clearly not an Aristotelian because he wrote to the Colossians and Laodiceans saying, 'My aim is that they may be encouraged, and be bound to one another by love, so attaining to the full blessedness of a firm and intelligent conviction, and to a perfect knowledge of God's secret truths which are embodied in Christ. For all God's treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found stored up in Christ. I say this so that no one may delude you by specious arguments.' Christ is the Creator and we can know his method of creation because he explains it in the Bible. Darwinian evolution is most certainly not it.

A common enough adage among bibliophiles is that life is far too short to read bad books. This is not only a poorly written book, it's positively parlous. More of how *not* to write a Christian defence than anything else, I cannot find even a single reason to recommend this book.

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