

God's Word or Human Reason? —a reply to John Woodmorappe

In the August 2018 issue of the *Journal of Creation*, John Woodmorappe published a negative review¹ of my 2016 book *God's Word or Human Reason? An inside perspective on creationism*. Here I'll respond to a few of Woodmorappe's most important points.

Part of Woodmorappe's review concerns my discussion about fulfilled predictions made by creationism and by evolution. Woodmorappe points out that creationism's scorecard is not empty in this respect (and the book acknowledges this), but in this area he has overlooked my most important argument. Numerous advances in technology and bioscience have been based on the reliability of predictions made by evolutionary and old-earth models, and if YEC models were able to predict future observations just as reliably, they would have many real-life applications as well. One example discussed in the book is that if accelerated nuclear decay were possible under conditions that can occur naturally on Earth, this model could be used to develop more efficient forms of nuclear power. My point was that although scientists who are creationists have contributed to the development of many useful technologies, those sorts of real-life applications of creationist models *themselves* have not happened.

Woodmorappe appears to have misunderstood the book's most important example of an advance in bioscience resulting from evolution's predictions. This advance is the discovery of the genes, and the proteins they code for, that give chimpanzees their resistance to HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and SIV (simian immunodeficiency virus). His

review offers an explanation for the fact that human cells were capable of functioning with the chimpanzee version of one of these genes, but that compatibility is *not* the prediction the book was discussing.

The prediction being discussed concerned *which* specific genes give chimpanzees their resistance to these viruses. According to evolutionary models, humans and chimpanzees share a recent common ancestor, but this disease resistance exists only in chimpanzees and not in humans. Researchers concluded that therefore the trait must have evolved in chimpanzees after their ancestors diverged from ours, and so the genes coding for it in chimpanzees must have been heavily modified by natural selection. By searching for chimpanzee genes that showed signs of heavy selection, these researchers identified three genes, known as ICAMs, that give chimpanzees their resistance to HIV and SIV.² The transplanting of one of the chimpanzee ICAMs into a culture of human cells is significant because it made the human cells resistant to HIV, demonstrating that the genes they had identified did indeed have this effect. The prediction that chimpanzees' genes for HIV/SIV resistance must show heavy selection was based on an evolutionary model, so when the genes were identified on the basis of that prediction, it was an example of this model producing a real-life benefit.

One other unfortunate characteristic of Woodmorappe's review is the seeming rejection of some ideas that are well established among creation scientists. For example, his review states: "I already knew that the geologic column did not exist, and this is not changed by the fact that 1% of Earth's land surface has representatives of all 10 Phanerozoic geologic systems in place." However, a variety of diluvial geology sources have accepted that the geologic column does, in fact, exist.³⁻⁶ Quoting Johns (2016): "Most YECs with training in geology accept

the reality of the geological column."⁷ This is one example of the book's concepts being taken more seriously among YECs than Woodmorappe gives them credit for.

As a second example, many of the specific points made by the chapter about the origin of birds⁸ were also brought up in Matthew McLain *et al.*'s study⁹ that was presented at the *Eighth International Conference on Creationism*. Points mentioned in both this chapter and McLain's study include the lack of a clear anatomical boundary between theropod dinosaurs and birds, creationists' history of uncertainty about which of those two groups *Archaeopteryx* should be placed in, and William Beebe's prediction of the existence of four-winged feathered reptiles more than 80 years before fossils of these animals were discovered. McLain *et al.* cite the book for one of their points, suggesting that in this area, it has contributed something of value to creationist discourse.

McLain's study, along with the 2013 study by Garner *et al.*¹⁰ that it builds upon, represents a new direction for creationist scholarship about dinosaurs and birds. Instead of simply attacking the evolutionary model of bird origins, these studies have worked to develop a consistent set of alternative models to explain the fossil data within a creationist worldview. The pursuit of this goal requires acknowledging the data that needs to be explained, such as the existence of pennaceous feathers on some fossils of dinosaurs (as discussed by Garner's study). In the past, the major YEC organizations' discussions of these animals often have lacked a consistent set of criteria to classify them.¹¹ If creationists wish to develop a functioning set of models in this area, they will need to adopt the new approach taken by Garner and McLain.

I do not expect any of the regular contributors to this journal to agree with me about evolution, but I hope that McLain's arguments and my own

can motivate them to improve their models and their arguments. In 2002, Wieland *et al.* wrote:

"... we think that Christians should be very much concerned about whether Biblical creation is being defended using arguments that are, for instance, factually incorrect, logically invalid, based on an incorrect understanding of the scientific evidence, etc. These sorts of things ... actually end up harming the cause of biblical creation (and hence, by extension, the Bible itself)."¹²

In the quoted article, Wieland *et al.* were arguing that it is important for creationist models to be critiqued by fellow creationists, but creationists are not the only people capable of offering valid criticism of these models. It would be valuable if more creation scientists were willing to consider criticism of their models from individuals outside of their academic community.

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» **John Woodmorappe replies:**

Jonathan Kane has put together three disparate topics, and I respond accordingly.

Orthologous genes—a variant of the old argument from homology

The fact that a chimp gene finds structural and functional correspondence to a human gene, and can function in a human setting, is not proof of evolution. By analogy, the engine in one car is ‘orthologous’ to the engine in another car, but this is not evidence that they both evolved from a common ancestor with the same kind of engine. Nor is it a prediction of evolutionary theory. It is hardly surprising that the engine from one car can be substituted for the engine of another, similar car, and perform its function.

Bird evolution—the real issues

I am quite familiar with such things as the various opinions as to what divides a dinosaur from a bird, and which (if any) dinosaurs had real feathers. (I attended the ICC presentations.) However, none

of this is relevant to the central fact that the presumed dinosaur-to-bird phylogenetic chain consists of a series of disparate, specialized, inconsistently progressing, cobbled-together fossil organisms.¹

The geologic column yet again

Kane repeats the quote: “Most YECs with training in geology accept the reality of the geological column.” How does he know that? Was there ever a survey of all creationist geologists on this topic? (Note that the geologic-column-affirmers are the ones that tend to get all the attention). In any case, even if it is true, it is an exercise in logical fallacies, for example *ad populam*. In science, especially, truth is not synonymous with majority opinion!

No informed person doubts that lithologies can, in a general sense, be correlated by fossils all over the world. However this, by itself, is not the geologic column. The geologic column, apart from the special pleading in its very design,² is based, among other things, on the uniformitarian assumption that distinctive fossils have time significance.³ This assumption has no warrant outside of uniformitarianism, and so the standard geologic column, in and of itself, has no place in Flood geology. Thus, for example, there is no basis for supposing that a Cambrian rock in one part of the world was necessarily laid down at the same time as a Cambrian rock elsewhere in the world. Nor is there any basis (except when dictated by local superposition) for supposing that a Cambrian rock in one part of the world was necessarily deposited before a Devonian rock somewhere else in the world.

Unfortunately, far too many creationists have ignored this basic fact, and have tried to ‘import’ the geologic column into Flood geology, as is, by ‘speeding it up’ from 600 million years to a few decades or centuries.

This, among other things, has led to endless and fruitless speculation as to which part of the geologic column corresponds to which stage of the Flood. It has also led to neo-Cuvierism—the notion that parts of the geologic column took ‘too long’ to have possibly formed during the Flood. Neo-Cuvierism, in turn, leads to the *reductio ad absurdum* of the entire Phanerozoic sedimentary record becoming post-Flood, with the Flood itself disappearing to somewhere far down in the Proterozoic or Archean. More likely, the Flood disappears entirely, and we are back to full-blown uniformitarianism. That is what happened, for example, to Glenn Morton.

Fortunately, creationist geologists are finally starting to break out of the shackles of uniformitarianism, though—in my opinion—not nearly enough. The discussions about the Flood/post-Flood boundary, held at the Eighth International Creation Conference in Pittsburg (August 2018), which I attended, bear this out. There is increasing realization that no stage of the Flood necessarily corresponds to some particular global interval of the Phanerozoic geologic column (for example, a Flood end at the Cretaceous-Tertiary boundary). It is also encouraging to see a return of the common-sense parsimonious Morris-Whitcomb understanding of the Flood, in which only Miocene, Pliocene, and Pleistocene are potentially post-Flood.

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