

Accessible apologetics

A review of
*Who Made God?
Searching for a Theory
of Everything*
by Edgar Andrews
EP Books, Darlington, UK,
2009

Daniel Davidson

In 1986, Edgar Andrews (1932–), then Professor¹ of Materials at the University of London, participated in a famous debate at the Oxford Union in which he and A.E. Wilder-Smith defended the scientific evidence for creation against Richard Dawkins and John Maynard Smith. Before the audience voted, Dawkins ‘implored’ them not to give a single vote to the creationist side, since every such vote “would be a blot on the escutcheon of the ancient University of Oxford”.² The Oxford Union was hardly sympathetic to the creation position, and, not surprisingly, Dawkins and Maynard Smith won. But (notwithstanding Dawkins’s desperate plea) they won by a surprisingly narrow margin, 198–115. After that experience, Dawkins stated he would never debate creationists again. But he has not given up his fight, evidenced by the fact that he continues to publish book after book to defend atheistic evolution. Edgar Andrews (now Professor Emeritus) is not done fighting either. In *Who Made God?*, Andrews joins the debate again, offering an answer to Dawkins and the other ‘new atheists’.

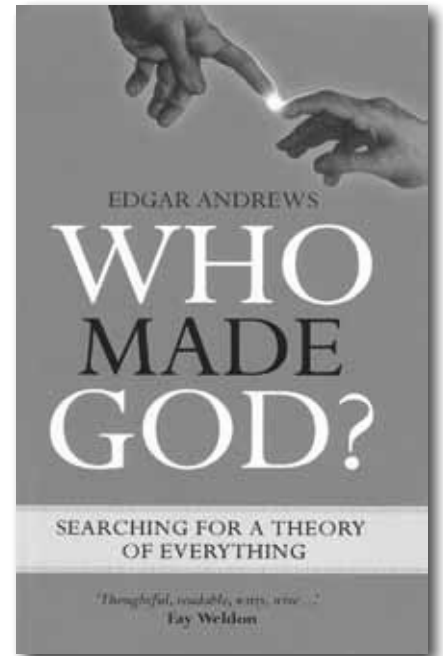
Arguments, positive and negative

But *Who Made God?* is not just a rebuttal book responding to the latest spate of atheistic rants. Andrews specifically notes, “I did not write

my book in response to anyone else’s book” (p. 64). Books-in-reply serve a valuable function, Andrews acknowledges, but he believes that a positive thesis has more appeal than a negative rebuttal. Andrews does a nice job of balancing both positive and negative arguments. The result is a readable and witty apologetic for the existence of God.

Andrews opens with a chapter on the title question: “Who made God?” He critiques this tired atheistic argument as one that assumes what it needs to prove—that God is subject to the same laws as the physical universe. The bulk of the book is then devoted to the subtitle’s topic—a theory of everything. In the next few chapters, Andrews shoots holes in the idea that science can explain everything. He enters the weird world of quantum physics and string theory, but provides engaging, layman-friendly explanations each step of the way. Unifying theories explain the world only in the sense of providing us with more accurate and more elegant descriptions of how it works, Andrews says. But even here, he notes, science is unable to provide ultimate answers about why the world works the way it does. Nor can science provide explanations that could be described as intuitive or ‘common sense’.

Let me pause here to pursue a rabbit trail. In discussing science’s failure to answer all the questions, Andrews says that a good explanation should ultimately be grounded in “premises that are intuitive or self-evident” (p. 30). This is a relatively minor point in the larger scheme of the book, but I do feel the need to quibble with it. With this statement, Andrews seems to be adopting what philosophers call foundationalist epistemology. Foundationalist epistemology notes that much of what we say that we ‘know’ is actually



built on the foundation of other things that were known previously. (If I look at a thermometer and it registers 10°C outside, I know that it is 10°C only because I also know and believe certain things about how mercury works in thermometers, leading me to conclude that the thermometer accurately measured the temperature.) But we cannot base everything we believe on something else, lest we end up with an infinite regress. So one of the key projects in foundationalist epistemology is figuring out what beliefs are properly basic or foundational.

The entire field of classical foundationalism has generated considerable controversy in philosophical circles for several decades now, and certainly the issue of what counts as a valid ‘basic’ belief is hotly contested.³ The bottom line is that Andrews opens up a can of worms with his remark about proper explanations. He never convinced me that it should matter whether scientific explanations took us outside the realm of ‘common sense’. Nor, for that matter, did he explain why even counterintuitive scientific principles, like aspects of quantum mechanics, could not be basic if they are traced

back to sense experience. (The link may be a bit attenuated when you're as far removed from direct observation as theoretical physics is, but at least the argument could be made.) Andrews does not address these issues, leaving Andrews's criteria for good explanations as one of his weakest points in the book.

Be that as it may, Andrews' larger point was communicated effectively—science has not answered all the questions. (And even if you assume that string theory helps answer some questions, as Andrews is willing to do, plenty remains unanswered.) Andrews then introduces a hypothesis that he believes really can provide the ultimate explanations: the existence of God.

Andrews takes the reader on a journey through science, looking at the origin of time, the origin of scientific laws, the origin of life, and Darwinian evolution—all in the light of his foundational 'hypothesis' that the God of the Bible exists. Along the way, Andrews engagingly debunks atheistic claims made in recent books by Dawkins and Victor Stenger and seems to have great fun doing so. In one place, Andrews explains the

concept of irreducible complexity, most famously championed by Michael Behe as a problem for evolution and an evidence of design.⁴ Andrews then cites Victor Stenger's critique of Behe, which "boils down to asserting that the component parts of the biological systems with which Behe illustrates his case may already be waiting in the wings—but serving unrelated purposes" (p. 76). (This is not just Stenger's idea—it is one of the most common evolutionist rejoinders to Behe's argument.) Andrews offers his own comeback:

"Dr. Stenger has obviously never bought a piece of flat-packed furniture. I can assure him from personal experience that having all the components in one place and moving them around randomly is most *unlikely* to assemble anything that works And remember natural selection cannot help because it only works on an already functioning system" (pp. 76–77).

This is typical Andrews: succinctly explaining a complex issue with a memorable and easy-to-grasp analogy.

Andrews also critiques theistic evolutionists' positions. He mentions Francis Collins, who implied in the title to his best-selling book that genetics is the "language of God" but then adopted an almost perfectly naturalistic account of genetics in his book.⁵ Yet through it all Collins insists that people are unique from animals in having a spiritual nature. Andrews certainly agrees on the latter point, but he finds Collins' retreat to naturalism problematic, and his vacillation between naturalism and supernaturalism utterly inconsistent. Andrews educates readers about a more biblical philosophy of natural law and miracles: God does work providentially through natural law, and natural law is His standard way of working in nature. However, God is not limited by His own usual way of doing things; He can operate in an out-of-the-ordinary manner (what we call a miracle) if He wants to.⁶ This approach to natural law and miracles is not new. Andrews' contribution here is not to add theoretical details to this framework but rather to offer one of the most accessible presentations of this perspective.

A caveat

Andrews does not specifically address the age of the earth, but he clearly affirms his belief in the historical nature of the Genesis account. Given Andrews' commitment to the historicity of Genesis, and his long advocacy of a 'young-earth' view, it comes as something of a surprise that he includes a favourable discussion of the big bang. In recent decades, many apologists have used the big bang to argue that science now provides evidence that the universe had a beginning—thus confirming, they say, the biblical creation account. Most of these apologists, like William Lane Craig and Norman Geisler, are comfortable with some sort of long-age interpretation of Genesis. Adopting a standard big bang cosmology requires not just long



Photo courtesy of Barker Evans

Figure 1. The debate chamber of the legendary Oxford Union debating society. It was here, in 1986, that Edgar Andrews participated in the debate that convinced Richard Dawkins to never debate creationists again. But in his recent book *Who Made God?*, Andrews continues the debate with Dawkins in print.

ages, but also rearranging the ordering of the Genesis 1 creation account (for instance, the big bang puts the origin of the sun before Earth, while Genesis has it the other way around).⁷ Andrews would seem less likely to be comfortable with this kind of significant reinterpretation of Genesis 1, judging from his comments about the historicity of Genesis elsewhere in this book. But somehow the big bang gets Andrews's stamp of approval and figures prominently in several chapters of *Who Made God?* Andrews does not elaborate on how he harmonizes the big bang with Genesis 1, and so we are left in the dark about how *much* of the standard big bang cosmology he would personally endorse (or, conversely, how much of the historical account of Genesis he is willing to reinterpret). This is most unfortunate, as Andrews is certainly aware of the exegetical problems that are created when the big bang is imported into verse 1 of Genesis.

The 'God hypothesis'

This significant caveat aside, the rest of the book is outstanding: faithful to the biblical account, scientifically sophisticated, and winningly presented. Andrews was self-conscious in selecting his approach, in which he brings out the 'God hypothesis' early on. He opted against taking the common approach using the design argument or a cosmological argument, in which God arrives only at the conclusion of the scientific and philosophical argumentation. Andrews suggests that this kind of 'reasoning to God' often ends up creating some sort of 'lowest-common-denominator' deity: one who designs or creates, but about whose character we know little.

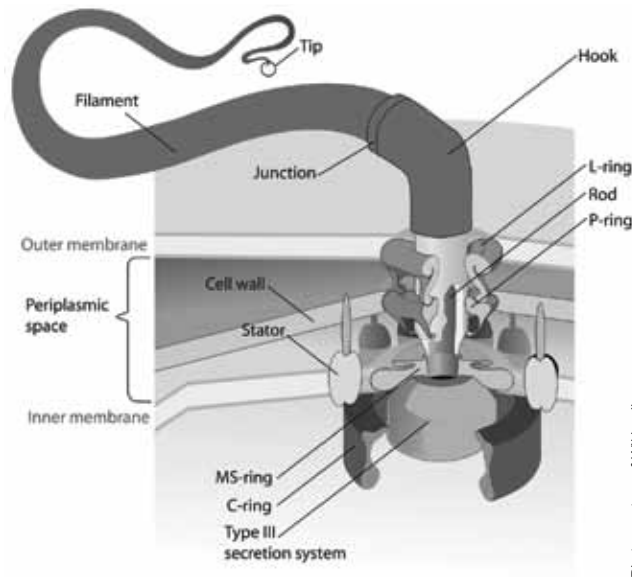


Photo courtesy of Wikipedia

Figure 2. A bacterial flagellum is a classic example of irreducible complexity. The flagellum acts like a propeller for the bacteria. Each basic component of the flagellum is necessary for it to function properly. In *Who Made God?*, Andrews critiques the proposed evolutionary explanation for this kind of biological structure.

Andrews instead takes what he calls a 'hypothetic' approach. The word 'hypothesis', Andrews notes, is derived from two Greek terms that signify "something 'placed beneath' as a foundation" (p. 53). Andrews begins with the hypothesis of God and then looks at evidence in light of how well it fits with the hypothesis. Starting with the hypothesis of God, Andrews notes, "gives us much more freedom to explore the nature of God because we can make any assumptions we choose concerning the attributes of God and then see where those assumptions take us" (p. 60). Andrews is unapologetic in recognizing the God of Scripture as the God he assumes or 'hypothesizes' when looking at nature and the world around us.

Andrews on ID

Andrews thus uses Scripture as his reference point for understanding who God is, what God is like, and what implications this has for science. He explicitly distances himself from the Intelligent Design approach to design and evolution. While he

expresses appreciation for the contributions that the ID movement has made to the debate, Andrews lists several problems with the ID approach. First, "It embroils people in a pointless debate over whether or not ID is 'science'" (p. 209). Andrews' view is that "ID is an inference drawn from science rather than part of science itself" (p. 209). Second, Andrews says, ID "lacks any philosophical bedrock, such as the hypothesis of God Thus ID can be accused of adopting a God-of-the-gaps mentality because it concentrates on the intractability of complex biological systems while leaving the rest of the universe to naturalism. This

narrow focus leaves it vulnerable to such accusations and means that it is just as compatible with life from Mars or little green men as with divine creation. I find that rather unsatisfactory" (p. 210).

The 'God-of-the-gaps' comment might be a bit too hard on ID, for design advocates who argue based on positive evidence of design (rather than just the implausibility of evolution) are not actually advocating a 'God-of-the-gaps' position. Still, Andrews is right that ID is vulnerable to genuine problems with a 'God-of-the-gaps' argument.⁸

Conclusion

Andrews has provided us with a book that skillfully uses scientific apologetics in an accessible and easy-to-read format. Andrews is at his best in explaining difficult scientific concepts in simple terms and down-to-earth analogies. His chapters on quantum mechanics and string theory are excellent examples. Andrews also sprinkles his text with British humour (which, for an American reader, might take a little getting used to—but only

a little), giving a light feel to this book even when discussing technical topics. Much of this book is also faithful to the historicity of the biblical creation account. The only significant problem in this book is Andrews's wholesale adoption of big bang cosmology, ignoring the problems this creates for any attempt to take Genesis as real history. It mars what is otherwise an outstanding book.

References

1. In the UK and in many Commonwealth countries, 'Professor' is a title given only to the highest ranking university academics (in contrast to the US, where the most junior faculty at a college or university receive the title of 'assistant professor')
2. Cooper, G. and Humber, P., Fraudulent report at AAAS and the 1986 Oxford University debate, www.samizdat.qc.ca/cosmos/origines/debate_gc.htm.
3. Some of the important critiques of classical foundationalism have originated from Christian philosophers, notably Alvin Plantinga. See the essays in Plantinga, A. and Wolterstorff, N. (Eds.), *Faith and Rationality*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1983. For an accessible summary, see Naugle, D., Alvin Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology: Analysis and Critique; paper presented at the Southwest Commission on Religious Studies, Dallas, TX, March 18–19, 1994, available at www3.dbu.edu/naugle/pdf/Plantinga_Reformed_Epistemology.pdf.
4. A biological structure is irreducibly complex if every component part of the structure is necessary for its functioning—remove one component and the structure is useless. In principle, such a structure could not be created by a gradual process of natural selection. See Behe, M., *Darwin's Black Box*, Free Press, New York, 1996.
5. See also Weinberger, L., Harmony and discord: A review of *The Language of God* by Francis S. Collins, *J. Creation* 21(1): 33–37, 2007.
6. See also Sarfati, J., Miracles and science, creation.com/miracles, 1 September 2006.
7. See the critique offered by Henry, J., Christian apologists should abandon the big bang, *J. Creation* 23(3):103–109, 2009.
8. See Weinberger, L., Whose god? The theological response to the god-of-the-gaps, *J. Creation* 22(1):120–127, 2008.

Theistic evolutionary doublespeak

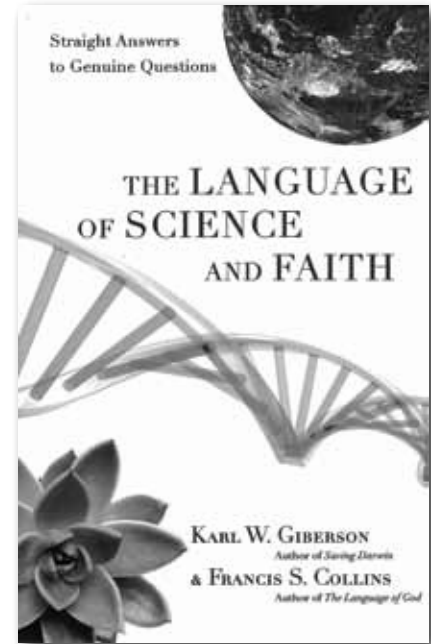
A review of
The Language of Science and Faith
by Karl W. Giberson and
Francis S. Collins
InterVarsity Press, 2011

Lita Cosner

Many Christians ask whether it is possible to accept modern science while being faithful to the Bible's teachings on origins. So when professing evangelical authors write a book that claims to give a biblical take on the issue, it is sure to be popular. Unfortunately, *The Language of Science and Faith* hits a lot of sour notes in their attempt to reconcile modern science and biblical faith. This should surprise no readers familiar with their previous works.^{1,2}

Stereotyping creation

The authors adopt a paternalistic, condescending tone toward creationists very early in the book, presuming to lecture the reader about what they must and must not accept. They tell the reader in no uncertain terms that "there are truths about the natural world that must be confronted, no matter how disturbing they seem" (p. 8). Moreover, "[t]he Bible is not a science text and should not be read that way" (p. 106) and the biblical authors "all lived before there was science" (p. 107). The tone is condescending. The result is both simplistic and insufficient to deal with the concerns of those who have considered the issues at length and have come to a different conclusion from that of the authors.



This attitude toward creationist Christians is also evident in how they are characterized throughout the book. For instance, the authors show contempt for creation views by citing theologians and scientists for pro-evolution views, but characterizing creationist views with straw men and lay people. For instance, the authors cite B.B. Warfield's view: "I do not think that there is any general statement in the Bible or any part of the account of creation ... that need be opposed to evolution." But for a creationist view, they cite the wife of the bishop of Worcester, England: "Descended from the apes? My dear, let us hope it is not true. But if it is, let us pray that it will not become widely known" (p. 42). This is only one example of a tendency that holds throughout the whole book. But had they wanted to be fair to the creation view, they could have cited respected theologians like Edward Young, who said: