

Does Genesis allow any scientific theory of origin?—a response to J.P. Dickson

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This article argues that the patristic exegesis of Genesis, including that of St Augustine, assumes and endorses a literalistic view of human origins, particularly an instantly created Adam as the sole progenitor of the human race. It points out the areas where the theory of Neo-Darwinism is inconsistent with this approach, and constitutes a break with historic Christian doctrine and exegesis.

Twenty years ago a minister of a large evangelical/reformed congregation in Holland was preaching on Genesis 1:1. His message was:

“Of course Moses did not write it. The Israelites only had a Bible with stories about Abraham and after. The rest was invented during the Babylonian captivity when Jewish children asked their parents about the origins of the world. Please don’t ask whether Genesis 1 happened historically. It is just a religious way of saying that sometime, somehow, God stood at the beginning of everything. There is no conflict between evolutionistic science and the Bible.”

This approach to Genesis continues to be popular, also in circles with a strong reformed inheritance. In Australia, John P. Dickson (a prominent spokesperson in the Anglican diocese of Sydney) has been encouraging a “symbolic reading” of Genesis 1 and the creation story for several years now. Like many scholars in non- or formerly-evangelical churches before him, he effectively tries to create a ‘safe haven’ for faith and Scripture against the onslaught of Neo-Darwinism and other secular scientific views on the origin of man. If not, then certainly a safe-haven for Darwinism in the Church. It doesn’t matter what scientific view you hold to, Genesis 1 always fits the bill. Or so Dickson claims (in his abstract):

“The paper seeks to plot a path through the controversy surrounding the Bible’s opening chapter by examining Genesis 1 in historical context. The author assumes and endorses no particular view of human origins but argues for a literal interpretation of the text, as opposed to what may be called ‘literalistic’.”

As his article unfolds, ‘literal’ appears to fit virtually any scientific theory of origin, including Neo-Darwinism. The author emphatically states:

“In fact, the case made below is consistent with virtually any scientific account of origins” (2008:3).

This article considers Dickson’s views, their doctrinal implications and the patristic sources that he calls

in to support his theory.¹ The way Dickson deals with the Church Fathers sheds light on his methodology, so this is a good starting point to evaluate his approach. He claims that his kind of symbolic reading of Genesis has existed for many centuries and found a place in Jewish and Christian tradition. Through Philo of Alexandria, Clement of the same city, Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo a symbolic approach to Genesis 1 claims an accepted place among Judaism and Christianity alike. At least, that is the idea. Is this really so? Is there a possibility that Dickson’s claims rest on hearsay, rather than a careful consultation of the primary sources?

Philo Judæus (c. 20 BC–AD 50)

Although Philo was a Jew who did not believe in Jesus, and should perhaps not be used to set a standard for Christian exegesis, I am happy to look into the question whether he can be used as a precedent for a wholesale ‘non-literalistic’ of the kind that Dr Dickson suggests. Dickson quotes from Colson and Whitaker’s introduction to the Loeb edition of Philo (dating back to 1929) to pave the way for his non-literalistic reading of the days in Genesis 1.

“By ‘six days’ Moses does not indicate a space of time in which the world was made, but the principles of *order* and *productivity* which governed its making.”

This quote is not a support for what Dickson seeks to achieve in this particular context (using Philo as a precedent for a reading of Genesis that fits any theory of origin). In more recent scholarship, Philo specialist David Runia calls for caution:

“In actual fact, strange as it may seem, Philo scarcely allegorizes the account of Genesis 1 (it is excluded from his two series of allegorical commentaries).”²

From a patristic point of view, the fact that Philo recognizes order and productivity in the creation account, and points this out, does not deny that he also saw Genesis 1 as factual history. Yes, the quote from the introduction to Colson’s translation leaves room for Dickson’s

interpretation. Even Runia's Genesis commentary (2001, not consulted by Dickson's original article) seems to, but Colson and Runia cannot be used for what Dickson seeks to prove.

Even a superficial consultation of modern scholarship shows that Philo cannot be used as a precedent for a wholesale 'non-literalistic' approach. In Alexandrine philosophy and theology there are often layers of interpretation of the sacred text that do not rule one another out. It is not either/or, but both. Sometimes only one interpretation is relevant for the writer's present goal, but that doesn't mean that Philo rigidly clings to one possibility like a 19th-century German source critic. For Philo it often was history *and* allegory.

Thomas H. Tobin (*The Creation of Man: Philo And The History of Interpretation*, 1983:154):

"This appears most clearly in the Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus. In both of these works, literal and allegorical interpretations lie side by side. Philo is obviously more interested in the allegorical interpretation, but, for the most part, the literal interpretations are also considered valid and valuable."

A closer look at Philo's writings on the subject confirms this. The Alexandrian himself³ says:

"The nation of the Jews keep every seventh day regularly, after each interval of six days; and there is an account of events recorded in the history of the creation of the world, comprising a sufficient relation of the cause of this ordinance; for the sacred historian says, that the world was created in six days, and that on the seventh day God desisted from his works, and began to contemplate what he had so beautifully created" (*On the Decalogue* XX,97).⁴

Philo makes it abundantly clear that he regarded Genesis 1 as a historical account: "Account of events recorded in the history of the creation of the world", "for the sacred historian", and a "beautifully created" world. Do you want it any clearer? Whatever one's personal thoughts on the subject, it is clear what Philo thought. It is at best a logical fallacy to suggest that Philo practised a symbolic reading of Genesis only.

In fact, on a historical level of interpretation, the Alexandrian philosopher actually denies that God used periods of non-specified lengths of time. This is the very



Figure 1. Philo of Alexandria (20 BC–AD 50)

opposite of what Dickson alleges. Yes, as a theoretical possibility Philo allows that God could have taken any amount of time other than six days. Who could deny that, when speaking about a sovereign God? But one has to read further. Like Augustine a few centuries later, Philo considers the possibility that God could have done it quicker than in six days, rather than longer! However, that is not his personal view in *On the Decalogue*. Philo settles for a historical creation in six days and argues for historically founded creation ordinances:

"But God, on one occasion, employed the six days for the completion of the world, though he had no need of any length of

time for such a purpose; but each man, as partaking of a mortal nature, and as being in need of ten thousand things for the unavoidable necessities of life, ought not to hesitate, even to the end of his life, to provide himself with all requisites, always allowing himself an interval of rest on the sacred seventh day" (*On the Decalogue* XX,99).⁵

In this way, Philo stated, a Jew who keeps the Sabbath may be confident that he is imitating God. He is not using a symbolic day in Genesis to argue for a literal day in the present. Philo uses the actual length of the period of the days in Genesis to argue for literal days now.

"The commandment, in effect says: Always imitate God; let that one period of seven days⁶ in which God created the world, be to you a complete example of the way in which you are to obey the law, and an all-sufficient model for your actions" (*On the Decalogue* XX,100).⁷

Even if Philo had not been taking these 'literalistic' approaches in his writings on the Ten Commandments, his Genesis commentary is thoroughly 'literalistic' in places. He affirms Adam as the first, instantly created, original man and the primeval founder of the human race. Philo's approach rules out many scientific theories of origin, particularly Neo-Darwinism, the prevailing paradigm of contemporary science.

Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150–215)

Dickson's argument becomes confused when he tries to build a whole string of assumptions on his earlier inaccurate representation of Philo. Dickson says that Christian theologian and evangelist Clement of



Figure 2. Clement of Alexandria (c. ad 150–215)

Alexandria followed Philo's interpretation. This statement is rather puzzling, as Philo didn't have the interpretation that Dickson alleges. But in a way it is true in the sense that Clement followed Philo's interpretation: like Philo he was also some sort of a six-day literalist,⁸ upholding an instantly created historical Adam as the forefather of us all, like all his Jewish and Christian contemporaries.

As with Philo, Dickson does not seem to realize that in patristic literature the recognition of potent symbolism in a text is not necessarily a denial of its historicity.

On the basis of *Stromata* 6.16, Dickson alleges that for Clement of Alexandria the days in Genesis are symbolic. While this may be so, with Church Fathers it pays to have a look at the genre of a book, its purpose and context. In this respect I would add a *caveat*, that some caution applies. The *Stromata* are not so much books by Clement, but rather an assemblage of bits and pieces collected by Clement, so it could be premature to conclude off-hand that a reference to the *Stromata* equals a reference to Clement's opinion. *Stromata* 6.16 might not be a reflection of his own views, as Clement introduces it as a "specimen of Gnostic interpretation of the Ten Commandments" (Ἰπόδειγμα δ' ἡμῖν κατὰ παραδρομὴν ἐκείσθω εἰς σαφήνειαν γνωστικὴν ἢ δεκάλογος.).

The main question is: Does Clement make out a case for symbolic use of the Days of Creation in *Stromata* 6.16? The answer is: he may have done it elsewhere, but doesn't do it here. This chapter actually confirms that creation was completed in six days as we experience them. What is more, Clement places this in a firm (pre-) scientific context of his time: medicine, science, maths and philosophy. He uses the days it takes for an embryo to develop in the same breath as he speaks about the six days of creation.⁹

The days in Genesis are not part of his symbolic case. On the contrary, he bases his symbolic case on them.

Augustin AD (354 – 430)

The confusion continues as Dickson calls in St Augustine to support his theory. Dr Dickson

overlooks that Augustine stressed the historical layer of interpretation more as he grew older, and perhaps wiser. One of the present standard works on Patristic Studies (Moreschini and Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature, a literary history, volume two*, pp. 386–387, 2005) cautions:

"The most important of Augustine's exegetic works, *On Genesis Literally Interpreted (De Genesi AD litteram)*, is directed in part against the Manicheans. As the title indicates, Augustine here renounces all allegorical and typological interpretation such as he had used in his preceding work of exegesis of Genesis. He rejects such interpretations even of the existence and location of the earthly paradise. This work is undoubtedly one of the most important of those produced by the ancients on the interpretation of Genesis, as well as one of the most important of Augustine's writings. His purpose is to show that there is no contradiction between the facts of creation of the world and humanity, even when these are taken literally, and the human sciences as represented in particular by philosophy."

Augustine believed in a literal creation of Adam and Eve, in an earthly paradise that could be located. According to Moreschini and Norelli, the older Augustine rejected many of his earlier allegorical and symbolic interpretations of Genesis. This basic patristic knowledge of Augustine's approach to Genesis should have ruled out using him for a symbolic interpretation of Genesis that fits

any scientific theory. In Dickson's terms, the mature Augustine was a committed 'literalist'. This is evident not only from *On Genesis Literally Interpreted*, but also from his other main work, *The City of God*.

Dickson continues:

"Augustine understood the 'days' in Genesis 1 as successive epochs in which the substance of matter, which God had created in an instant in the distant past, was fashioned into the various forms we now recognise."

Dickson correctly asserts that Augustine suggested an instant creation that was worked out afterwards. But he does not rely on the primary sources when he says that the church father suggested that this was in a distant past. On the contrary, Augustine positively affirmed that this moment took place some eight thousand years ago:



Figure 3. Augustine of Hippo (c.1480)

“They are deceived, too, by those highly mendacious documents which profess to give the history of many thousand years, though, reckoning by the sacred writings, we find that not 6000 years have yet passed” (*De Civitate Dei* 12.10, “Of the Falseness of the history which allots many thousand years to the world’s past”).

What is even less well known is that Augustine firmly teaches that the whole human race descends from one man. He spells this out in *De Civitate Dei* 12.21 (“*That there was created at first but one Individual, and that the human Race was created in Him*”).¹⁰

On top of this, Augustine took the genealogies in Genesis as reliable history, including Enoch’s translation (*De Civitate Dei* 15.19), making a point of confirming that the ages of Methuselah and the others were real years and confirmed a worldwide flood as a historic reality (*De Civitate Dei* 15.27, cf. 15.13, 21). It is as clear as the daylight of creation: Even Augustine leaves no room for Dickson’s theory. Alas, the Church Fathers seem to suffer the same fate as the classics: often referred to, but not always read.

Fathers in general

The evaluation of Philo, Clement and Augustine shows that Dickson’s antiliteralistic, symbolic interpretation of Genesis lacks support in history and the sources he refers to. It is a post-modern reinterpretation of what, in Dickson’s view, early philosophers and Fathers should have said. Although they allow for symbolic interpretation, often in addition to their understanding that it was history, their symbolism is of a very different kind than what Dickson’s theory proposes. Even Augustine has a far more ‘literalistic’ approach to number symbolism than Dickson (2008:8).¹¹

The main problem with Dickson’s thesis for the field of patristic studies is not even his shaky methodology, but the fact that his theory is in flagrant opposition to virtually *all* Fathers. On one crucial point Dickson’s interpretation of Genesis 1 as symbolism (allegedly fitting any scientific theory of origin) is ruled out by every available Church Father, including Ambrose of Milan (who was otherwise allegorically inclined). That is where it concerns the creation of man.

“The Fathers are in accord in teaching that God immediately created the first man, both as to body and soul.”¹²

In other words, all Fathers taught a ‘literalistic’ interpretation of Genesis where the origin of mankind was concerned.¹³ None of them leaves room for the concept of common descent from animals, which is foundational to secular scientific thinking in the 21st century. All Fathers teach an immediate, historical creation of Adam. Not as a symbol, but as the first historical man.

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) shares this approach. Dickson’s article ignores that Thomas didn’t make a wholesale endorsement of Augustine’s view of creation, particularly not as he matured. The *Summa Theologica* combines aspects of Augustine’s view with a most literalistic approach to the text. Thomas even argues against actual death in the animal world before the Fall (ST.I.72 AD 5),¹⁴ and tells us that “since man before he sinned would have used the things of this world conformably to the order designed, poisonous animals would not have injured him” (ST.I.72 AD 6).¹⁵ In fact, earlier allowances that Thomas made as a young scholar in the *Sentences* (*Scriptum super Sententiis*, a commentary on Peter Lombard’s views) should be seen in their proper light. The *Summa* shows that eventually Thomas seems to have settled on the literal sense of the word ‘day’ for Genesis 1. He even accepted that the day period was observed before the sun, moon and stars were created:

“The general division of time into day and night took place on the first day, as regards the diurnal movement, which is common to the whole heaven and may be understood to have begun on that first day. But the particular distinctions of days and seasons and years, according as one day is hotter than another, one season than another, and one year than another, are due to certain particular movements of the stars: which movements may have had their beginning on the fourth day” (ST.I.70.2).¹⁶

In all things it was for Thomas ultimately: *In contrarium sufficit auctoritas Scripturae*.

Dickson’s views on Genesis are in fact a major clash with all the Fathers, including Augustine, and medieval scholars like Thomas, to whom he refers for approval. For none of them was the creation story mere symbolism. All of them took at least crucial parts (also) very literally as history. And it is those crucial parts that seem irreconcilable with the Neo-Darwinist theory of origins, to mention just one view that Dickson allegedly accommodates.



Figure 4. Thomas Aquinas by Benozzo Gozzoli (1420–1497)



Figure 5. The Fall of Adam and Eve (Notre Dame, Paris)

No Mosaic authorship

Dickson not only finds himself at grave odds with the Fathers and traditional Christianity where it concerns allowing denial of the immediate creation of Adam as the first historical man. Dickson (2008:9) also rejects the Mosaic authorship of Genesis 1:

“In the case of Genesis we absolutely must remember that this text was composed two and half thousand years before the scientific era.”

It is the same old story of 19th-century liberal scholarship all over again: Jewish exiles ‘inventing’ their own creation story, in opposition to Babylonian creation myths, nearly a thousand years after Moses.

Again, none of the Church Fathers endorsed this approach. They had a very different view on the origin of the book of Genesis and believed that Moses wrote it (c. 1400 BC). Dickson’s denial of this has consequences for the way the New Testament is approached as well. The traditional Mosaic link between the opening verses of John’s Gospel and Genesis (Jesus as the Word of God through whom all things were made ‘in the beginning’) disappears. Jesus claims that Moses wrote about Him (John 5:46). This is linked to the first creation (John 1:1–17) and the second creation (regeneration and salvation, John 3:1–18). Dickson’s theory breaks this Mosaic connection in the literary context of this Gospel as far as natural history is concerned. For Dickson’s Moses, Jesus was all about salvation. For John’s Moses, however, Jesus was the Creator (maker and rightful owner) *and* Saviour (redeemer and rightful Lord). St John and Dickson seem to have very different views on who Moses was and what he wrote.

Serious and multiple doctrinal repercussions

Dickson’s views have many undesirable implications for the interpretation of the New Testament as well as the Old. The New Testament claims that it was through Jesus Christ, the pre-existing Son of God, that all things were created (e.g. John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:16–17). Did our Saviour create by means of death, struggle, elbow work and destruction? How dare He then call it “very good”? What sort of sinister maniac would do that? Is this the sort of God one meets in the Old and New Testament, whom Christians relate to and worship as the holy, righteous God?

These are some of the doctrinal repercussions that Dickson’s article doesn’t even touch on. There is not only the subject of Christology and creation, but also concerning the person of God and His works and the concept of theodicy. In other words, can you trust God, is He holy and just, or really morally responsible for natural evil in this world? Did Christ come into the world to save sinners, or to undo some of the effects of his own devastating creation mechanisms?

This has implications for eschatology as well. If the first creation, although it was called “very good” by God Himself, was in actual fact a nightmare of death and destruction that lasted hundreds of millions of years, God might also have a very different understanding of the new heavens and a new earth than what a 21st-century person understands to be very good. The promises in Revelation chapters 21 and 22 (and 2 Peter 3) may turn out to be non-essential and irrelevant symbolism. It may well have another purpose than conveying that sin, sickness and death would once again disappear from the scene of history.

The doctrine of sin is at risk as well. Is death a consequence of sin and the last enemy that Christ came to conquer (1 Cor. 15:26)? Or was it actually one of God’s creation tools in the evolution of man? Did Christ come into the world to save sinners, or to undo some of the effects of his own devastating creation mechanisms?

The textual context of Genesis 3 clearly indicates that death and struggle for survival in the human world is God’s punishment on the first human sin. Genesis 3 (KJV):

“¹⁶Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

“¹⁷And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

¹⁸Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;”¹⁷

interpret Genesis. The New Testament is different, C.S. Lewis would have said. Many repeat this sentiment. Luke is regarded as an eminent historian. But isn't it Luke who purports to give his readers a factual historical family tree of Jesus? (Luke 3:23–38, NRSV), specifically calling him: “son of Enos, son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God.”²²

If Adam was a myth, in what part of this genealogy does Luke stop being an eminent historian? Wasn't he rather lax in referring to Moses as the author of the Torah (16:31, 24:44)? Wouldn't that be rather strange for someone who describes Jesus as meeting and talking with Moses (9:28–36)? Or was Luke portraying a Jesus who adopted the ignorant conventions of his time, or, perhaps, who did not know any better Himself (*kenosis* theology) and as a result confirmed people in their ill-founded literalistic approach of Genesis stories like the one about Sodom and Gomorra (Luke 10:12), Lot (Luke 17:28–30), even Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt (Luke 17:32), not to mention Noah and the Ark (Luke 17:26–27, cf. 3:36)?

If Genesis 1–11 is an ‘invention’ by well-meaning religious Jews in the Babylonian exile; if it is essentially mythological in character, there should be implications for how one reads the New Testament as history as well. Luke has a thoroughly ‘literalistic’ approach to Genesis. With someone that ignorant (in terms of Dickson's theory), how can one rely on the historical nature of his accounts that deal with the supernatural? For instance, when Luke describes Jesus raising the widow's son (7:11–17), or Jairus's daughter (8:40–56). What about the Resurrection of Jesus Himself (Luke 24)?

If Dickson's approach to Scripture is valid for Genesis, then similar principles could apply to the New Testament, as Genesis has a literary basis in the text of the Gospels as well. Consequently, one could argue that Jesus is all about overcoming spiritual death, that asking questions about the historical nature of the miracles and mythological references is just silly literalism; Luke didn't mean to teach that Jesus really descended from Adam, Noah and Shem. Nor did he want his readers to believe that all the ‘fanciful’ things he writes about the life of Jesus really happened. Luke just tried to get the message across that he thought that Jesus was a great man, who continues to be spiritually present in the lives of those He touched. Luke is just showing appreciation in his ‘prescientific’ way, just like Genesis only intends to show that somehow God stood at the beginning.

I do not accuse neo-evangelicals of doing this, but I call for fair-mindedness towards liberal scholars who use similar principles, which become perfectly accountable and biblical once Dr Dickson's approach to sacred Old Testament texts is accepted. It is not a question of John Dickson or others personally doing this, but a matter of introducing hermeneutical principles that allow for this.

Dickson's theory not original

As Dickson presents ‘his’ solution to the Genesis ‘problem’, the reader should realize that he is far from original. Henry Blocher (who also lectured at Moore Theological College in 1995) and Meredith Kline both advocated similar views.²³ All of these are versions of substantially the same thing: the framework hypothesis of Arie Noordtjij, which dates back to 1924.²⁴ This theory has serious flaws that were pointed out by G.Ch. Aalders as early as 1932.²⁵

In his introduction of ‘literalistic’ Dickson does not give any reference or credit to C. John Collins, one of the best-known contemporary scholars on Genesis:

“Six day creationists and scientific materialists approach the opening chapter of the Bible in a ‘literalistic’ fashion. I use the word ‘literalistic’ deliberately, as I want to distinguish between literalistic and literal. A literalistic reading takes the words of a text at face value, interpreting them with minimal attention to literary genre and historical context.”

As Dickson wrote several years after Collins' main publication and tells his readers basically the same as what Collins proposes in his *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg 2006). Collins (who is not original in his approach either, but in turn leans heavily on others) gave a summary of his view in a way that is virtually identical to the argument in Dickson's article two years later:

“Many popular figures, both of the secular and creationist varieties, are sure that the two are incompatible, and we must ditch either the biblical story or the scientific one. It may come to that, but not just yet. First we must decide whether the two stories really do conflict; and in raising the question, we realize that to do so we have to compare *interpretations* of the data. I have given reasons against a literalistic reading of Genesis, and this literalistic reading is the one on which the supposed conflict is based” (Collins p. 255, 2006).

John Collins regards Genesis 1:1–2:3 as an uncommon narrative genre and refers to chapter one as ‘exalted prose narrative’. From this label he draws the conclusion that as a narrative Genesis 1 has to be connected up to other narratives about the origins of the world. Dickson does this as well by following what liberal scholarship has done for more than a century now, suggesting a connection with the Babylonian creation myth. As far as the terminology is concerned, it was Collins who warned earlier that one must not read ‘literalistic’ hermeneutics into the text (e.g. 2006, pp. 44, 77, 123, 163). Collins sees Genesis 1 as an alternative for other Middle-Eastern creation stories. Dickson does the same and singles

out the Babylonian creation myth *Enuma Elish* (cf. Collins, 2006, p. 45) for that purpose, although this could be argued to be a *theogony* rather than a *cosmogony*. Collins doesn't see conflict between any theories of origins in contemporary Neo-Darwinist science and Genesis. Dickson *idem dito*.

In summary, Dickson has not come up with an original theory. On critical issues his method does not include (or give credit to) contemporary scholarship on his subject.

Early religious recipients

The crucial defect in Collins' approach, followed (unwittingly) by Dickson, is that it isolates passages from their chapter, book and collection. As a rule it is much better to establish the scope and character of *the book*, rather than attributing a certain literary genre to a passage in isolation. Like Collins, Dickson alleges that Genesis 1 is 'debunking' pagan creation stories. The literary form of Genesis 1, however, does not show any polemics. Deuteronomy and many of the Prophets deserve this label, but not Genesis One. On a philological level, the formal indicators and polemic contents are absent here.²⁶ The polemics are read into the text on the basis of historical assumptions for which there is a lot of consensus among (liberal) scholarship but little or no evidence in the primary sources.

In the Jewish religious tradition, Genesis comes as a book and in the package of the Torah. As a book it has a historic focus: the *toledot* (history/origin), first of the world,²⁷ subsequently of the Israelite nation. Packaged in the Torah and universally attributed to Moses in Jewish tradition, it would seem unhistorical to remove Genesis 1 from this wider literary context. There is no evidence that this approach was shared by Jews and early Christians. Exodus 20:11 applies the description of the creation days in Genesis 1 to the workweek of the Israelites. Because God created in six days, the Israelites have to follow that pattern for their week: six days labour, one day rest. Within this wider context, the specific use of the terms 'evening' and 'morning' points to days as the Israelites knew them.

Historically it is important how the first recipients of a religious text interpreted it and how it was appreciated in their community and tradition. They spoke the language and shared the same culture. There is not much doubt as to how Genesis 1 was read and received in Judaism. For the Jews it was a historical account of how God created the world, less than ten thousand years ago. This is evident even in Philo and was so general a view that it is still reflected by the Jewish calendar. Prescientific or not, the mainstream interpretation among Jews and Christians from Exodus to Ussher is that Genesis 1 conveys the message that God created the earth in roughly six days and at a point in history that is regarded as impossible in terms of the Neo-Darwinist meta-narrative of origin and descent.

By all means, conclude that the early Jewish interpretation was wrong and prescientific, even that the Christian Church uncritically followed this 'literalistic' approach and should now mend its way in the light received from Neo-Darwinism and other theories. If one has determined that Christianity and its concepts of God are no longer tenable, so be it. Let's be 'honest to God' about it, but to ourselves as well. But let's do justice to the *prima facie* evidence of the primary source and its history in religious tradition. Only a ventriloquist would read (post-) modern symbolism in a religious tradition that in fact does the opposite.

Common ground?

Fortunately Dickson confirms one aspect of a high view of creation (p. 14, 2008). What God made was 'good' and looking back on it all on the seventh day, the end result was 'very good'. This gives him some common ground with the Fathers and doctors of the Church.

It is this same ancient conviction that continues to resound, even in modern praise and worship:

"God is good. We sing and shout it. God is good. We celebrate. God is good. No more we doubt it. God is good."

But is He? Or is this just an irrational leap of faith, with no basis in the historical facts available to us? The premise that God is historically and factually good is an anomaly in Dickson's theory, inconsistent with his accommodation of Neo-Darwinist views on the origin of this world. The fallacies in Dickson's methodology and his treatment of primary and secondary sources make one thing clear: Genesis does not fit any secular theory of origin.

References

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3. The full quote of Philo on the fourth commandment. On the Decalogue XX: (96) the fourth commandment has reference to the sacred seventh day, that it may be passed in a sacred and holy manner. Now some states keep the holy festival only once in the month, counting from the new moon, as a day sacred to God; but the nation of the Jews keeps every seventh day regularly, after each interval of six days; (97) and there is an account of events recorded in the history of the creation of the world, comprising a sufficient relation of the cause of this ordinance; for the sacred historian says, that the world was created in six days, and that on the seventh day God desisted from his works, and began to contemplate what he had so beautifully created; (98) therefore, he commanded the beings also who were destined to live in this state, to imitate God in this particular also, as well as in all others, applying themselves to their works for six days, but desisting from them and philosophising on the seventh day... (99) But God, on one occasion, employed the six days for the completion of the world, though he had no need of any length of time

for such a purpose; but each man, as partaking of a mortal nature, and as being in need of ten thousand things for the unavoidable necessities of life, ought not to hesitate, even to the end of his life, to provide himself with all requisites, always allowing himself an interval of rest on the sacred seventh day. (100) Is it not a most beautiful recommendation, and one most admirably adapted to the perfecting of, and leading man to, every virtue, and above all to piety? The commandment, in effect says: Always imitate God; let that one period of seven days in which God created the world, be to you a complete example of the way in which you are to obey the law, and an all-sufficient model for your actions. The Greek text may be found online at: khazarzar.skeptik.net/books/philodecalogg.pdf

4. 97' Ιουδαίων ἔθνος συνεχῶς <ἡμέρας> ἕξ διαλείποντες αἰεί. λόγος δ' ἐστὶν ἀναγραφείς ἐν τοῖς κατὰ τὴν κοσμοποιίαν, περιέχων ἀτίαν ἀναγκαίαν· ἐν γὰρ ἕξ ἡμέραις φησὶ κτισθῆναι τὸν κόσμον, τῇ δ' ἑβδόμῃ παυσάμενον τῶν ἔργων τὸν θεὸν ἄρξασθαι τὰ γεγονότα καλῶς
5. Greek text online: khazarzar.skeptik.net/books/philodecalogg.pdf.
6. Philo refers to the period of the Creation Week as a whole, which, in Genesis 1, included God's subsequent rest and satisfaction.
7. Greek text online: khazarzar.skeptik.net/books/philodecalogg.pdf.
8. In the Old Testament Earth days are not always of equal length, e.g. Joshua 10:12 and Isaiah 38:8. Return to text.
9. Stromata 6.16 (Migne): ἡ τε γὰρ κοσμογονία ἐν ἕξ πειραοῦται ἡμέραις, ἡ τε ἀπὸ τροπῶν ἐπὶ τροπᾶς κίνησις τοῦ ἡλίου ἐν ἕξ συντελεῖται μηνί, καθ' ἣν πῆ μὲν φυλλορροεῖ, πῆ δὲ βλαστάνει τὰ φυτὰ καὶ αἱ τῶν σπερμάτων γίνονται τελειώσεις. φασὶ δὲ καὶ τὸ ἔμβρυον ἀπαρτίζεσθαι πρὸς ἀκριβείαν μηνὶ τῷ ἕκτῳ, τούτεστιν ἑκατὸν ἡμέραις καὶ ὀγδοήκοντα πρὸς ταῖς δύο καὶ ἡμίσει, ὡς ἰστορεῖ Πόλυβος μὲν ὁ ἰατρὸς ἐν τῷ Περὶ ὀκταμήνων, Ἄριστο τέλος δὲ ὁ φιλόσοφος ἐν τῷ Περὶ φύσεως· οἱ τε Πυθαγόρειοι ἐνεῦθεν, οἶμαι, ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου κατὰ τὸν προφήτην γενέσεως, τὸν ἕξ ἀριθμὸν τέλειον νομίζουσι καὶ μεσευθὸν καλοῦσι τοῦτον καὶ γάμον διὰ τὸ μέσον αὐτὸν εἶναι τοῦ εὐθέως, τούτεστι τοῦ δέκα καὶ τοῦ δύο· [“Having reached this point, we must mention these things by the way; since the discourse has turned on the seventh and the eighth. For the eighth may possibly turn out to be properly the seventh, and the seventh manifestly the sixth, and the latter properly the Sabbath, and the seventh a day of work. For the creation of the world was concluded in six days. For the motion of the sun from solstice to solstice is completed in six months—in the course of which, at one time the leaves fall, and at another plants bud and seeds come to maturity. And they say that the embryo is perfected exactly in the sixth month, that is, in one hundred and eighty days in addition to the two and a half, as Polybus the physician relates in his book On the Eighth Month, and Aristotle the philosopher in his book On Nature. Hence the Pythagoreans, as I think, reckon six the perfect number, from the creation of the world, according to the prophet, and call it Meseuths and Marriage, from its being the middle of the even numbers, that is, of ten and two. For it is manifestly at an equal distance from both.”]
10. Unus creatur homo AD unitatem societatis ...

21. *De Civitate Dei* 12.21: Hac igitur quaestione difficillima propter aeternitatem Dei nova creantis sine novitate aliqua voluntatis, quantum potuimus, explicata non est arduum videre multo fuisse melius quod factum est, ut ex uno homine, quem primum condidit, multiplicaret genus humanum, quam si id incohasset a pluribus. Nam cum animantes alias solitarias et quodammodo solivagas, id est, quae solitudinem magis appetant, sicuti sunt aquilae milvi, leones lupi et quaecumque ita sunt, alias congreges instituerit, quae congregatae atque in gregibus malint vivere, ut sunt columbi sturni, cervi damulae et cetera huiusmodi: utrumque tamen genus non ex singulis propagavit, sed plura simul iussit existere. Hominem vero, cuius naturam quodammodo mediam inter angelos bestiasque condebatur, ut, si Creatori suo tamquam vero domino subditus praeceptum eius pia oboedientia custodiret, in consortium transiret angelicum, sine morte media beatam immortalitatem absque ullo termine consecutus; si autem Dominum Deum suum libera voluntate superbe atque inoboedienter usus offenderet, morti addictus bestialiter viveret, libidinis servus aeternoque post mortem supplicio destinatus,

unum ac singulum creavit, non utique solum sine humana societate deserendum, sed ut eo modo vehementius ei commendaretur ipsius societatis unitas vinculumque concordiae, si non tantum inter se naturae similitudine, verum etiam cognationis affectu homines necterentur; quando ne ipsam quidem feminam copulandam viro sicut ipsum creare illi placuit, sed ex ipso, ut omnino ex homine uno diffunderetur genus humanum.

“That There Was Created at First But One Individual, and that the Human Race Was Created in Him.

“Now that we have solved, as well as we could, this very difficult question about the eternal God creating new things, without any novelty of will, it is easy to see how much better it is that God was pleased to produce the human race from the one individual whom He created, than if He had originated it in several men. For as to the other animals, He created some solitary, and naturally seeking lonely places—as the eagles, kites, lions, wolves, and such like; others gregarious, which herd together, and prefer to live in company—as pigeons, starlings, stags, and little fallow deer, and the like: but neither class did He cause to be propagated from individuals, but called into being several at once. Man, on the other hand, whose nature was to be a mean between the angelic and bestial, He created in such sort, that if he remained in subjection to His Creator as his rightful Lord, and piously kept His commandments, he should pass into the company of the angels, and obtain, without the intervention of death, a blessed and endless immortality; but if he offended the Lord his God by a proud and disobedient use of his free will, he should become subject to death, and live as the beasts do—the slave of appetite, and doomed to eternal punishment after death. And therefore God created only one single man, not, certainly, that he might be a solitary, bereft of all society, but that by this means the unity of society and the bond of concord might be more effectually commended to him, men being bound together not only by similarity of nature, but by family affection. And indeed He did not even create the woman that was to be given him as his wife, as he created the man, but created her out of the man, that the whole human race might derive from one man.”

11. Latin: *De Genesi ad Litteram* IV.2.6–7: Nec quisquam ita demens est, ut audeat dicere non potuisse Deum facere uno die cuncta, si vellet; aut si vellet biduo, uno die spiritalem creaturam, et alio die corporalem; sive uno die coelum cum omnibus pertinentibus, et alio terram cum omnibus quae in ea sunt; et omnino quando vellet et quamdiu vellet, et quomodo vellet: quis est qui dicat voluntati eius aliquid potuisse resistere? 3.7: Quapropter cum eum legimus sex diebus omnia perfecisse, et senarium numerum considerantes, invenimus esse perfectum, atque ita creaturarum ordinem currere, ut etiam ipsarum partium, quibus iste numerus perficitur, appareat quasi gradata distinctio; veniat etiam illud in mentem, quod alio loco Scripturarum ei dicitur: *Omnia in mensura, et numero, et pondere disposuisti, nisi: Omnia in te disposuisti?*
12. Augustine, *On Genesis*, IV.3.6 (translation Edmund Hill, John E. Rotelle, *New City Press* 2002:244): “So it was in a perfect number of days, that is, in six, that God perfected his works, which he had made. That, you see, is what is written: *And God finished on the sixth day his works which he had made* (Gen 2:2).” Latin: *De Genesi ad Litteram* IV.2.6:2.6. Perfecto ergo numero dierum, hoc est senario, perfecit Deus opera sua quae fecit. Ita enim scriptum est: *Et consummavit Deus in die sexto opera sua quae fecit*. Augustine bases himself on the notion of the Septuagint (Gen 2:2) that as the seventh was a day of rest, the work was completed by the end of the sixth day. Augustine confirms that he is, historically speaking, inclined to go for short period of creation. For him the number six is not mere symbolism but a historical creation ordinance (*On Genesis*, IV.3.6–7; pp. 245–246, 2002): “And there can be none so out of their minds that they would have the face to say that God was unable to make all things in one day if he so wished, or if he so wished in two; on one day the spiritual creation and on the other day the bodily or on one day heaven and all its appurtenances, and on the other the earth with all the things that are on it; and in a word, when he wished and as long as he wished and in the way he wished—who would ever say that anything would have been able to resist his will? For this reason, when we read that he perfected all things in six days, and find that six, when we take a look at it, is a

- perfect number, and that the order of creation runs its course in such a way as to show up even the graded distinction, so to say, of the parts by which this number is perfected, let us call to mind what is said to him in another place in scripture: *You have arranged all things in measure and order* (Wis 11:20).” (This reference concerns Sap 11:21).
13. Ott, Ludwig, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma: A One Volume Encyclopedia of the Doctrines of the Catholic Church, Showing Their Sources in Scripture and Tradition and Their Definitions By Popes and Councils*, 4th ed., Rockford, IL, Tan Books, p. 95, 1960. For a general introduction on the Church Fathers and Genesis: James R. Mook, the Church Fathers on Genesis, the Flood and the Age of the Earth; in: Mortenson, T. and Ury, T.H., *Coming to Grips with Genesis, Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, Master Books, pp. 23–51, 2008.
 14. Adherence to this minimum view on the history of mankind was required by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1909.
 15. Unde animalia quae generantur ex corruptione rerum inanimatarum vel plantarum, potuerunt tunc generari. Non autem quae generantur ex corruptione animalium, tunc potuerunt produci, nisi potentialiter tantum..
 16. Homo autem ante peccatum ordinate fuisset usus rebus mundi. Unde animalia venenosa ei noxia non fuissent.
 17. AD tertium dicendum quod in prima die facta est communis distinctio temporis per diem et noctem, secundum motum diurnum, qui est communis totius caeli; qui potest intelligi incoepisse primo die. Sed speciales distinctiones dierum et temporum, secundum quod dies est calidior die, et tempus tempore, et annus anno, fiunt secundum speciales motus stellarum; qui possunt intelligi quarto die incoepisse.
 18. Genesis 3:16–18 (BHS):
אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה אָמַר הַרְבֵּה אַרְבָּבָה עֲצֻבוֹנָה וְהָרִיבָה בְּעֵצָב תִּלְדִּי בָנִים וְאֶל־אִישָׁךְ תִּשְׁקָתָה וְהָיָה יְמֵי־שָׁלְךָ כַּדָּבָר
לְקָדְמָה אָמַר בְּיַשְׁמֵעֵת לְקוֹל אִשְׁתֶּךָ וְתֹאכַל מִן־עֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ אֲרִיזָה הָאֵדָמָה לְבַעֲבֹרָהּ בְּעֵצְבוֹרָהּ תִּאֲכָלְכֶנָּה כִּלְ יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:
וְקוֹרַי וְדַרְדַּר תִּצְמַח־יָךְ לָךְ וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה:
 19. Cf. Cosmic and universal death from Adam’s fall: an exegesis of Romans 8:19–23a, *J. Creation* 21(1):75–85, 2007.
 20. Genesis 3:19 (BHS):
בְּוַעַת אֶפְרַיִם תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם עַד שׁוֹבֶהָ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ בְּיַעֲפָר אֶתָּה וְאֶל־עֲפָר תִּשָּׁב:
 21. C.S. Lewis (In his lecture *Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism*, read at Westcott House, Cambridge, on 11 May 1959) said about the historicity of Jonah and Job: “Jonah, a tale with as few even pretended historical attachments as Job, grotesque in incident and surely not without a distinct, though of course edifying, vein of typically Jewish humour.” This lecture was published in *Christian Reflections* pp. 154–155, 1981.
 22. Cosner, L., Romans 5:12–21: Paul’s view of literal Adam, *J. Creation* 22(2):105–107, 2008.
 23. Luke 3 (NA27): ²³Καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν Ἰησοῦς ἀρχόμενος ὡσεὶ ἑτῶν τριάκοντα, ὦν υἱός, ὡς ἐνομιζέτο, Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Ἡλίου ²⁴τοῦ Μαθθαίου τοῦ Λευὶ τοῦ Μελχὶ τοῦ Ἰανναίου τοῦ Ἰωσήφ ²⁵τοῦ Ματθαίου τοῦ Ἀμῶς τοῦ Ναοῦμ τοῦ Ἑσλίου τοῦ Ναγγαίου ²⁶τοῦ Μάαθ τοῦ Ματθαίου τοῦ Σεμεῖν τοῦ Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Ἰωδᾶ ²⁷τοῦ Ἰωανᾶν τοῦ Ρησᾶ τοῦ Ζοροβαβὲλ τοῦ Σαλαθηήλ τοῦ Νηρι ²⁸τοῦ Μελχὶ τοῦ Ἀδδὶ τοῦ Κωσάμ τοῦ Ἑλμαδάμ τοῦ Ἡρ ²⁹τοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ἐλιέζερ τοῦ Ἰωριμ τοῦ Μαθθαίου τοῦ Λευὶ ³⁰τοῦ Συμεῶν τοῦ Ἰούδα τοῦ Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Ἰωνάμ τοῦ Ἐλιακίμ ³¹τοῦ Μελεὰ τοῦ Μεννὰ τοῦ Ματθαθαίου τοῦ Ναθάμ τοῦ Δαυὶδ ³²τοῦ Ἰεσσαὶ τοῦ Ἰωβηδ τοῦ Βόος τοῦ Σαλά τοῦ Ναασσών ³³τοῦ Ἀμιναδάβ τοῦ Ἀδμὶν τοῦ Ἀρνὶ τοῦ Ἐσρώμ τοῦ Φάρες τοῦ Ἰούδα ³⁴τοῦ Ἰακώβ τοῦ Ἰσαάκ τοῦ Ἀβραάμ τοῦ Θάρα τοῦ Ναχώρ ³⁵τοῦ Σερουὸχ τοῦ Πραγαὺ τοῦ Φάλεκ τοῦ Ἐβερ τοῦ Σαλά ³⁶τοῦ Καϊνὰμ τοῦ Ἀραφξὺδ τοῦ Σῆμ τοῦ Νῶε τοῦ Λάμεχ ³⁷τοῦ Μαθουσαλά τοῦ Ἐνώχ τοῦ Ἰάρετ τοῦ Μαλελεήλ τοῦ Καϊνὰμ ³⁸τοῦ Ἐνὼς τοῦ Σῆθ τοῦ Ἀδάμ τοῦ Θεοῦ.
 24. Batten, D.J. *et al.*, Is Genesis poetry / figurative, a theological argument (polemic) and thus not history? Critique of the Framework Hypothesis.
 25. Noordtjij, A., Gods Woord en der Eeuwen Getuigenis: Het Oude Testament in het Licht der Oostersche Opgraveningen (Kampen 1924). Cf. Edward J. Young, The Days of Genesis, *Westminster Theological Journal* 25:134, 1962/63.
 26. G. Ch. Aalders: *De Goddelijke Openbaring in de eerste drie Hoofdstukken van Genesis*, Kampen, p. 233, 1932: “Wij kunnen dit niet anders verstaan dat ook naar het oordeel van Noordtjij aan de “dagen” geen realiteit in betrekking tot de Goddelijke scheppingswerkzaamheid toekomt.” (We can only understand that with Noordtjij, too, the days have no actual/real contents of Divine creational activity.) Aalders gave two reasons to reject this theory: “1°, dat de tekst van Gen. 1 zelf geen enkele aanwijzing bevat, dat de dagen slechts als een vorm of voorstellingswijze zouden bedoeld zijn en derhalve voor de wezenlijke kennis van de Goddelijke scheppingswerkzaamheid geen waarde zouden hebben: en 2° dat in Ex. 20:11 het doen Gods aan den mensch tot voorbeeld wordt gesteld; en dit veronderstelt zeer zeker, dat in dat doen Gods een realiteit is geweest, welke door den mensch hun worden nagevolgd. Hoe zou den mensch kunnen worden voorgehouden dat hij na zes dagen arbeiden op den zevenden dag moet rusten, omdat God in zes dagen alle dingen geschapen heeft en rustte op den zevenden dag, indien aan die zes scheppingsdagen in het Goddelijk scheppingswerk geen enkele realiteit beantwoordde?” Young translates this accurately as: “(1) In the text of Genesis itself, he affirmed, there is not a single allusion to suggest that the days are to be regarded as a form or mere manner of representation and hence of no significance for the essential knowledge of the divine creative activity. (2) In Exodus 20:11 the activity of God is presented to man as a pattern, and this fact presupposes that there was a reality in the activity of God which man is to follow. How could man be held accountable for working six days if God himself had not actually worked for six days?”
 27. An indication of the length some people go to, to argue polemic intentions in Genesis 1, is the often repeated view that the terms ‘sun’ and ‘moon’ are avoided. Dickson shares this approach (p. 14). Within the passage it is a practical way to relate to how the reader is experiencing the small light by night and the big light by day.
 28. Gen 2:4 אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ:

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