

## PHILOSOPHICAL NATURALISM AND THE AGE OF THE EARTH: ARE THEY RELATED?

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*Contemporary concern over the negative impact of theories of biological evolution is justified, but many Christians do not understand the stranglehold that philosophical naturalism has on geology and astronomy. The historical roots of philosophical naturalism reach back into the sixteenth century in the works of Galileo Galilei and Francis Bacon. Evolutionary and naturalistic theories of the earth's creation based on uniformitarian assumptions and advocating old-earth theories emerged in the late eighteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, many Christians sought to harmonize biblical teaching with old-earth geological theories such as the gap theory and a tranquil or local Noachian flood. However, many evangelicals and High Churchmen still held to the literal view of Genesis 1–11. Two Enlightenment-generated philosophical movements in the eighteenth century, deism and atheism, elevated human reason to a place of supreme authority and took an anti-supernaturalistic view of the Bible, holding it to be just another human book. The two movements with their advocacy of an old-earth and their effect on astronomy and geology preceded Darwin and supplied him with millions of years needed for his naturalistic theory of the origin of living things. From this lineage it is clear that geology is not an unbiased, objective science and that old-earth theories, naturalism, and uniformitarianism are inseparable. Intelligent-design arguments usually used to combat evolution fail to account for the curse imposed by God in Genesis 3 and are therefore only partially effective. Intelligent-design advocates should recognize that the naturalism represented in evolutionary theories began much earlier than Darwin. A return to the Scriptures and their teaching of a young earth is the great need of the day.*

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Many are concerned about the negative impact of evolution on today's world. Some see the consequences in terms of moral and spiritual chaos in society and the church. Others see the damage that the brainwashing of evolution is causing in academic and intellectual arenas. They correctly argue that neo-Darwinism (or any related theory of biological evolution, such as "punctuated equilibrium theory")

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is not pure science, but largely philosophical naturalism<sup>1</sup> masquerading as scientific fact. Many such critics of evolution are part of what is called the “Intelligent Design” (hereafter ID) movement. But many are also within the “young-earth creationist” (hereafter YEC) movement.

I strongly agree with and appreciate a great deal of what leaders in the ID movement are writing, not only about the scientific problems with all theories of biological evolution, but especially about the stranglehold that philosophical naturalism (hereafter simply “naturalism”) has on science.

However, from my reading of ID books and articles and listening to lectures by some of those leaders, I do not think that they see clearly enough the extent to which science is dominated by naturalism. The reason for this observation is that many ID leaders have made oral or written statements something like this: “We are not going to deal with the question of the age of the earth because it is a divisive side issue. Instead we want to address the main issue, which is the control of science by naturalism.”<sup>2</sup> The implication of such statements is that the age of the earth is unrelated to naturalism. Many Christians have not even considered the arguments for young-earth creationism because they think that the ID movement has the right view and is dealing with evolution correctly. But this disjunction of naturalism and the age of the earth is incorrect, as I hope to show.

As I read their writings, the ID people do not seem to understand the historical roots of the philosophical control of science. Or, perhaps, they do not appear to have gone back far enough in their historical investigations. A closer look at history, especially the history of the idea of an old earth, provides abundant evidence that the originators of the idea of an old earth and old universe interpreted the physical evidence by using essentially naturalistic assumptions. Similarly, a closer look at the way modern old-earth geologists and old-universe cosmologists reason shows that both geology and astronomy are controlled by the same naturalism that dominates the biological sciences, and indeed nearly all of academia.

I submit, therefore, that the age of the earth strikes at the very heart of naturalism’s control of science and that fighting naturalism only in the biological sciences amounts to fighting only one-third of the battle. Worse still, many of the people involved at the highest levels in the ID movement (e.g., Hugh Ross, Robert Newman, Walter Bradley) are not neutral regarding the age of the earth (as the recognized leader of the ID movement, Phillip Johnson, attempts to be), but are actively and strongly opposed to the young-earth view. Although the ID movement is fighting naturalism in biology, it is actually tolerating or even promoting naturalism in geology and astronomy—which is not a consistent strategy—thus undermining its potential effectiveness.

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<sup>1</sup>This philosophy or worldview, promoted under various names (philosophical materialism, atheism, or secular humanism), says that nature (or matter) is all there is and everything can and must be explained by time plus chance plus the laws of nature working on matter. This worldview includes not only the way the world operates, but how it came into being. These materialists either believe that matter is eternal (and merely changes form) or that the initial simple matter somehow came into existence by chance.

<sup>2</sup>For example, Phillip Johnson recently wrote, “To avoid endless confusion and distraction and to keep attention focused on the most important point, I have firmly put aside all questions of Biblical interpretation and religious authority, in order to concentrate my energies on one theme. My theme is that, in Fr. Seraphim’s words, ‘evolution is not “scientific fact” at all, but philosophy.’ The philosophy in question is naturalism.” See his introduction to Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* (Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000) 50.

## I. HISTORICAL ROOTS

The idea of an old earth really began to take hold in science in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, before Darwin's controversial theory appeared on the scene. Prior to this, in Europe and North America (where science was born and developed under the influence of Christianity and assumptions about physical reality were rooted firmly in the Bible), the dominant, majority view was that God created the world in six literal days about 6,000 years earlier and judged it with a global, catastrophic flood. How, then, did the old-earth idea arise?

Two important people in the sixteenth century greatly influenced the development of old-earth thinking at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Those two were Galileo Galilei and Sir Francis Bacon. As is well known, Galileo (1564–1642) was a proponent of Copernicus's theory that the earth revolves around the sun, not vice versa. Initially the Roman Catholic Church leadership had no problem with this idea, but for various academic, political, and ecclesiastical reasons, in 1633 the pope changed his mind and forced Galileo to recant his belief in heliocentricity on threat of excommunication. But eventually heliocentricity became generally accepted and with that many Christians absorbed two lessons from the so-called "Galileo affair." One was from a statement of Galileo himself. He wrote, "The intention of the Holy Ghost is to teach us how to go to heaven, not how heaven goes."<sup>3</sup> In other words, the Bible teaches theology and morality, but not astronomy or science. The other closely related lesson was that the church will make big mistakes if it tries to tell scientists what to believe about the world.<sup>4</sup>

Galileo's contemporary in England, Francis Bacon (1561–1626), was a politician and philosopher who significantly influenced the development of modern science. He emphasized observation and experimentation as the best method for gaining true knowledge about the world. He also insisted that theory should be built only on the foundation of a wealth of carefully collected data. But although Bacon wrote explicitly of his belief in a recent, literal 6-day creation,<sup>5</sup> he like Galileo insisted on not mixing the study of what he called the two books of God: creation and the Scriptures. He stated,

But some of the moderns, however, have indulged in this folly, with such consummate carelessness, as to have endeavoured to found a natural philosophy on the first chapter of Genesis, the book of Job, and other passages of holy Scripture—"seeking the dead among the living." And this folly is the more to be prevented and restrained, because, from the unsound admixture of things divine and human, there arises not merely a

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<sup>3</sup>Galileo, *Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina* (1615), translated and reprinted in Stillman Drake, *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo* (New York: Doubleday, 1957) 186, reprinted in D. C. Goodman, ed., *Science and Religious Belief 1600-1900: A Selection of Primary Sources* (Milton Keynes, U.K.: The Open University Press, 1973) 34.

<sup>4</sup>Much has been written about this complex Galileo affair. Helpful analyses can be found in Thomas Schirmacher, "The Galileo Affair: history or heroic hagiography?," *Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal* 14/1 (2000):91–100 (also at <[www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/magazines/tj/docs/TJ14\\_1-Galileo.pdf](http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/magazines/tj/docs/TJ14_1-Galileo.pdf)> [accessed Jan. 30, 2004]), and in William R. Shea, "Galileo and the Church," in *God and Nature*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986) 114–35.

<sup>5</sup>Francis Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon* (London: n.p., 1819) 2:480–88.

fantastic philosophy, but also a heretical religion.”<sup>6</sup>

As a result of the powerful influence of Galileo and Bacon, a strong bifurcation developed between the interpretation of creation (which became the task of scientists) and the interpretation of Scripture (which is the work of theologians and pastors). With the advent of the nineteenth century, the old-earth geologists, whether Christian or not, often referred to Bacon and Galileo’s dictums to silence the objections of the “Scriptural geologists,” a group of Christian clergy and scientists writing from about 1820 to 1850 who raised biblical, geological, and philosophical arguments against old-earth theories and for the literal truth of Genesis—a literal six-day creation about 6,000 years ago and a global catastrophic flood at the time of Noah, which they believed was responsible for most of the geological record.<sup>7</sup> The warning of the old-earth proponents was powerful in its effect on the minds of the public. The message was that defenders of a literal interpretation of Genesis regarding Creation, Noah’s flood, and the age of the earth were repeating the same mistake the Roman Catholic Church made three centuries earlier in relation to the nature of the solar system. And just look at how that retarded the progress of science and exposed the church to ridicule, said the old-earth advocates.

## II. NEW THEORIES ABOUT THE HISTORY OF CREATION

In contrast to the long-standing young-earth creationist view, different histories of the earth began to be developed in the late eighteenth century, which were evolutionary and naturalistic in character. Three prominent French scientists were very influential in this regard. In 1778 Georges-Louis Comte de Buffon (1708–1788) postulated that the earth was the result of a collision between a comet and the sun and had gradually cooled from a molten lava state over at least 75,000 years (a figure based on his study of cooling metals).<sup>8</sup> Buffon was probably a deist or possibly a secret atheist.<sup>9</sup> Pierre Laplace (1749–1827), an open atheist, published his nebular hypothesis in 1796.<sup>10</sup> He imagined that the solar system had naturally and gradually condensed from a gas cloud during a very long period of time. In his *Zoological Philosophy* of 1809, Jean Lamarck (1744–1829), who straddled the fence

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<sup>6</sup>Francis Bacon, translated by Andrew Johnson from the 1620 original *Novum Organum* (London, n.p., 1859) 43 (Book I, part lxxv). See also Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning* (Oxford, 1906) 46 (Book I, part VI.16).

<sup>7</sup>A fully documented analysis of the Scriptural geologists and their opposition to old-earth geology may be found in my Ph.D. thesis: T. J. Mortenson, “British Scriptural Geologists in the first half of the Nineteenth Century” (Coventry University, Coventry, U.K., 1996). This is available from the British Library Thesis Service (<[www.bl.uk/services/document/brittheses.html](http://www.bl.uk/services/document/brittheses.html)> [accessed Jan. 30, 2004]) either on microfilm for loan or on paper for purchase. New Leaf Press expects to publish a revised version in Spring 2004 under the title, *The Great Turning Point: The Church’s Mistake with Geology—Before Darwin*.

<sup>8</sup>Georges Comte de Buffon, *Les époques de la nature* (Paris: n.p., 1778). According to de Buffon’s unpublished manuscript, he actually believed that the sedimentary rocks probably took at least three million years to form. But Buffon’s fear of contemporary reaction to this great date led him to put 75,000 years in the published book. See “Buffon, Georges-Louis LeClerc, Comte de,” in Charles C. Gillispie, ed., *Dictionary of Scientific Biography* [hereafter *DSB*], 16 vols. (New York: Scribner’s, 1970–1990) 579.

<sup>9</sup>“Buffon, Georges-Louis LeClerc, Comte de,” *DSB* 577–78.

<sup>10</sup>Pierre Laplace, *Exposition du système du monde*, 2 vols. (Paris: Cercle Social, 1796).

between deism and atheism,<sup>11</sup> proposed a theory of biological evolution over long ages, with a mechanism known as the inheritance of acquired characteristics.

New theories in geology were also being advocated at the turn of the nineteenth century as geology began to develop into a disciplined field of scientific study. Abraham Werner (1749–1817) was a German mineralogist and probably a deist.<sup>12</sup> Although he published very little, his impact on geology was enormous, because many of the nineteenth century's greatest geologists had been his students. He theorized that the strata of the earth had been precipitated chemically and mechanically from a slowly receding universal ocean. According to Werner's unpublished writings, the earth was at least one million years old.<sup>13</sup> His elegantly simple, oceanic theory was quickly rejected (because it just did not fit the facts), but the idea of an old earth remained with his students.

The Scotsman, James Hutton (1726–1797), was trained in medicine but turned to farming for many years before eventually devoting his time to geology. In his *Theory of the Earth*, published in 1795, he proposed that the continents were gradually and continually being eroded into the ocean basins. These sediments were then gradually hardened and raised by the internal heat of the earth to form new continents, which would be eroded into the ocean again. With this slow cyclical process in mind, Hutton could see no evidence of a beginning to the earth, a view that precipitated the charge of atheism by many of his contemporaries, though he too was most likely a deist.<sup>14</sup>

Neither Werner nor Hutton paid attention to the fossils in rocks. But another key person in the development of old-earth geological theories, who did, was the Englishman, William Smith (1769–1839). He was a drainage engineer and surveyor and helped build canals all over England and Wales, which gave him much exposure to the strata and fossils. He is called the “Father of English Stratigraphy” because he produced the first geological maps of England and Wales and developed the method of using fossils to assign relative dates to the strata.<sup>15</sup> As a vague sort of theist<sup>16</sup> he believed in many supernatural creation events and supernaturally induced floods over the course of much more time than indicated in the Bible.<sup>17</sup>

The Frenchman, Georges Cuvier (1768–1832), was a famous comparative anatomist and paleontologist. Although he was a nominal Lutheran, recent research has shown that he was an irreverent deist.<sup>18</sup> Because of his scientific stature, he was most influential in popularizing the catastrophist theory of earth history. By studying fossils found largely in the Paris Basin he believed that over the course of untold ages there had been at least four regional or nearly global catastrophic floods, the

<sup>11</sup>John H. Brooke, *Science and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 243.

<sup>12</sup>Leroy E. Page, “Diluvialism and Its Critics in Great Britain in the Early Nineteenth Century,” in *Toward a History of Geology*, ed. Cecil J. Schneer (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1969) 257.

<sup>13</sup>Alexander Ospovat, “Werner, Abraham Gottlob,” *DSB* 260.

<sup>14</sup>Dennis R. Dean, “James Hutton on Religion and Geology: the Unpublished Preface to His *Theory of the Earth* (1788),” *Annals of Science* 32 (1975):187–93.

<sup>15</sup>William Smith, *Strata Identified by Organized Fossils* (London: n.p., 1816) and *Stratigraphical System of Organized Fossils* (London: n.p., 1817).

<sup>16</sup>Smith's own writings suggest this, as do comments by geologist John Phillips, Smith's nephew and geology student. See John Phillips, *Memoirs of William Smith* (London: [n.p.], 1844) 25.

<sup>17</sup>William Smith, *Deductions from Established Facts in Geology* (Scarborough: n.p., 1835).

<sup>18</sup>Brooke, *Science and Religion* 247–48.

last of which probably was about 5,000 years ago.<sup>19</sup> This obviously coincided with the date of Noah's flood, and some who endorsed Cuvier's theory made this connection. However, in his published theory, Cuvier himself never explicitly equated his last catastrophe with Noah's flood.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, Charles Lyell (1797–1875), a trained lawyer turned geologist and probably a deist (or Unitarian, which is essentially the same),<sup>21</sup> began publishing his three-volume *Principles of Geology* in 1830. Building on Hutton's uniformitarian ideas, Lyell insisted that the geological features of the earth can, and indeed must, be explained by slow gradual processes of erosion, sedimentation, earthquakes, volcanism, etc., operating at essentially the same average rate and power as observed today. By the 1840s his view became the ruling paradigm in geology. So, at the time of the Scriptural geologists (ca. 1820–50), there were three views of earth history (see the chart at end of this article for a graphical comparison).

It should be noted that two very influential geologists in England (and in the world) at this time were William Buckland (1784–1856) and Adam Sedgwick (1785–1873). Buckland became the head professor of geology at Oxford University in 1813 and Sedgwick gained the same position at Cambridge in 1818. Both were ordained Anglican clergy and both initially promoted old-earth catastrophism. But under the influence of Lyell they both converted to uniformitarianism with public recantations of their catastrophist views in the early 1830s. Buckland is often viewed as a defender of Noah's flood because of his 1823 book, *Reliquiae Diluvianae*. But this apparent defense of the flood was actually a subtle attack on it, as Scriptural geologists accurately perceived. Because of their powerful positions in academia and in the church, Sedgwick and Buckland led many Christians in the 1820s to accept the new geological theories about the history of the earth and to abandon their faith in the literal interpretation of Genesis and in the unique and geologically significant Noachian flood.

One more fact about geology at this time deserves mention. The world's first scientific society devoted exclusively to geology was the London Geological Society (LGS), founded in 1807. From its inception, which was at a time when very little was known about the geological formations of the earth and the fossils in them, the LGS was controlled by the assumption that earth history is much older than and different from that presented in Genesis. And a few of its most powerful members were Anglican clergy. Not only was very little known about the geological features of the earth, but at that time there were no university degrees in geology and no professional geologists. Neither was seen until the 1830s and 1840s, which was long after the naturalistic idea of an old earth was firmly entrenched in the minds of those who controlled the geological societies, journals, and university geology departments.

<sup>19</sup>Georges Cuvier, *Theory of the Earth* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1813). This was the first English translation of the French original, "Discours Préliminaire" in *Recherches sur les ossements fossils de quadrupèdes* (Paris, 1812).

<sup>20</sup>It was the Scottish editor and publisher of Cuvier's English editions, Robert Jameson, who made the clear connection between Cuvier's last catastrophe and Noah's flood, no doubt to make it more compatible with British thinking at the time. The Oxford geologist, William Buckland, made this idea even more popular. See Martin Rudwick, *The Meaning of Fossils* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 133–35.

<sup>21</sup>Colin A. Russell, *Cross-currents: Interactions Between Science & Faith* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1985) 136.

### III. CHRISTIAN COMPROMISES WITH OLD-EARTH GEOLOGICAL THEORIES

During the early nineteenth century many Christians made various attempts to harmonize these old-earth geological theories with the Bible. In 1804, the gap theory began to be propounded by the 24-year-old pastor, Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847), who after his conversion to evangelicalism in 1811 became one of the leading Scottish evangelicals.<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that Chalmers began teaching his gap theory before the world's first geological society was formed (in London in 1807), and before Cuvier's catastrophist theory appeared in French (1812) or in English (1813) and over two decades before Lyell's theory was promoted (beginning in 1830). In part because of Chalmers' powerful preaching and writing skills, the gap theory quickly became the most popular reinterpretation of Genesis among Christians for about the next half-century. However, the respected Anglican clergyman, George Stanley Faber (1773–1854), began advocating the day-age theory in 1823.<sup>23</sup> This was not widely accepted by Christians, especially geologists, because of the obvious discord between the order of events in Genesis 1 and the order according to old-earth theory. The day-age view began to be more popular after Hugh Miller (1802–1856), the prominent Scottish geologist and evangelical friend of Chalmers, embraced and promoted it in the 1850s after abandoning the gap theory.<sup>24</sup>

Also in the 1820s the evangelical Scottish zoologist, Rev. John Fleming (1785–1857), began arguing for a tranquil Noachian deluge<sup>25</sup> (a view which Lyell also advocated, under Fleming's influence). In the late 1830s the prominent evangelical Congregationalist theologian, John Pye Smith (1774–1851), advocated that Genesis 1–11 was describing a local creation and a local flood, both of which supposedly occurred in Mesopotamia.<sup>26</sup> Then, as German liberal theology was beginning to spread in Britain in the 1830s, the view that Genesis is a myth, which conveys only theological and moral truths, started to become popular.

So from all this it should be clear that by 1830, when Lyell published his uniformitarian theory, most geologists and much of the church already believed that the earth was much older than 6,000 years and that the Noachian flood was *not* the cause of most of the geological record. Lyell is often given too much credit (or blame) for the church's loss of faith in Genesis. In reality, most of the damage was done before Lyell, often by Christians who were otherwise quite biblical, and this compromise was made at a time when geologists knew very little about the rocks and fossils of the earth.

Nevertheless, many evangelicals and High Churchmen still clung to the

<sup>22</sup>William Hanna, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers* (Edinburgh: n.p., 1849–52) 1.80–81; Thomas Chalmers, "Remarks on Curvier's *Theory of the Earth*," in *The Christian Instructor* (1814), reprinted in *The Works of Thomas Chalmers* (Glasgow: n.p., 1836–42) 12:347–72.

<sup>23</sup>George S. Faber, *Treatise on the Genius and Object of the Patriarchal, the Levitical, and the Christian Dispensations* (London: n.p., 1823) 1:chap. 3.

<sup>24</sup>Hugh Miller, *The Two Records: Mosaic and the Geological* (London: n.p., 1854) and *Testimony of the Rocks* (reprint of 1957 ed.; Edinburgh: W. P. Nimmo, Hay & Mitchell, 1897) 107–74.

<sup>25</sup>John Fleming, "The Geological Deluge as Interpreted by Baron Cuvier and Buckland Inconsistent with Moses and Nature," *Edinburgh Philosophical Journal* 14 (1826):205–39.

<sup>26</sup>John Pye Smith, *Relation between the Holy Scriptures and some parts of Geological Science* (London: Jackson & Walford, 1839).

literal view of Genesis because it was exegetically the soundest interpretation. In fact, until about 1845 the majority of Bible commentaries on Genesis taught a recent six-day creation and a global catastrophic flood.<sup>27</sup> So in the early nineteenth century competing old-earth geological theories and competing old-earth interpretations of the early chapters of Genesis existed, and the Scriptural geologists fought against all these theories and interpretations.

#### IV. PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENTS

As a prelude to this Genesis-geology controversy, the eighteenth century also witnessed the spread of two competing but largely similar worldviews: deism and atheism. These two worldviews flowed out of the Enlightenment, in which human reason was elevated to the place of supreme authority for determining truth. This enthroning of human reason not only challenged the authority of the church in society, but also led to all kinds of anti-supernatural attacks on the Bible, undermining its authority as a source of historical, as well as moral and theological truth. Deism and atheism were slightly different ways of packaging an anti-supernatural view of history.

Apart from the deists' belief in a rather vaguely defined Creator God and a supernatural beginning to the creation, they were indistinguishable from atheists in their views of Scripture and the physical reality. In deism, as in atheism, the Bible is merely a human book, containing errors, and not the inspired Word of God, and the history and function of the creation can be totally explained by the properties of matter and the "inviolable laws of nature" in operation over a long period of time. Deists and atheists often disguised their true views, especially in England where they were not culturally acceptable. Many of them gained influential positions in the scientific establishment of Europe and America, where they subtly and effectively promoted what is today called naturalism. Brooke comments on the subtle influence of deistic forms of naturalism when he writes,

Without additional clarification, it is not always clear to the historian (and was not always clear to contemporaries) whether proponents of design were arguing a Christian or deistic thesis. The ambiguity itself could be useful. By cloaking potentially subversive discoveries in the language of natural theology, scientists could appear more orthodox than they were, but without the discomfort of duplicity if their inclinations were more in line with deism.<sup>28</sup>

But the effects of deistic and atheistic philosophy on biblical studies and Christian theology also became widespread on the European continent in the late eighteenth century and in Britain and America by the middle of the nineteenth century. As Reventlow concluded in his massive study,

We cannot overestimate the influence exercised by Deistic thought, and by the principles of the Humanist world-view which the Deists made the criterion of their biblical criticism, on the historical-critical exegesis of the nineteenth century; the consequences extend right down to the present. At that time a series of almost unshakeable presupposi-

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<sup>27</sup>See the detailed analysis of commentaries before and during this period in my thesis (footnote 7 above) 53–67, also at <[www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/magazines/tj/docs/tjv11n2\\_scrip\\_geol.asp](http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/magazines/tj/docs/tjv11n2_scrip_geol.asp)> (accessed Feb. 3, 2004).

<sup>28</sup>Brooke, *Science and Religion* 194.

tions were decisively shifted in a different direction.<sup>29</sup>

So the biblical worldview, which had dominated the Western nations for centuries, was rapidly being replaced by a naturalistic worldview. And it was into the midst of these revolutions in worldview and the reinterpretation of the phenomena of nature and the Bible that the Scriptural geologists expressed their opposition to old-earth geology in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In summary, deism (which is a slightly theologized form of naturalism) flourished briefly in the early eighteenth century and then went underground as it spread into liberal biblical scholarship and in the nineteenth century into science. Atheism (naked naturalism) became increasingly popular and aggressive in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially on the European continent. So, naturalism first affected astronomy and geology and then only later did it gain control of biology. Many old-earth geologists (e.g., Sedgwick) vigorously opposed Darwin's theory in 1859. But they failed to realize that Darwin simply applied the same naturalistic thinking to his theory of the origin of living creatures that the geologists had applied to their theories about the origin of the earth and geological record of strata and fossils. Their naturalistic geological theories laid the foundation for naturalistic biology.

Clearly, Buffon's theory that the earth was the result of a collision of a comet and the sun and then cooled from a molten state over at least 75,000 years was a naturalistic theory. His deism led him to try to separate science from religious and metaphysical ideas and to reject teleological reasoning and the idea of any supernatural, divine intervention in nature. It is therefore no surprise that he firmly rejected the biblical flood (along with its implications for the history and age of the earth).<sup>30</sup> Laplace's nebular hypothesis for the origin of the solar system over much more than 75,000 years (which became the seedbed of the "big bang" theory) was atheistic and therefore naturalistic. So was Werner's deistic geological theory of a slowly receding ocean producing the geological record over one million years. So were Hutton's and Lyell's deistic uniformitarian theories. William Smith's and Georges Cuvier's deistic catastrophist theories were also quite naturalistic in that they too ignored Scripture and considered only natural causes for the geological record (though they had a supernaturalistic view of the origin of biological life).

## V. GEOLOGY—AN OBJECTIVE SCIENCE?

These developers of old-earth theory were hardly objective, unbiased, let-the-facts-speak-for-themselves interpreters of the physical evidence, as is so often supposed. Regarding early nineteenth-century geology, a respected historian of science has noted,

Most significantly, recent work in cultural anthropology and the sociology of knowledge has shown that the conceptual framework that brings the natural world into a comprehensible form becomes especially evident when a scientist constructs a classification [of rock strata]. Previous experience, early training, institutional loyalties, personal temperament, and theoretical outlook are all brought to bear in defining particular boundaries as

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<sup>29</sup>Henning G. Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1984) 412.

<sup>30</sup>Article on Buffon in *DSB* 577–78.

'natural.'<sup>31</sup>

It would be misleading to think that all these factors influenced all scientists to the same degree. Furthermore, a major component of anyone's theoretical outlook is his religious worldview (which could include atheism or agnosticism). Worldview had a far more significant influence on the origin of old-earth geology than has often been perceived or acknowledged. A person's worldview not only affects the interpretation of the facts but also the observation of the facts. Another prominent historian of science rightly comments about scientists, and non-scientists, "[M]en often perceive what they expect, and overlook what they do not wish to see."<sup>32</sup> In his enlightening description of the late-1830s controversy over the identification of the Devonian formation in the geology of Britain, Rudwick wrote,

Furthermore, most of their recorded field observations that related to the Devonian controversy were not only more or less 'theory laden,' in the straightforward sense that most scientists as well as historians and philosophers of science now accept as a matter of course, but also 'controversy laden.' The particular observations made, and their immediate ordering in the field, were often manifestly directed toward finding empirical evidence that would be not merely relevant to the controversy but also *persuasive*. Many of the most innocently 'factual' observations can be seen from their context to have been sought, selected, and recorded in order to reinforce the observer's interpretation and to undermine the plausibility of that of his opponents.<sup>33</sup>

In his covert promotion of Scrope's uniformitarian interpretations of the geology of central France, Lyell had similarly said in 1827, "It is almost superfluous to remind the reader that they who have a theory to establish, may easily overlook facts which bear against them, and, unconscious of their own partiality, dwell exclusively on what tends to support their opinions."<sup>34</sup> However, many geologists, then and now, would say that Lyell was blind to this fact in his own geological interpretations.

So, the influence of worldview on the observation, selection and interpretation of the geological facts was significant, especially given the limited knowledge of people individually and collectively in the still infant stage of early nineteenth-century geology. As the philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn, has noted,

Philosophers of science have repeatedly demonstrated that more than one theoretical construction can always be placed upon a given collection of data. History of science indicates that, particularly in the early developmental stages of a new paradigm, it is not even very difficult to invent such alternatives.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup>James A. Secord, *Controversy in Victorian Geology: The Cambrian-Silurian Dispute* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986) 6.

<sup>32</sup>Colin A. Russell, "The Conflict Metaphor and Its Social Origins," *Science and Christian Belief* 1/1 (1989):25.

<sup>33</sup>Martin J. S. Rudwick, *The Great Devonian Controversy: The Shaping of Scientific Knowledge among Gentlemanly Specialists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 431-32.

<sup>34</sup>Charles Lyell, "Review of Scrope's *Memoir on the Geology of Central France*," *Quarterly Review* 36/72 (1827):480.

<sup>35</sup>Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) 76.

Just as the catastrophist felt irresistibly driven by the “obvious” evidence to believe in great regional or global catastrophes, so also the uniformitarian “saw” equally undeniable evidence that they had never happened. In the same way, Scriptural geologists, like Rev. Henry Cole (with virtually no geological knowledge) or Rev. George Young (with excellent geological competence), felt that all the opposing geologists were “blind” to the plain evidences for a recent supernatural creation and a unique global flood.<sup>36</sup>

Not only did various influences bias the developers of old-earth theory. They were in fact either blatantly or subtly hostile toward Scripture. We get a glimpse of the anti-scriptural attitudes of old-earth geologists from the writings of Charles Lyell. Writing to Roderick Murchison (a fellow old-earth geologist) in a private letter dated 11 Aug. 1829, just months before the publication of the first volume of his uniformitarian *Principles of Geology* (1830), Lyell reflected,

I trust I shall make my sketch of the progress of geology popular. Old [Rev. John] Fleming is frightened and thinks the age will not stand my anti-Mosaical conclusions and at least that the subject will for a time become unpopular and awkward for the clergy, but I am not afraid. I shall out with the whole but in as conciliatory a manner as possible.<sup>37</sup>

About the same time Lyell corresponded with his friend, George P. Scrope (another old-earth geologist and MP of British Parliament), saying, “If ever the Mosaic geology could be set down without giving offense, it would be in an historical sketch.”<sup>38</sup> Why would Lyell want to rid geology of the historically accurate (inspired) record of the flood? Because as a Unitarian he was living in rebellion against his Creator, Jesus Christ, and he wanted geology to function with naturalistic presuppositions, just like his uniformitarian forefather, James Hutton, who wrote,

The past history of our globe must be explained by what can be seen to be happening now.... No powers are to be employed that are not natural to the globe, no action to be admitted except those of which we know the principle.<sup>39</sup>

So contrary to what people in the ID movement and many Christians influenced by the ID movement seem to think, naturalism (with its attendant anti-Bible, especially anti-Genesis, attitude) took hold of geology and astronomy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. And this spread of the infection of naturalism in science was concurrent with the development of the same critical naturalistic approach to Genesis in biblical scholarship. In other words, it was reasoned, Moses did not write Genesis under divine inspiration. Rather, Genesis is no different from any other fallible human book and was in fact the purely natural product of many human authors and redactors working many centuries after Moses.

Although some of the catastrophists and uniformitarians believed in a

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<sup>36</sup>Henry Cole, *Popular Geology* (London: J. Hatchard, 1834) 31; George Young, *Scriptural Geology* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1838) 74.

<sup>37</sup>Quoted in John H. Brooke, “The Natural Theology of the Geologists: Some Theological Strata,” *Images of the Earth*, eds. L. J. Jordanova and Roy S. Porter (British Society for the History of Science, Monograph 1, 1979) 45.

<sup>38</sup>Quoted in Roy Porter, “Charles Lyell and the Principles of the History of Geology,” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 9/2/32 (July 1976):93.

<sup>39</sup>James Hutton, “Theory of the Earth,” *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, 1785, quoted in A. Holmes, *Principles of Physical Geology* (U.K.: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1965) 43-44.

Creator and some even professed to be Christians, the old-earth theories were developed by applying naturalistic philosophical assumptions in their interpretations of geological and astronomical evidence. Many old-earthers were *not* 100 percent philosophical naturalists. But all of them were operating largely with naturalistic assumptions, whether they realized it or not. In other words, they reconstructed their histories of the earth and solar system by appealing *only* to the presently observed laws and processes of nature plus time and chance (i.e., excluding the supernatural interventions of God at the fall and the flood, which disrupted or altered at least some of the laws and processes of nature).

It was on the basis of this anti-biblical naturalistic thinking that fifty years later Darwin promoted his naturalistic uniformitarian theory in biology to explain the incredible design in living things. Old-earth geological theories and old-universe astronomical theories are nothing but naturalistic philosophy (or really religion) masquerading as scientific fact, just like the evolutionary biological theories of Neo-Darwinism and Punctuated Equilibrium are.

## VI. NATURALISM AND UNIFORMITARIANISM

Much more needs to be explored regarding this subject of naturalism and uniformitarianism. There has been some shallow and even incorrect thinking and writing on this subject by YECs as well as by their old-earth Christian and non-Christian critics. John Reed has written two very helpful articles.<sup>40</sup>

I want to state clearly that naturalistic assumptions do not *necessarily* mean that a scientific conclusion is wrong. For example, for a person with naturalistic assumptions as his starting point could conceivably deduce the law of inertia from his observations. Or, in the matter of actualities, Francis Crick, who is an atheist, was a co-discoverer of the structure of the DNA molecule. But these examples have to do with what I like to call *operation* science. This research uses the so-called “scientific method” of observation of repeatable experiments in a controlled environment to determine how the present creation, or an individual entity in the creation, operates. For example, medical research, engineering research, and much research in biology, chemistry, and physics fall into the category of operation science. This is the kind of science which put a man on the moon, a refrigerator in almost every kitchen, and finds cures for diseases. But operation science does not have any significant bearing on any doctrine of Scripture, and it is rarely affected by a scientist’s religious worldview.

However, the matter of the *origin* of the law of inertia or of the DNA molecule or of the origin, age, and history of the earth and universe (and everything in them) is a distinctly different question. These questions fall into the domain of what is often called *origin* science. This kind of research does not use the “scientific method” of experimentation (except sometimes to propose *possible* causes of past events). Rather, to determine the *actual* past cause for some present effect that was produced in the unobservable past (e.g., a fossil or Grand Canyon), origin scientists use the legal-historical method of consideration of any relevant eye-witness testimony of the past event and careful investigation of the existing circumstantial evidence of the past event. Sciences such as archeology, paleontology, and historical geology fit into this category of origin science. Origin science is like criminal

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<sup>40</sup>John K. Reed, “Demythologizing Uniformitarian History,” *Creation Research Society Quarterly (CRSQ)* 35/3 (December 1998):156-65, and idem, “Historiography and Natural History,” *CRSQ* 37/3 (December 2000):160-75.

investigation—by studying the evidence which exists in the present, researchers are trying to “discover the past.” Origin scientists, then, are reconstructing history, which has direct and significant bearing on many important doctrines of Scripture. Here, naturalistic and uniformitarian assumptions strongly influence the observation, selection, and interpretation of the physical data and can lead to very erroneous conclusions. In this case, Jesus’ warning that bad trees cannot produce good fruit (Matt 7:18) and Paul’s warnings about deceptive philosophy (Col 2:8) and “arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’” (1 Tim 6:20) are very relevant. Old-earth geological theories were theories about *history*. Since they started with anti-biblical presuppositions, it is no surprise that they ended up concluding that the history in the Bible was wrong.

Naturalistic, and even uniformitarian, thinking of sorts is not to be totally excluded from Christian thinking. From roughly the end of the post-flood, ice-age period (about 500–700 years after the flood)<sup>41</sup> to the present time, physical processes (e.g., volcanoes, earthquakes, wind and water erosion and sedimentation, meteor impacts, etc.) have been operating essentially as they do today and at the same average rate and intensity presently observed. Furthermore, although some different starting conditions for the processes and laws of nature prevailed in the interval between creation week and the flood, there was a uniformity of natural processes then, too. Some of the laws of nature started functioning during creation week after God made particular things (e.g., laws governing the growth and reproduction of plants did not commence until God supernaturally made the first kinds of plants on Day 3, laws related to the movements of the heavenly bodies commenced when God made those bodies on Day 4, and certain laws affecting animal life began to take effect on Day 5 when God made the first birds and sea creatures). Certainly, by the time God made Adam all the laws of nature were operational.

But it is likely that some of the laws of nature were altered in some way by God’s curse on the whole creation in Genesis 3, resulting in the bondage to corruption that Paul speaks of in Rom 8:19–23. This present world is similar to, but significantly different from, the perfect world that God originally created during the six literal days of creation week. We now live in, and scientists study, a creation damaged by human sin and divine judgment. Today all old-earth geologists and astronomers (whether professing Christians or not) deny the cosmic impact of the fall, just as their predecessors did in the early nineteenth century. Such a denial is an obvious implication of a non-Christian’s worldview. Many old-earth Christians explicitly deny this cosmic impact of the fall. Others unconsciously reject it. That is, they explicitly affirm that the fall affected the whole creation, but because they accept the evolutionary view of history (even if they reject Darwinism to explain the origin of the various kinds of life), they unwittingly imply that the curse of Genesis 3 had no discernable impact on the non-human creation.

Furthermore, although many laws continued to operate during the flood (e.g., water still flowed downhill and with sufficient speed could erode and carry silt, sand, rocks, and boulders but with reduced speed would drop and sort its load, as it

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<sup>41</sup>Leading creationist researchers on this subject believe there is unequivocal evidence for only one Ice Age and that it was triggered by climatic, atmospheric, geological, and oceanic factors existing at the end of the 371-day flood at the time of Noah. See for example, Michael Oard, *An Ice Age Caused by the Genesis Flood* (El Cajon, Calif.: Institute for Creation Research, 1990) and Larry Vardiman, *Ice Cores and the Age of the Earth* (El Cajon, Calif.: Institute for Creation Research, 1996). For a less technical treatment, see Don Batten, ed., *The Answers Book* (Green Forest, Ark.: Master Books, 1990) 199–210.

does today), there was a significant divinely induced disruption in the “normal” course of nature during that year-long event, due to several supernatural acts of God (e.g., the flood began exactly seven days after God said it would, God brought the animals to Noah in the ark, the floodgates of heaven and fountains of the deep broke open simultaneously on a global scale, etc.).

In light of these considerations, biblically informed students of God’s creation should invoke supernatural explanations only when there is an explicit biblical indication that God has done supernatural things (e.g., creation week, the fall, the flood, and the Tower of Babel). Otherwise, Christians should seek to explain what they see in creation by the processes and laws of nature. The laws of nature describe not what God *must* do, but what He *normally does* to uphold his creation providentially. God does not have to obey the laws of nature. Rather, nature must obey God. Put another way, the laws of nature reflect the customs of God as He works in creation, and miracles are simply God acting in His creation in an uncustomary manner for a special purpose.

What all YECs (both the Scriptural geologists in the early nineteenth century and the YECs in the last 50 years) have always argued is that Genesis 1–11 is inspired, inerrant history given to us by the Creator. One cannot correctly interpret the physical evidence of His acts in creation (either the customary “natural” acts or the uncustomary supernatural acts) if he ignores His written revelation about those acts. Even more problematic is the use of *naturalistic* interpretations of the present physical evidence to reinterpret the plain meaning of God’s Word. But that is what the ID movement and most Christian leaders and Bible scholars have been doing and advocating in varying degrees (explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously) for almost the past 200 years, as they have tried to accommodate millions of years (and sometimes Darwinian evolution) in their interpretation of Scripture.

## VII. “INTELLIGENT DESIGN” ARGUMENTS OF AN EARLIER TIME

One more observation about the early nineteenth century is necessary. As atheism was advancing in the late eighteenth century, Christians and others expended much effort to defend the existence of a creator God. To do this they developed arguments from design, especially in living creatures. The most famous design argument at this time was developed by the Anglican minister, Rev. William Paley (1743–1806), in his *Natural Theology: Evidence of the Existence of and Attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearances of Nature* (1802). It was very popular, going through 20 editions by 1820 and continuing in use as a set text at Cambridge University into the early twentieth century. Darwin and all his old-earth mentors studied and knew the book well.

But there were other such writings, including a work by one of the Scriptural geologists and a fellow Anglican clergyman, Rev. Thomas Gisborne (1758–1846), who in 1818 published *Testimony of Natural Theology to Christianity*. Gisborne said that Paley’s work was very good as far as it went, but it was weak because of its omissions. Paley’s argument only vindicated God’s so-called positive attributes, such as goodness, wisdom, eternity, and omnipotence. But it failed to point to God’s holiness and justice as well as his mercy, as witnessed in nature. Paley, in other words, had ignored the cosmic impact of sin and God’s judgment on His once perfect creation. Gisborne sought to rectify this weakness by illuminating the witness of nature to these neglected divine attributes.

Then in the 1830s the celebrated 8-part series of “Bridgewater Treatises” appeared. These presented design arguments from (1) the moral and intellectual

nature of man, (2) the physical nature of man, (3) astronomy and physics, (4) animal and plant physiology, (5) the human hand, (6) chemistry, meteorology, and digestion, (7) geology (written by the old-earth geologist, William Buckland), (8) the history, habits, and instincts of animals (the only one of the eight treatises written by a young-earth creationist). Robson correctly identifies two important weaknesses of these efforts to defend the existence of God. First, because they largely divorced themselves from divine revelation (the Bible), the natural theology that was produced failed to deal with one of the greatest difficulties in theology, namely the existence of evil.<sup>42</sup> To put it simply, by arguing for a Designer without incorporating the Fall, they raised the obvious question of what sort of Designer would create some of the pathological features of this world. Second, argued Robson, contrary to the intent of the authors of the Bridgewater Treatises, their arguments had an inherent tendency toward deism or even pantheism.<sup>43</sup> Regarding the impact of the Fall, a consideration of the following subsequent criticisms of the design argument is necessary. The famous atheist, Bertrand Russell, told why he was an atheist. One reason was that

When you come to look into this argument from design, it is a most astonishing thing that people believe that this world, with all the things that are in it, with all its defects, should be the best that omnipotence and omniscience have been able to produce in millions of years. I really cannot believe it.<sup>44</sup>

More recently, the evolutionist philosopher, David Hull, argued in a similar way in his review of Phillip Johnson's *Darwin on Trial* (InterVarsity, 1991), which essentially launched the ID movement. Hull wrote,

The problem that biological evolution poses for natural theologians is the sort of God that a darwinian [*sic*] version of evolution implies.... The evolutionary process is rife with happenstance, contingency, incredible waste, death, pain and horror.... Whatever the God implied by evolutionary theory and the data of natural history may be like, He is not the Protestant God of waste not, want not. He is also not a loving God who cares about His productions. He is not even the awful God portrayed in the book of Job. The God of the Galápagos is careless, wasteful, indifferent, almost diabolical. He is certainly not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.<sup>45</sup>

This line of reasoning applies even if one rejects Neo-Darwinian evolution and instead believes that God supernaturally created new forms of life occasionally over the course of millions of years of death, bloodshed, and extinction.

The early nineteenth-century design arguments, while enthusiastically

<sup>42</sup>For a recent scholarly comparison of the way early nineteenth-century old-earth and young-earth proponents dealt with this issue of evil in the creation, see Thane Hutcherson Ury, "The Evolving Face of God as Creator: Earth Nineteenth-Century Traditionalist and Accommodationist Theological Responses in British Religious Thought to Paleontological Evil in the Fossil Record" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2001).

<sup>43</sup>John M. Robson, "The Fiat and Finger of God: The Bridgewater Treatises," in *Victorian Faith in Crisis*, eds. Richard J. Helmstadter and Bernard Lightman (Basingstoke, U.K.: MacMillan, 1990) 111–13.

<sup>44</sup>Bertrand Russell, "Why I Am Not A Christian" (March 6, 1927, lecture to the National Secular Society, South London Branch, at Battersea Town Hall), <[www.users.drew.edu/~jlenz/whynot.html](http://www.users.drew.edu/~jlenz/whynot.html)> (accessed Feb. 3, 2004) 4.

<sup>45</sup>David Hull, "The God of the Galápagos," *Nature* 352 (8 August 1991):485–86.

received by the already “converted” of that day, failed to stem the rising tide of atheism and other forms of anti-biblical (and therefore anti-God) skepticism. In fact, history shows that the unrecognized assumptions of naturalism, which were buried in the foundations of the old-earth, “the-age-of-the-earth-doesn’t-matter” design arguments, actually paved the way for Darwin’s theory, which would demolish the force of those design arguments in most people’s minds.

### VIII. MODERN COMPROMISE WITH OLD-EARTH NATURALISM

Phillip Johnson and the other old-earthers in the ID movement have not gone back far enough in their historical studies. Johnson appears to think that naturalism took control of science only after Darwin, or maybe even at the time of the 100th anniversary of Darwin’s book. Speaking about a famous international celebration of about 2,000 scientists in Chicago in 1959, Johnson writes,

What happened in that great triumphal celebration of 1959 is that science embraced a religious dogma called naturalism or materialism. Science declared that nature is all there is and that matter created everything that exists. The scientific community had a common interest in believing this creed because it affirmed that in principle there is nothing beyond the understanding and control of science. What went wrong in the wake of the Darwinian triumph was that the authority of science was captured by an ideology, and the evolutionary scientists thereafter believed what they wanted to believe rather than what the fossil data, the genetic data, the embryological data and the molecular data were showing them.<sup>46</sup>

Nancy Pearcey likewise seems historically short-sighted. In her excellent discussion of the victory of Darwin’s theory, she speaks of the Christians who tried to make peace with Darwinian evolution. She states, “Those who reformulated Darwin to accommodate design were hoping to prevent the takeover of the idea of evolution by philosophical naturalism. They sought to extract the scientific theory from the philosophy in which it was imbedded.”<sup>47</sup> But those Christians and many before them had for over 50 years allowed and even advocated (albeit unknowingly) the takeover of geology and astronomy by naturalism, and then advocated the day-age theory or gap theory and local-flood theory to save old-earth theory. I attended the ID movement conference in 1996, where Pearcey originally gave this paper. When in the comment period after the presentation I remarked about philosophical naturalism taking control of science decades before Darwin through old-earth geology and referred to my just-completed Ph.D. work on this matter, I had no response from anyone, either publicly or privately. It seemed that the old-earthers did not want to know about naturalism’s involvement in the development of the idea of millions and billions of years of history.

The above-mentioned conference was sponsored by the Christian Leadership Ministry (hereafter CLM), a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ which is focused on university professors and is very supportive of the ID movement and of such old-earth proponents at Hugh Ross and Walter Bradley. Through its link

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<sup>46</sup>Phillip Johnson, “Afterword: How to Sink a Battleship,” in *Mere Creation: Science, Faith and Intelligent Design*, ed. William Dembski (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998) 448–49.

<sup>47</sup>Nancy Pearcey, “You Guys Lost,” *ibid.*, 84.

to the “Origins” Website, CLM targets “top scientists and philosophers on issues concerning intelligent design and theism.”<sup>48</sup> That site linked to CLM states confidently,

For Christians, the date of creation is not a primary issue of faith and should not be regarded as such, because the Bible does not specifically state a date of creation. This fact can be easily confirmed by reviewing sources such as The NIV Study Bible, The Believers Study Bible, The New Geneva Study Bible and evangelical commentaries.... Therefore, *we believe Christians are free to follow the scientific evidence, minus hostile philosophical assumptions like naturalism.*<sup>49</sup>

For starters, what most Christian scholars believe *today* on this issue is no confirmation of the correct interpretation of Scripture, because popular scholarly vote does not determine truth. If it does, then the Protestant Reformation was wrong (which is not the case), for the Reformers were definitely in the minority for many decades. But note the emphatic statement in italics. These old-earth proponents do not understand that the “scientific evidence” for billions of years is really only a *naturalistic* interpretation of the observed geological and astronomical evidence. Remove the “hostile philosophical assumptions” of naturalism from geology and astronomy, and there is *no* scientific evidence for millions and billions of years.

Another example of people who say they are fighting naturalism’s stranglehold on science, while at the same time promoting naturalistic “scientific” theories in the church, is the new book by Hugh Ross and Fazale Rana, *Origins of Life* (2004). Their *Reasons to Believe* Website advertisement for the book says, “For years naturalistic theories have monopolized academia as the only possible scientific explanation for the origin of life.... Rana and Ross explode the myth that scientific evidence supports naturalistic theories....”<sup>50</sup> The subtle implication is that the origin of life is the only topic in which naturalism reigns. But it also reigns in billions-of-years theories of geology and astronomy, which Ross and Rana effectively persuade Christian laymen, pastors, and scholars to accept and use as they interpret their Bibles. So Ross and Rana are deceiving themselves and other Christians by this opposition to naturalism in the area of the origin of life while they simultaneously promote the Big Bang and billions of years.

Even a few young-earth creationists do not seem to see things very clearly. Nelson and Reynolds state in their debate with old-earthers, “Our advice, therefore, is to leave the issues of biblical chronology and history to a saner period. Christians should unite in rooting out the tedious and unfruitful grip of naturalism, methodological and otherwise, on learning.”<sup>51</sup> But there never will be a saner period, because sin will continue to darken the minds of people who do not want to submit to their Creator and His Word. Nelson and Reynolds are mistaken when they say that “the key thing is to oppose any sort of attempt to accommodate theism and naturalism.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup><[www.leaderu.com/menus/othersites.htm](http://www.leaderu.com/menus/othersites.htm)> (accessed Feb. 3, 2004).

<sup>49</sup><[www.origins.org/articles/00site\\_ourfocus2.html](http://www.origins.org/articles/00site_ourfocus2.html)> (accessed Feb. 3, 2004) [emphasis in the original].

<sup>50</sup><[store.reasons.org/cgi-bin/webc.exe/st\\_prod.html?p\\_prodid=776](http://store.reasons.org/cgi-bin/webc.exe/st_prod.html?p_prodid=776)> (downloaded Jan. 11, 2004).

<sup>51</sup>Paul Nelson and Mark John Reynolds, “Young-Earth Creationism: Conclusion,” in *Three Views of Creation and Evolution*, eds. J. P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999) 100.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

No, the key is to oppose the accommodation of biblical revelation with naturalistic interpretations of the creation, which is what all old-earth reinterpretations of Genesis are. The issue is not a vaguely defined *theism's* marriage with naturalism but rather the adulterous union of *biblical teaching* and naturalism.

Thus, fighting naturalism only in biology will not work. Ignoring the Bible—especially Genesis—and its testimony to the cosmic impact of sin and God's judgments at the fall, the flood, and the Tower of Babel, even though arguing for design in living things (and even *God's* designing activity), will not lead people to the true and living God, but rather away from Him and His holy Word. Nor will fighting naturalism only in biology, while tolerating or even promoting naturalism in geology and astronomy, break the stranglehold of naturalism on science. So the "wedge" of the ID movement is not a wedge (leading to more truth) at all. It is simply a nail, which will not split the log open. It will not lead the scientific establishment to embrace the biblical view of creation, nor will it lead most people to the true God, the Creator who has spoken in only one book, the Bible.

In his book about his "wedge strategy," Johnson explains how Christians should proceed in what he thinks is the coming public dialogue between religion and science (actually, it has been going on for years before the ID movement was born, as a result of the efforts of young-earth creationists and others). He says, "The place to begin is with the Biblical passage that is most relevant to the evolution controversy. It is not in Genesis; rather, it is the opening of the Gospel of John."<sup>53</sup> He then quotes and discusses John 1:1–3 followed by Rom 1:18–20. Though those passages are certainly relevant, they do not directly address the creation-evolution and age-of-the-earth debates as Genesis does. Furthermore, John and Paul clearly believed Genesis was literal history and based their teaching on Genesis, as Jesus did. More recently, in a 2001 interview, Johnson also stated,

I think that one of the secondary issues [in the creation-evolution debate] concerns the details of the chronology in Genesis.... So I say, in terms of biblical importance, that we should move from the Genesis chronology to the most important fact about creation, which is John 1:1.... It's important not to be side-tracked into questions of biblical detail, where you just wind up in a morass of shifting issues.<sup>54</sup>

On what basis does Johnson assert that the most important fact about creation is John 1:1? He has never provided a theological or biblical argument to defend this assertion. It is difficult to see how his comments indicate anything but a very low view of and indifference to the inspired inerrant text of Genesis 1–11. I suggest that Johnson's failure to see (or to explain to his listeners, if he does see) that the idea of billions of years of geological and cosmic history is nothing but philosophical naturalism masquerading as scientific fact, is the reason that he avoids the text of Genesis.

This failure to see the influence of naturalism, even by a person warning about the danger of naturalism, is further illustrated in a paper by one of America's greatest evangelical philosophers, Norman Geisler. In 1998 Geisler was president of the Evangelical Theological Society and gave the presidential address at the

<sup>53</sup>See Phillip Johnson, *The Wedge of Truth: Splitting the Foundations of Naturalism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000) 151.

<sup>54</sup>P. Hastie, "Designer genes: Phillip E. Johnson talks to Peter Hastie," *Australian Presbyterian* 531 (October 2001):4–8; <members.iinet.net.au/~sejones/pjaustpr.html>, see Johanson's reply to "In your opinion, what are the secondary issues in the creation-evolution debate?" (accessed Feb. 3, 2004).

November annual meeting of the ETS.<sup>55</sup> In it he warned of a number of dangerous philosophies that are assaulting the church and having considerable influence. The first one he discusses is naturalism (both methodological and philosophical naturalism), which he says has been one of the most destructive philosophies. Therefore, he devotes more space to it than any of the other dangerous philosophies that he discusses. As far as it goes, it is a very helpful warning about the dangers of naturalism. He even says that “James Hutton (1726–1797) applied [David] Hume’s anti-supernaturalism to geology, inaugurating nearly two centuries of naturalism in science.”<sup>56</sup>

What is terribly ironic and very disappointing is that Geisler has endorsed the writings of Hugh Ross, who aggressively but subtly (whether consciously or not) promotes naturalistic assumptions and thinking in the church by persuading Christians to accept billions of years and the “big bang” as scientific fact. Also, in Geisler’s own *Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, published the year after his ETS presidential address, he tells his readers, “Most scientific evidence sets the age of the world at billions of years.”<sup>57</sup> But as I have shown, it was not the *evidence* that set the age at billions of years, but rather the naturalistic *interpretation* of the evidence. Because of the confusion of evidence and interpretation of evidence, Geisler rejects the literal-day interpretation of Genesis 1 and believes that the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 have gaps of thousands of years, even though he says that “*prima facie* evidence” in Genesis supports literal days and no genealogical gaps in Genesis.<sup>58</sup> After laying out the various old-earth reinterpretations of Genesis (all of which are based on naturalistic interpretations of the scientific evidence, have serious exegetical problems, and have been refuted by YECs), he mistakenly concludes, “There is no necessary conflict between Genesis and the belief that the universe is millions or even billions of years old.”<sup>59</sup>

But Geisler is not the only evangelical philosopher who is highly trained to spot philosophical naturalism and yet has missed it in the issue of the earth’s age. I am not aware of any leading evangelical philosopher who is a convinced YEC. If our greatest Bible-believing and Bible-defending philosophers cannot see naturalism’s control of geology and astronomy, how will the rest of the church see it?

Herein is the bewitching influence of old-earth thinking. The fact is that we all (from the intellectually lowest to the most brilliant) have been brainwashed. “Brainwashed” is a strong word, so let me explain. As we saw earlier, soon after Lyell published his *Principles of Geology* (1830–33), geology came under the control of the dogma of uniformitarianism, and catastrophism essentially passed off the scene. Reflecting this fact, in 1972 the following definition of “catastrophism” appeared in a geological dictionary written by two of the leading geologists and academics of the day: “*Catastrophism*: The hypothesis, now more or less completely discarded, that changes in the earth occur as a result of isolated giant catastrophes of relatively short duration, as opposed to the idea, implicit in *Uniformitarianism*,

<sup>55</sup>Norman Geisler, “Beware of Philosophy: A Warning to Biblical Scholars,” *JETS* 42/1 (March 1999):3–19.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>57</sup>Norman L. Geisler, *Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999) 272.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 270 (on days) and 267 (on genealogies).

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 272.

that small changes are taking place continuously.”<sup>60</sup>

However, at about the same time a very unexpected thing was occurring in geology—the birth of “neo-catastrophism.” All the neo-catastrophists were evolutionists and believed in the billions of years of earth history. But they believed that much of the geological record was formed quickly and catastrophically, as the early nineteenth-century catastrophists had believed. One of the leading neo-catastrophists was Derek Ager, a British geologist who had conducted geological investigations in about 50 countries of the world. In one of his books he reviewed the early nineteenth-century development of catastrophism and uniformitarianism and made this revealing comment:

My excuse for this lengthy and amateur digression into history is that I have been trying to show how I think geology got into the hands of the theoreticians [i.e., the uniformitarians, in Ager’s view] who were conditioned by the social and political history of their day more than by observations in the field.... In other words, we have allowed ourselves to be brain-washed into avoiding any interpretation of the past that involves extreme and what might be termed ‘catastrophic’ processes.<sup>61</sup>

Ager admits that he was brainwashed through his geological education and early years in geological work, so that he could not see the evidence for catastrophe. The evidence was staring him in the face, but a mind-controlling set of assumptions made him blind to it. However, what he failed to see was that he had not only been brainwashed with assumptions coming from nineteenth-century social and political philosophy; he had been blinded by a whole philosophical-religious worldview called naturalism (he was a willing victim, however, for his writings give sufficient indication that he was a sinner in rebellion against God and his Word). So, as far as I am aware, until the day of his death a few years ago he was blinded (by naturalism) from seeing the overwhelming evidence in the rocks and fossils for Noah’s flood. If the geologists themselves were (and most geologists, even most Christian geologists, still are) brainwashed with the assumptions of philosophical naturalism, think of other Christians (including the most brilliant evangelical philosophers and OT Bible scholars), who through education, museums, national-park tours, TV science programs, etc., have been led to believe that the geologists have proven that the earth is billions of years old and that the global, catastrophic, year-long flood never happened.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The source of naturalism’s control of science goes further back than Darwin, back to the old-earth and old-universe theories of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and even back to the writings of Galileo and Bacon (to whose dictums about Scripture and science the early nineteenth-century old-earth geologists frequently referred), who drove the first wedge between Scripture and science.

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<sup>60</sup>D. G. A. Whitten and J. R. V. Brooks, *The Penguin Dictionary of Geology* (London: Penguin Books, 1972) 74. In a classic example of evolutionary inconsistency, this same dictionary’s definitional entry for *uniformitarianism* contradicts what it says about uniformitarianism in this definition of *catastrophism*!

<sup>61</sup>Derek Ager, *The Nature of the Stratigraphical Record* (London: Macmillan, 1981) 46–47.

The age of the earth matters enormously if one wants to fight naturalism in science effectively and if he wants to be faithful to the inspired, inerrant Word of the Creator of heaven and earth, who was there at the beginning of creation and at the flood, and has faithfully and clearly told us what happened.

But the ID movement is such a mixture of agnostics and theists of great theological variety that it can never be concerned about faithfulness to the true God and His Word. As noted earlier, there really is no wedge in Johnson's strategy. It is rather a nail strategy that will not split the log. A vaguely defined intelligent designer (not even necessarily divine) is as far as a Scripture-less approach can reach. Having deliberately ignored the biblical teaching given by the Creator—especially in Genesis—the ID arguments will not open the door to the true God.

If Johnson and the other Christian ID participants want eventually to bring Genesis into the origins debate, I predict,

- they will be accused of having been deceptive (a suspicion that many evolutionists have already expressed) during all the years that they have distanced themselves from YEC and ignored Genesis, and
- they will scare away most of their old-earth bedfellows in the ID movement who for various reasons do not want to live under the authoritative Word of God.

The lack of faithfulness to Scripture in the ID movement should be a concern to every Bible-believing Christian. Christians do not help God or help the evolutionized world by ignoring His holy Word.

This is a call to my Christian brothers in the ID movement to return to the Word of God, especially to the book of Genesis, which opens eyes to see the naturalism that controls geology and astronomy and leads people to think mistakenly that science has proven that the creation is billions of years old. I urge them to use their considerable mental powers and speaking and writing abilities to expose the lie of the naturalistic interpretations of old-earth geology and old-universe astronomy and to defend the clear truth of Genesis, both in the church and in the secular world.

The evidence is abundant and clear. The enemy has invaded the holy citadel. Naturalistic (atheistic) ways of thinking have increasingly polluted the church over the last 200 years through old-earth "scientific" theories and through liberal theology. Who will take up the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17)—especially Genesis 1–11—and help expel the enemy of naturalism? The only alternative is to ignore the invasion and pollution and further abet it by compromise with the evolutionary belief in millions of years.

# Early Nineteenth-Century Views of Earth History

## Biblical View (Scriptural geologists)

**SC---F-----P-----SE**  
 (Time to Present: ca. 6,000 years)

God supernaturally created the world and all the basic 'kinds' of life in six literal days (SC) and then judged the world with a global flood (F) at the time of Noah, which produced most of the geological/fossil record, and all present-day (P) processes have continued essentially since the flood. This will continue until God supernaturally brings the world to an end (SE).

## Catastrophist View (e.g., Cuvier, Smith)

**SB-----C-----C-----C-----C-----P-----C?---NE?**  
 (Time to Present: 'untold ages')

During the earth's long history (millions of years at least) since God supernaturally began a primitive earth (SB), there have been many natural regional or global catastrophic floods, which produced most of the geological/fossil record and current geography of the earth. After each catastrophe (C) God supernaturally created some new forms of life. Since the past catastrophes were natural events, there may be another in the future on earth, which may also have a natural (or supernatural) end (NE).

## Uniformitarian View (e.g., Hutton, Lyell)

**SB?-----P-----NE?**  
 (Time to Present: 'untold ages')

All geological processes on the earth (perhaps) had a beginning (SB) millions of years ago on a primitive earth. These processes (e.g., erosion, sedimentation, volcanoes, and earthquakes) continued into the present and will continue into the future at the *same* rate and intensity as observed today (P). No one knows whether there will be an end to the current natural processes (NE?).