

# A very shallow anti-creationist book that emphasizes logic but is devoid of it

## ***The Three Failures of Creationism: Logic, Rhetoric, and Science***

Walter M. Fitch

University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2012

John Woodmorappe

The author was Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of California at Irvine, before his passing in 2011.

In the introduction, written by evolutionist Francisco Ayala, the reader encounters the hoary quoted statement of Theodosius Dobzhansky: “Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution” (p. ix). Evidently, Fitch, Ayala, and Dobzhansky all conveniently forget the works of many pioneering biologists—such as Linnaeus, Mendel, Pasteur, and many others—who made perfect sense of biology, and major advancements in the biological sciences, while disbelieving in evolution.

The first part of this book resembles an introductory work on logic and elementary logical fallacies. For instance, he mentions the straw man fallacy, yet that is what he engages in. Thus, he complains that creationists think of evolution as a religion because some of its advocates are zealous (p. 46). This completely misrepresents the creationist position. Evolution is a religion not because of the zealousness of some of its proponents, but because, owing to the fact that it deals with past events, it involves faith in non-observed events, just as does special creation. It also attempts to provide answers to the same big questions as theistic religions:

where we came from? (pond scum); what is our purpose? (reproduce); what is our destiny? (fertilizer).

From then on, the author gets into theology and science, aiming his remarks at both creationists and Intelligent Design advocates. The reader looking for something new can stop right here. There is nothing. In addition, there is so much naivety in this book that one would have to write a separate book to address each issue.

The author mentions isotopic dating. His remarks show not the slightest understanding of what creationists actually believe about isotopic dating, and he exhibits not even the foggiest awareness of creationist efforts in this field, such as the RATE Project.

### **Contrived ambiguities: figurative Genesis ‘days’ yet again**

Fitch repeats the argument that ‘day’ has ambiguous meaning until it is defined in Genesis 1 for the first time. The *reductio ad absurdum* is obvious. It is as silly as saying that ‘God’ is ambiguous until God is specifically defined in the Bible for the first time! It also means that other terms in the Bible must also have ambiguous meanings until they are defined in the Bible for the first time, and—worse yet—terms that are used in the Bible but are never specifically defined in the Bible must forever be ambiguous.

In reality, the reader comes to the Bible with prior knowledge of what terms such as day and God mean. There is thus no more ambiguity in the term ‘day’ than there is with the term ‘God’.

The word ‘day’ or ‘days’ is used throughout Scripture, yet Genesis 1 is

## The Three Failures of Creationism

Logic, Rhetoric,  
and Science

WALTER M. FITCH

the only place in the Bible where the word ‘day’ is supposedly ambiguous (figure 1). Why? After all, no one suggests that maybe Jonah spent three indefinite long periods of time in the whale, or that our Lord spent three indefinite long periods of time in the tomb, or that we work for six indefinite periods then rest for one (note that the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment in Exodus 20:8–11 is based on Creation Week). To ask this question is to answer it. The ‘ambiguity’ about the meaning of ‘day’ in Genesis 1 is a contrived one. It stems not from any uncertainty in the meaning of the word ‘day’. It comes from attempting to force Genesis 1 to agree with evolution or billions of years.

The author adopts a “We cannot know if it is literal or not” attitude towards the Bible, comparing the situation to the saying “Ah, it was a real rat race!” being non literal (p. 99). His argument has multiple flaws. In the first place, common sense tells us that statements are literal unless we know otherwise. If it were not so, there would be mass confusion, as we would always be wondering whether or not someone’s statement is literal.

In addition, there are principles for determining whether a biblical verse is

literal or not. This is based on the kind of writing and prior knowledge about the matters it raises. For instance, we know that the “rivers clapping their hands” (Psalm 98:8) is not literal for both reasons. The Psalms are a kind of writing that is centred on worship and personal religious experiences, not the transmission of factual information, and we have prior knowledge of the fact that rivers do not have hands and are inanimate objects.

The same holds for everyday conversation. Statements are literal unless unambiguously not. Thus, for instance, we know that the ‘rat race’ comment is not literal because we have the prior knowledge that humans can never actually be transformed into rats. However, were it in fact possible for humans to become rats, we then could no longer freely use the ‘rat race’ comment as it stands, at least without qualification about what we mean whenever we use that phrase.

### Old chestnuts—Gilgamesh Epic and JEPD—trotted out

The author is enamoured of the Gilgamesh Epic as the ‘original’ Genesis account, even calling it a ‘bestseller’ of sorts in ancient times. He wilfully disregards alternative explanations for parallels between the two, such as Genesis being the original and Gilgamesh the pagan distortion, and exaggerates the similarities between the Gilgamesh Epic and the Genesis account.<sup>1</sup>

Fitch also dusts off the JEPD hypothesis on the origin of the Pentateuch, citing Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 as two separate creation myths. He presents the JEPD with considerable detail, and with unwavering certitude. Ironically, even many liberal theologians have distanced themselves from it. Conservative theologians refuted JEPD long ago.<sup>2,3</sup>

### The author's childlike evolutionary faith

The author’s faith (and I stress faith) in evolution was venal. For instance, he commented: “Evolutionists may not yet know all the details of how an eye evolved, but that does not mean that the eye didn’t evolve” (p. 132). Oh really? Then how do we know that it evolved?

The author also made the following leap of faith:

“Small change can be observed in laboratory experiments and in the field. There is persuasive evidence that these small changes accumulate over time, as seen in common morphological structures, DNA sequences, similarities in embryo development, the fossil record, and the geographic distribution of species. Macroevolution is simply cumulative microevolution” (p. 129).

Ironically, there are evolutionists who reject the premise that macroevolution is just straightforward time-expanded microevolution. Author Fitch is engaging in the old ‘given enough time, anything can happen’ magical thinking.

In addition, all of the ‘evidences’ he cites for macroevolution are not. They are inferential in nature, and they all can be explained without evolution.

Some of Fitch’s apologetics for evolution is nothing short of abysmal. For instance, he rejects creationist arguments about the astronomical improbability of protein synthesis with the counter-argument that a chain of messenger RNA exists that specifies what the next amino acid in the protein should be (pp. 63–64). But that is in a functioning organism! It tells us nothing about how specific proteins assembled themselves, spontaneously, out of a sea of amino acids, in the absence of messenger RNA.

### The evidence supports evolution ... except when it doesn't

The author claims that similarities among living things consistently support their interrelatedness. For instance, humans and chimps are more similar to each other than to other primates. However, Fitch comments:

“As usual, things are imperfect in biological tests. If one chooses many triples of characteristics for the gorilla, chimpanzee, and human triple, one gets human-chimp pairs most often, but one also gets a sizable number of chimpanzee-gorilla pairs plus a few human-gorilla pairs. The problem is that the species are all too closely related to each other for the amount of information available to separate them. The fault lies not with Darwinism but with a lack of data—a lack of a sufficient number of varied characters” (p. 96).

How predictable! How classic! The problem is never with evolution. The problem is always with the data.

There is a line of evidence not mentioned by Fitch—the SINES. These are retroposons that are supposed to be the most reliable means of deciphering



Figure 1. The use of the word ‘day’, throughout Scripture and in Genesis 1, is unambiguous

evolutionary relatedness. After all, SINES almost never get inserted in the same spot in homoplastic fashion, and they almost never get excised without leaving behind warning evidence that this has happened. Even so, some SINES support a gorilla–human–chimpanzee clade instead of the accepted gorilla–chimpanzee–human clade. Since evolution cannot possibly be wrong, a rationalization has to be invoked. It is this: The human–chimpanzee divergence happened so soon after the gorilla–chimpanzee–human divergence that some SINES had, owing to incomplete lineage sorting, fortuitously gotten shared by gorillas and humans but not chimps.

### Same old song of 'bad' design—Fitch confuses the issue

Fitch argues that imperfect designs imply an imperfect designer. This is, first of all, based on nothing more than somebody's opinion about a structure being poorly designed. He trots out all the examples of 'bad' design in humans—including ones (such as the appendix and the 'backwards'-wired retina of the human eye) that have been soundly debunked—and cites this as evidence against a designer.

Fitch also argues that the sub-optimization of some designs, such that the overall structure is relatively optimal, implies a Creator who does not know how to simultaneously optimize all designs in a creature. This is a *non-sequitur*. It ignores the possibility of a designer who limited Himself, by choice, to finite materials. The Designer is not finite, but the materials He decided to work with are finite. If the designed object were perfect in every conceivable way, it would not be a creation of God. It *would* be God.

However, this entire discussion is academic, as it confuses the issue. The issue is not whether or not a structure is good or bad design (whatever that means), but how it is that the structure exists *at all*. For instance, if one

were to find hieroglyphics on a rock from the moon, it would be futile to quibble about whether they were elegantly written or not, or whether or not they concurred with somebody's opinion about good prose. One would, instead, wonder in astonishment about what kind of intelligent entity (extraterrestrial life) produced these hieroglyphics.

### Second Law of Thermodynamics—Fitch confuses the issue

The author dusts off the old saw about open systems vitiating creationist contentions about the Second Law of Thermodynamics. The real issue is not open or closed systems. It is the presumably spontaneous origin of functional specified complexity which is equivalent to a reduction of *configurational* entropy.<sup>4</sup>

Consider, as an analogy, the watch. The watch only tells time because of the functional specified complexity that is inherent in the parts being specifically designed, machined, and assembled to interact in a very narrow, specific way. The thermodynamics of the metal itself is irrelevant to the function of the watch.

Let us now make an open system by delivering heat to the watch. The entropy of the metal atoms increases. The solidity of the metal is lost, and we now have liquid metal. Solid to liquid is an increase in entropy in itself because the atoms have much greater randomness. The entropy increase of a watch melting is even greater because of the low configurational entropy it started with. Now let the open system function by letting the heat depart, so that the liquid solidifies. We have regained the solidity of the metal, which is a local loss of entropy in itself. However, we have not regained the functioning watch because it could not return to the state of low configuration. All we now have is a useless blob of metal. Clearly, open or closed systems are

irrelevant to the fact (or otherwise) of the function of the watch (other than, of course, potential issues related to such factors as the temperature of the watch's parts).

The low configurational entropy (useful specified complexity) is in no way a property of the metal. It does not originate spontaneously, regardless of whether or not the watch is an open or closed system. It is, instead, solely, and inevitably, the product of an intelligent designer.

### Irreducible complexity on hemoglobin—Fitch confuses the issue

The author tries to get around the irreducible complexity of hemoglobin by calling attention to the different kinds, and sophistications, of hemoglobin that exist among living things. He is, first of all, begging the question, by assuming the fact of evolution in order to support the possibility of evolution.

His argument, in addition, is a *non-sequitur*. The irreducible complexity of a feature does not disappear merely because there are simpler versions of that feature in existence. Moreover, the simpler versions operate under the constraints of their own irreducible complexities.

As an analogy, consider the gas-powered drivable lawnmower, the gas-powered hand-pushed lawnmower, and the non-motorized hand-pushed lawnmower. We have three levels of sophistication in terms of lawnmowers. Following Fitch's logic, one could argue that the most sophisticated one, the gas-powered drivable lawnmower, is not irreducibly complex because less-sophisticated functional lawnmowers exist. Against such nonsense, one could remove a major part of it and observe its non-function.

In fact, all three forms of lawnmowers have their own irreducible complexities. None of them can function at all unless all, or virtually



all, of their components are simultaneously in place.

Finally, the fact of the existence of three levels of sophistication begs the question about their origins. Following Fitch's reasoning, one would have to concur that the existence of three levels of sophistication demonstrates the capability of lawnmowers to arise through spontaneous, non-intelligent, evolutionary processes.

### Natural selection, a non-tautology?—Fitch again confuses the issue

Now consider 'the survival of the fittest'. Fitch denies that this is a 'survival of the survivors' tautology, by claiming that experiments can be done to test the adaptive value of a structure. For instance, the idea that a long tail helps the bird find a mate can be tested by shortening the tail and observing whether it hinders his acquisition of a mate.

There are several layers of fallacies immediately apparent in his reasoning. If a clipped tail causes the male to be avoided by females, does it prove that the tail evolved for mate-attraction, or does it merely show that females tend to avoid males that have mutilated or atypical bodies? Second, Fitch's reasoning avoids the problem of exaptation. What if the long tail originally evolved in response to selection pressures unrelated to mating and only recently became evolutionarily co-opted as a mate-attractant?

Pointedly, the real issue, confused by Fitch, is not 'survival of the fittest'. It is the *arrival* of the fittest. Even if the long tail unambiguously helps the male attract females, and even if we could have some way of knowing that it has *always* done so, it tells us nothing about how the long tail *arrived*, even within the context of evolutionary thinking. Instead, the speculation and storytelling only begin. When and how did the long tail contribute to the 'survival of the fittest' of the bird? Did an ancestral bird have a

mutation that gave it an unusually long tail, and did this persist for millions of years as a neutral mutation before some female finally 'discovered' its attractiveness? Or did an ancestral male bird have a mutation that gave it an unusually long tail, inducing the females to immediately go crazy over him? Alternatively, was all this a step-by-step co-evolutionary process, wherein a slightly longer tail generated a slightly heightened female interest, and this became a feedback loop that led to still-longer tails and still-greater female interest in them?

A more basic factor needs to be considered. The vast majority of adaptations in nature are deduced on the basis of what the structure does for the organism. Their inferred evolutionary origins are based on scenarios and storytelling, not experimental evidence.

Finally, many of the believed crucial evolutionary events were one-time occurrences that happened long ago, and the speculated causes for these events are impossible to test experimentally. In addition, the testing of the survival value of an adaptation is of dubious relevance to its speculated evolutionary origins, even if one reflexively believes in an evolutionary origin. For example, it would be futile to argue that land-dwelling creatures necessarily evolved into existence so that such creatures could escape the attentions of predatory fish, even though the simplest experiment would demonstrate the obvious—that land-dwelling creatures are almost always out of reach of predatory fish.

Finally, the erroneous conflation of 'survival of the fittest' with 'arrival of the fittest' goes to the very heart of the creation–evolution issue. Permit another analogy. Imagine a group of aliens landing on Earth and becoming fascinated with automobiles. Dutifully experimenting with the 'survival' value of each component of the car, they do an experiment wherein they remove the motor and observe what happens. They quickly deduce that

the 'survival of the fittest' requires the automobile to have an engine to even move. However, this experimental find is totally irrelevant to the *real* issue—the 'arrival of the fittest'. Did the car and its engine originate by intelligent design, or did it originate by spontaneous natural processes?

### Conclusion

This book is very superficial. Author Fitch's reasoning is very shallow, with uncritical repetition of very stale arguments. In addition, he seems to be stuck in a time warp. The author consistently brings up matters that creationists had dealt with long ago. He shows almost no understanding of the many scientific developments in creationism in recent decades.

The author titles this book as the *Three Failures of Creationism*. At the risk of being a bit uncharitable, I think it more valid to conclude that his reasoning is the biggest failure of all.

### References

1. Osanai, N., *A comparative study of the flood accounts in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis*, MA Thesis, Wesley Biblical Seminary, USA, 2004; [creation.com/gilg](http://creation.com/gilg).
2. Phelan, M.W.J., *The Inspiration of the Pentateuch* Twoedged Sword Publications, Waterlooville, UK, 2005.
3. Holding, J.P., Debunking the Documentary Hypothesis, review of Phelan, ref. 2, *J. Creation* 19(3):37–40, 2005.
4. Thaxton, C.B., Bradley, W.L. and Olsen, R.L., *The Mystery of Life's Origin*, ch. 8, Philosophical Library Inc., New York, 1984; available online at [ldolphin.org/mystery/chapt8.html](http://ldolphin.org/mystery/chapt8.html).