

Dancing between scientism and heterodoxy

A review of
*The Dance Between
Science and Faith*
by Nick Hawkes
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Andrew Kulikovsky

Nick Hawkes is an ordained minister of the Uniting Church of Australia and a part of the evangelical movement within that denomination. He worked as a research scientist before becoming a minister and this book is a product of his Doctorate of Ministry studies.

The Dance Between Science and Faith is yet another attempt to make Christians feel comfortable about having the truth claims of science undermine their faith and historic Christian doctrine. Hawkes argues that science and faith are compatible and can enrich each other. This is certainly true, but in the minds of far too many Christians, science is held in higher esteem and always seems to win in any conflict.

Hawkes rightly acknowledges that questions of science and faith continually impinge on ministry, and raises four issues that need to be answered when reaching those who do not attend church:

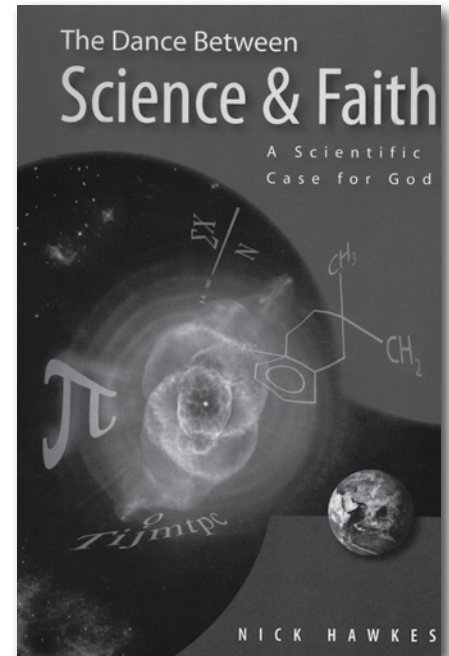
1. The perception that Christianity has generally been anti-science throughout history.
2. The perception that Christianity is not credible in light of modern scientific discoveries.
3. The question of whether order in creation points to existence of God.
4. The question of whether chaos and suffering in the world are evidence against the existence of God.

Regarding the first point, Hawkes claims the relationship between science and Christianity in history has alternated between antagonism and co-operation. This is a strange argument to make given that science is a relatively recent phenomenon that was a direct product of the Judeo-Christian worldview. How can Christianity be antagonistic to something it invented and developed?^{1,2}

Hawkes cautions against tying the understanding of Scripture too closely to contemporary science, but this is exactly what he tends to do throughout the book. In fact, it is clear that he is quite ignorant of the history and development of modern science, and appears to presume that science arose independently of Christianity.

In order to support his assertion that Christianity is perceived to have been anti-science throughout history, Hawkes cites the 1991 National Church Life Survey which reported that 51% of church-goers did not believe in evolution, and those holding to a literal biblical view “were likely to be young, less educated and unlikely to belong to an Anglican or Uniting Church” (p. 17).

Firstly, Hawkes presumes that being anti-evolution and holding to a biblical young earth view is equivalent to being anti-science! This is absurd and demonstrates that Hawkes does not understand the grounds on which creationists reject evolution, nor does he understand that evolution is not empirical science. Secondly, by noting the demographics of those that accept the young-earth-creationist (YEC) view (young, less educated and not Anglican or Uniting Church members), Hawkes appears to be suggesting that such people are naïve, ignorant and stupid! He does not seem to consider the alternative view that members of Anglican and Uniting churches are less likely to have been exposed to



robust and up-to-date presentations of young-earth-creationist exegesis and scientific research, and more likely to be affected by the rampant theological and ethical liberalism within both those denominations.

He also cites the 1999 Gallup survey from the USA that asks people if they believed in young-earth creationism. The survey showed declining percentages as level of education increased. Again, the implication is that only ignorant, stupid and uneducated people believe in YEC. This whole line of argument is just absurd! Level of education is not a true or accurate measure of intelligence or knowledge. It often indicates indoctrination, especially given the overwhelmingly leftist and misotheistic bias of university professors.³ There are many well-educated people with advanced degrees in science who reject evolution and hold to YEC. In any case, the overwhelming majority of “leading” scientists don’t believe in a personal God let alone Christianity.⁴ Does this mean that belief in God and commitment to Christianity are indicative of a lack of education?

There is a shocking abuse of statistics in his reference to the 1969 Carnegie Commission Survey (USA) showing scientists “attended church



Copernicus held a position as a church official. He delayed publication of his heliocentric theory out of fear of ridicule from scientists rather than from the church.

with the same regularity as the general population” (p. 18). But the intellectual and moral climate of the academy in 1969 was much different from today. Moreover, church attendance is not a reliable guide to actual belief in God or Christian commitment. Indeed, many people, including scientists, attend church for social and political connections and networking opportunities. This is particularly the case for Uniting and Anglican Churches in Australia!

Hawkes asserts that those who appear antagonistic to “conventional science” cause many “to believe that the dead hand of religion is still trying to suppress the truth that was hard won and emancipated by the enlightenment” (p. 16). He adds that, judging by books that discuss science in Christian book stores, most people would assume that most church ministers are against “conventional science”. By conventional science, he means *evolution* (see Introduction, fn. 2) and he repeatedly equates the two concepts throughout the book. But this argument is clearly nonsense. Evolution is not empirical science, and it is conventional only in the sense that

it is accepted as truth by the majority of scientists. Yet wide-spread acceptance is neither a necessary nor a sufficient test of truth. What critics of evolution question is not science *per se*, but claims of scientific truth that have little or no empirical support. As creationists and other opponents of evolution have shown, evolutionary theory is mere philosophical speculation dressed up to sound like science.

Copernicus and Galileo

Hawkes claims that theology suppressed the “scientific discoveries in astronomy of Nicholas Copernicus and Galileo Galilei” (p. 26). But the ideas of Galileo and Copernicus were not strictly scientific in the modern Baconian sense. They did not actually discover anything; they merely proposed models, both of which were eventually proved to have incorrect details.

It should be noted that the Church did not reject Copernicanism. In fact, church officials encouraged Copernicus to publish his work. In the case of Galileo, Cardinal Barberini (who would later become pope and bring proceedings against Galileo)

merely wanted to ensure that Galileo did not teach something as proven fact when no proof had actually been offered. Hawkes, on the other hand, claims that Galileo suffered from “the technical inability of the clerics in power to fully understand complex mathematical arguments of astronomy and appreciate the compelling nature of its arguments” (p. 28). On this point Hawkes has let his imagination run wild. Galileo offered no such technical and compelling arguments! Galileo offered no proof at all and it was only in response to mounting pressure to produce a proof, that Galileo offered the tides as his proof. This so-called proof was, of course, completely wrong. The tides are caused by the moon’s gravitational field. In fact, it would be another 200 years before a sufficient proof was given.⁵ In this respect, Barberini was more scientific than Galileo.⁶

Science and the Bible

Like many theistic evolutionists and old-earth creationists, Hawkes advocates the “two books of revelation” theory—the Bible being one book and nature being the other. Science is concerned with the book of nature, and theology is concerned with the Bible, and each discipline must participate in dialogue and open itself up to be informed by the other. In practice, however, the dialogue becomes a monologue. For Hawkes and other dual revelation advocates, the truth claims of science always trump the propositions in scripture. He acknowledges, albeit disapprovingly, that Calvin “believed the Bible was needed to correct the imperfect understandings gleaned from nature” (p. 34).

In Hawkes’ view, the Creation and Flood accounts are written in a way that accommodates human capacity and understanding. In other words, the descriptions of events, people and places are not literal straightforward descriptions. But Hawkes equivocates over the meaning of the “accommodation approach” to

interpreting Scripture. This is evident when he cites Calvin in support of the accommodation approach. Calvin was actually referring to the way God acted in history, not the way that history was revealed and recorded in Scripture. In other words, God has acted in history in a way that accords with human capacity. Calvin was not referring to hermeneutical approaches, but to the reason why God took six days as opposed to creating a fully developed universe in an instant. In any case, Calvin believed in six day YEC.⁷

According to Hawkes, “Science introduces us to the dangerous possibility of God” (p. 182). It does? In what way? Why aren’t more scientists believers?

Hawkes acknowledges that science does not and should not have a monopoly on truth: “Science can be wrong. What we know today is not all there is to know. Scientific knowledge is continually evolving” (p. 51). However, the reasoning employed throughout the book is that “scientific truth” trumps all other truth claims.

He asserts that “[m]any good reasons exist to challenge the perception that Christianity is not scientifically credible” (p. 15). But this reveals a deep conceptual confusion about the nature of science. There are many key aspects of Christianity that are *not* scientifically credible (e.g. Virgin birth, Christ’s miracles and resurrection). Compatibility with scientific knowledge and reasoning is not the litmus test of objective truth. Christianity is certainly reasonable, but not necessarily *scientifically* reasonable. It violates scientific rules and reason (or rather, the “scientific” *presupposition* that the universe is a closed system) because it is inherently supernatural.

He adds “Many Christians believe the Genesis accounts of creation are timeless stories designed to tell us theology’s ‘who and why’ rather than science’s ‘how and when.’” (p. 177). But this is trite nonsense. Why is

science alone capable of telling us how and when? He continues:

“Science tells us that random events, death and competition between organisms are necessary factors required in order to allow the generation of new developments within a universe that seems so conducive to allowing increasing diversity” (p. 179).

Science tells us nothing of the sort—*scientists* who are committed to a materialistic *worldview* tell us this.

Evolution and the big bang

Hawkes is clearly committed to theistic evolution. He approvingly quotes Arthur Peacock: “no professional, informed biologist works honestly without acknowledging the correctness of evolutionary theory” (p. 61), and concludes that: “it must be acknowledged that the evolutionary theory has proved to be an excellent, well attested model that explains the development of the diversity of life forms that exist” (p. 61).

He is even willing to defend Darwin, arguing that “Darwin never denied design but believed it was due to natural selection” (p. 42). In what possible way can natural selection be regarded as design? It is the very antithesis of design! Hawkes does, however, acknowledge that “evolution does not yet adequately explain how distinctly new species come about” (p. 61).

Hawkes also appears to have misrepresented Charles Hodge’s views on evolution. He writes: “[Charles] Hodge saw no reason to reject the science behind the theory of evolution” (p. 44). It is not clear what he means by “the science behind the theory”. Darwin’s book was not an empirical scientific work. It contains only a series of philosophical speculations about the history of the natural world. In any case, Hodge explicitly rejected Darwinism, and called it for what it is: “atheism”.⁸

Due to his commitment to theistic evolution, Hawkes uncritically accepts

all evolutionary truth claims including the standard old-earth geological time scale. One also gets the impression that because some notable Christian writer proposes some theory or accepts some explanation, Hawkes believes that this somehow makes it a valid Christian position that is compatible with the teachings of Scripture. Of course, there are also many scientists who use religious language or talk about or refer to “God” in their writings, but they are not referring to the personal God of the Bible. They are referring to an impersonal deistic power.

But the critical point here is that if human beings just evolved through mutations and natural selection, then what does it mean to be “created” in the “image of God” (Gen 1:26–27)?

Not surprisingly, Hawkes accepts the big bang theory and believes the “evidence for the cosmic big bang is very compelling” (p. 55). But any argument is compelling if you only ever consider the evidence put forward by its supporters! Hawkes gives no indication that he is aware of the many fundamental problems with the theory, and makes statements that he really does not understand it himself. For example, he states that red-shifting of starlight is caused by the Doppler effect when it is actually meant to be caused by cosmological expansion. He claims Alexander Friedmann discovered an error in Einstein’s static universe solution to the field equations. This is not true. Friedmann simply found another solution that allowed for a non-static universe. In fact, Hawkes appears to have garbled the facts: Einstein thought that he had found an error in Friedmann’s non-static universe solution, but Friedmann demonstrated to Einstein that his solution was indeed correct.⁹

Hawkes also claims Gamow predicted the background radiation temperature to be -268°C (5 K), which was later verified by Penzias and Wilson in 1964. This is not true. Gamow made several predictions, the latest being 50 K just four years before

Penzias and Wilson’s discovery—an order of magnitude off the actual measurement.¹⁰ He goes on to state that the COBE satellite measured the temperature to be -270.3°C (2.7 K) in 1989 and showed that it “had a spectrum which exactly matched that which was predicted” (p. 55). This is patently untrue and exemplifies Hawkes’ sloppy research. Although he notes that the necessary ripples in the background radiation were “discovered” in 1992 in the COBE data, he fails to point out that this was more than two years after it was collected and only after sophisticated statistical filtering was applied to the data set.¹¹ Even then the amount of variation was an order of magnitude less than what was predicted/expected.¹²

Ultimately, Hawkes reason for accepting big-bang cosmology is linked to his commitment to theistic evolution: “the universe needs to be as big as it is to allow sufficient time for it to be old enough to allow life as we know it to develop on any one planet” (p. 117).

The Fall

As in all non-YEC interpretations, the Fall presents a real theological problem. Hawkes describes the account of the Fall as a “theologically illustrative story” (p. 158). In other words, it is not a true historical account. But if it is only an illustrative story then how does it translate into actual reality and history? Hawkes claims his view is orthodox Christian theology and appeals to liberal theologian Paul Tillich(!) for support. According to Tillich, the Fall is a symbol of humans denying their essential nature and destroying their own humanity by choosing to sin. In Tillich’s view, sin is estrangement from God as a result of unbelief and is characterized by (1) lack of faith; (2) hubris/pride; and (3) concupiscence (unbounded striving after knowledge, sex and power). These may well be manifestations of the sinful nature, but the orthodox definition of sin is “a violation of the moral law of God.” Furthermore, Tillich believed the Fall

had cosmic significance and included nature because human beings are part of nature and cannot be separated from it.

But how did this all happen? “Story” is not “history”. Stories are fiction. What actually occurred in history that resulted in a diminished creation? What actual historical event damaged or destroyed the relationships between God and His creation? This is a key point. The revelation value of the Bible depends on its historical reliability. Historical narrative explicitly appeals to history (actual names, places, events, dates etc.) to verify what it teaches. If these references are not trustworthy, then why should we consider the theology to be trustworthy? If we cannot connect the Fall to actual historical events then it becomes, as Schaeffer put it, simply an upper-story, mystical event. It has no historical grounding. It is merely a connotation—a symbol (p. 158). Thus, Hawkes’ view of the Fall is at least heterodox theology if not outright heresy. It is neo-orthodoxy in the same tradition as Tillich. Schaeffer explains the absurdity of this position:

“Neo-orthodoxy leads to a dead end with a dead God, as has already been demonstrated by the theology of the sixties. And is it not curious that some evangelicals are just now picking this up as if it were the thing we should hold if we are to be ‘with it’ today? But equally significant, note that the liberal pastor and *the leader with the weakened view of Scripture who calls himself an evangelical* both end up in the same

place—*with no other final plea than ‘an inner witness.’ They have no final, objective authority.*”¹³

According to Hawkes, death and suffering came about as a result of humanity’s rebellion against God, but affected all of time including time before humans came into being. “Sin is able to do this because it is an affront to God who stands outside time” (p. 166). But what rebellion in particular is he talking about (i.e. what historical event)? How does the fact that God stands outside time change the normal cause and effect relationship such that an event in time may generate effects prior to that time? Hawkes’ explanation is illogical and theological nonsense, and is indicative of deep-seated theological confusion.

Anti-young-earth creationist

Unfortunately the tone of the book is very anti-YEC in a condescending and passive-aggressive way. Hawkes frequently refers to YECs as “biblical literalists” even though this is a



After Domenichino <www.wikipedia.com>

Accounting for the Fall is a major problem for all non-YEC interpretations and especially for the theistic evolution view.

grossly inaccurate description of their grammatical-historical hermeneutic.¹⁴ He suggests YECs hold “extreme views” (p. 62).

In an attempt to discredit YECs, Hawkes cites J. Rennie’s *Scientific American* article “15 Answers to Creationist Nonsense”, but did not bother to cite creationist rebuttals.¹⁵ He then argues that “in the interests of both truth and fruitful dialogue, apologists should distance themselves from such a literalist understanding for it will rightly fuel the incredulity and contempt of the scientific community” (p. 63). Again, the YEC view is NOT “a literalist understanding”, and our concern is discovering *truth* not seeking the approval and endorsement of the scientific community! He states that “good theology that takes into account the context and literary form of Scripture will prevent Christians from engaging in ill-founded biblical literalism” (p. 64). But he offers no examples of this supposed ill-founded literalism, nor is there any attempt to engage with the “biblical literalists” with whom he disagrees, nor any attempt to show how or why they are mistaken.

Hawkes’ whole approach borders on hubris and is rather grating coming from someone who evidently has shown so little respect for truth and accuracy in this book! He needs to be humble enough to accept that Christians who accept YEC do so because they believe that God’s special revelation in the early chapters of Genesis is a more reliable account of the origins of the universe than the reasoning and truth claims of fallible scientists. Moreover, he needs to acknowledge that many good and highly qualified scientists hold to a YEC interpretation of the scientific data and the Genesis account of creation.¹⁶

Conclusion

I have actually met and talked with Hawkes several times (although we did not discuss the issues he raises in the book), and I found him to be a

genuinely good man who loves God and is devoted to reaching people for Christ. However, I am greatly disappointed at the poor level of scholarship he has displayed here.

Altogether, this is a particularly disturbing book that is poorly researched. Some of the views expressed are a departure from orthodox theology and indicate deep theological confusion. The book contains many errors of fact, illogical argument, and condescension. It should have been entitled either *Dancing Between Scientism and Heterodoxy* or *Dancing Around Faith to Bow Before Science*, since, despite protests to the contrary, the author clearly holds the truth claims of scientists above the revelation found in Scripture.

In any case, the book really does not offer much help to Christians trying to understand the relationship between science and Christianity. In fact, it is likely to raise even more questions and create more confusion. It is, unfortunately, a very poor contribution that adds almost nothing to the debate.

References

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2. Furthermore, the rediscovery of the grammatical-historical hermeneutic during the Reformation played a vital role in the birth of modern science. See Harrison, P., *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2001; review by Weinberger, L., Reading the Bible and understanding nature, this issue, pp. 21–24.
3. Rothman, S., Lichter, S.R. and Nevitte, N., Politics and Professional Advancement Among College Faculty, *The Forum: A Journal of Applied Research in Contemporary Politics* 3(1):205 | DOI: 10.2202/1540-8884.1067, <www.bepress.com/forum/vol3/iss1/art2>. “A randomly based national survey of 1643 faculty members from 183 four-year colleges and universities finds that liberals and Democrats outnumber conservatives and Republicans by large margins, and the differences are not limited to

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4. Larson, E.J. and Witham, L., Leading scientists still reject God, *Nature* 394(6691):313, 23 July 1998. The sole criterion for being classified as a “leading” or “greater” scientist was membership of the National Academy of Sciences (USA); see also <creation.com/article/godlessnas>.
5. By Friedrich Bessel in 1842, when he became the first to perform a parallax measurement of the distance to a star, showing that the sun not the earth was the approximate centre of mass of our solar system.
6. See Schirrmacher, T., The Galileo Affair: history or heroic hagiography, *J. Creation* 14(1):91–100, 2000; <creation.com/gal-affair>.
7. See Calvin, J., *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, vol. 1, p. 78, 1948; for some of his explicit statements, see <creation.com/calvin>.
8. Hodge, C., *What is Darwinism?* London, 1874.
9. See <www-history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk/Biographies/Friedmann.html>.
10. Assis, A.K.T. and Neves, M.C.D., History of the 2.7 K temperature prior to Penzias and Wilson, *Apeiron* 2(3):83, 1995.
11. And COBE’s successor WMAP is no better. See Robitaille, P.-M., WMAP: A radiological analysis, *Progress in Physics* 1:3–18, January 2007; Hartnett, J., WMAP “proof” of big bang fails normal radiological standards, *J. Creation* 21(2):5–7, 2007.
12. Williams, A and Hartnett, J., *Dismantling the Big Bang*, Master Books, Portland, OR, pp. 127–128, 2005.
13. Schaeffer, F.A., *The Great Evangelical Disaster*; in: *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, vol. 4, pp. 334–335, 1984; my emphasis.
14. See Kulikovskiy, A., The Bible and hermeneutics, *J. Creation* 19(3):14–20, 2005; <creation.com/hermeneutics>.
15. See Sarfati, J., 15 Ways to Refute Materialist Bigotry, <creation.com/sciam>, 20 June 2002.
16. See for example those listed on the CMI website: <creation.com/bios>.