

OPEN THEISM: AN OPEN DOOR FOR EVOLUTION

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Open theism is an unorthodox theological position with modern philosophical roots in panentheism and process theology whose proponents have recently more fully incorporated the secular scientific paradigm of naturalistic evolution. The major tenants of open theism have always made ample philosophical room for evolutionary theory. In this respect, such propositions include: creatures have total libertarian freedom to evolve naturalistically; there is no comprehensive divine blueprint or decree in the universe; God's evolving creation is a random and risky experiment (a big cosmic evolutionary gamble); God has no foreknowledge of what will evolve over the course of deep evolutionary time; God is constantly learning new things in regards to his evolving creation; and, God is relationally controlled and contingently affected by his evolving creation. Another fundamental open theist position is that the "evil" aspects of creation (predation, parasitism, disease, etc.) are the creative works of Satan who is in a millions-of-years-old cosmic battle with God. In this unorthodox paradigm, the historical aspects of Genesis that offer a much better explanation of the observable facts of nature are largely ignored. The fundamental biblical propositions include: the narrative of the creation week; the Edenic fall of mankind; the resultant curse on creation; and, the catastrophic nature of the global flood.

Open theism upends the traditional evangelical reformed view that God is sovereign, totally omniscient, immutable, and transcendent. The history of the ideas related to open theism are philosophically ancient but bear many similarities in church history to the Socinian controversy that plagued Calvin and the Geneva reformers in which proponents denied God's foreordination and foreknowledge.¹ In more recent history, open theism has strong and ongoing roots in process theology and panentheism. The key modern work that brought open theism to the forefront of evangelical awareness was a book by multiple authors in 1994 entitled *The Openness of*

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¹ John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001) 32-36.

God.² In 2000 and 2001, respected orthodox theologians, Bruce A. Ware and John M. Frame, published highly important books in response respectively.³ Ware and Frame not only soundly refuted open theism using sound logic and mostly Scripture, but they also presented solid and lengthy biblical arguments for the orthodox view of God's foreordination and foreknowledge. Readers of this article will gain a more detailed study of the general subject of open theism from those two works.

OPEN THEISM, PANENTHEISM, AND PROCESS THEOLOGY

In regards to the evolutionary issue, it is important to understand that open theism has philosophical roots and ongoing connections and influence with panentheism and process theology. Panentheism is the belief that all is in God as opposed to pantheism which proposes that God and the universe are one. In other words, panentheism maintains some ontological distinction between the divine and the non-divine, but makes the divine contingent upon the universe. In his recent book (*Open and Relational Theology*), Thomas Jay Oord, one of the current leading open theist theologians, said, "Open and relational believers think God is present to and relates with all creation. Many call this 'panentheism,' which means 'all in God.' It differs from both pantheism, which says, 'all is God,' and conventional theology, which says 'nothing is in God.'"⁴ In the opening chapter of his edited work *Creation Made Free*, Oord stated, "Many Open theists are attracted to the God-world model called 'panentheism,' although they differ among themselves with regard to the fine details of panentheism."⁵

Process theology is based on basic panentheistic principle but develops it into a larger theological system. The current state of process theology is best represented by the recent writings of David R. Griffin.⁶ One should note that Thomas Jay Oord did his doctoral studies and research

² Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994).

³ Frame, *No Other God*; Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000).

⁴ Thomas Jay Oord, *Open and Relational Theology: An Introduction to Life-Changing Ideas* (Grasmere, ID: SacraSage Press, 2021) 92. Kindle.

⁵ Thomas Jay Oord, "Introduction to Part One," in *Creation Made Free: Open Theology Engaging Science*, gen. ed. idem (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009) 11.

⁶ David R. Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

under the tutelage of David R. Griffin. Oord is a key figure behind the leading open theist organization known as the Center for Open and Relational Theology or c4ort (www.c4ort.com) which not only maintains a comprehensive website with many open theist resources, but also hosts a yearly conference known as ORTCO (Open and Relational Theology Conference); and it is also noteworthy that on the c4ort's Sister Organizations webpage (c4ort.com/resources/#sisterorgs), the majority of the groups listed are process theology specific such as The Center for Process Studies (ctr4process.org), Process & Faith (processandfaith.org), Open Horizons (openhorizons.org), the Cobb Institute (cobb.institute), and the Whitehead Research Project (whiteheadresearch.org). In a bold propaganda push for the merger of open theism with process theology, c4ort also hosts a large conference in a community church venue called "Power and the God of Love: A Process-Open-Relational Conference" and features no less than twenty different open theist/process theology speakers (c4ort.com/power-and-the-god-of-love/).

While William Hasker attempted to make a distinction between process theology and open theism in the book *Openness of God* in 1994, his effort seemed to be more of a smokescreen as his section was mostly an affirmation of praise for process theology propositions rather than any well-defined clear objections.⁷ The process theology ideas that Hasker exalted that are fundamental to the open theist community are: that both God and the world are interdependent in a panentheistic model; the idea of human libertarian freedom is paramount (which Hasker expanded to apply "to many non-human aspects of the world," e.g. evolution); and, he had strong praise for process theology's criticism of traditional theism which largely focuses on the problem of evil. Griffin also defined another key feature of process thinking embraced by open theists that God's power "is not coercive power, because the creatures necessarily have their own power" and "divine power is persuasive, not controlling."⁸ In this respect, "Process theism also rules out the idea that God can completely determine any particular event in the world."⁹

Process theologians, like open theists, believe that because of total libertarian free will, God cannot predict the future with any certainty and thus it is open. In other words, they purport that God is omniscient in that He fully knows the past and present, but has no perfect foreknowledge (knowledge of the future) and is constantly learning new things as creatures

⁷ Pinnock et al., *Openness of God*, 138-41.

⁸ Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 32, 122.

⁹ *Ibid.* 65.

make free decisions and the future progressively unfolds. In this respect, open theists and process theologians believe that God is also not above time but locked into the sequence of time. Hasker said, “The core of what I mean by saying that God is ‘in time’ is that God experiences changing mental states.” One will find it interesting that philosophers and naturalists frequently used the term “becoming” as a synonym for “evolution” during the period in which Lamarck and Darwin were promoting their evolutionary ideas in the 19th century. Similarly, open theists frequently use the word “becoming” concerning God who is locked in the sequence of time and constantly learning new things.

In another attempt to make a distinction between open theism and process theology, Bassinger claimed, in 1994, that “unlike proponents of process theism, we maintain that God does retain the right to intervene unilaterally in earthly affairs” and “God retains the power and moral prerogative to inhibit occasionally our ability to make voluntary choices to keep things on track.”¹⁰ However, David Ray Griffin who identifies himself as a process theologian, has recently claimed that occasional miracles and interventions by God are indeed allowed – erasing this supposed distinction.^{11,12} While each process theologian or open theist has their own specific opinions and nuances regarding their beliefs, it is safe to say that the two allegedly different systems are essentially the same in their basic presuppositions. Thus, for the sake of brevity, this author will no longer make a categorical distinction between process theology and open theism as much as it is possible.

¹⁰ Pinnock et al., *Openness of God*, 159.

¹¹ Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*.

¹² While Robert Lewis Dabney published his systematic theology over one hundred years prior to the current open theism debate, his comments regarding those who want to claim only occasional divine intervention into the natural order are relevant. He said, “We see, then, that all general providence is special. And the special is as truly natural as the general. The natural arose out of the supernatural, and in that sense, reposes upon it at all times. The Divine will is perpetually present, underlying all the natural. Else God is shut back to the beginning of the universe, and has no present action nor administration in His empire. Reason: Because, if you allow Him any occasional, or special present interventions, at decisive crises, or as to cardinal events, those interventions are found to be, as events, no less natural than all other events” (*Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology*, 2nd ed. [St. Louis: Presbyterian Publishing Company, 1878] 283).

OPEN THEIST PUSH TO INTEGRATE EVOLUTION

Open theism is a system that is ripe for the integration of evolutionary naturalism. In 1994, David Bassinger said, “we believe that God does not as a general rule override human freedom and/or the natural order.”¹³ The *natural order* beyond human activity clearly meant the naturalistic world, which in the mind of conventional science is evolution-driven. In fact, in 2007 twenty open theist scholars convened at Eastern Nazarene College for a three-week conference sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation to debate and develop concepts concerning the relationship between open theism and secular science.¹⁴ A variety of open theist speakers gave talks, which led to the proposal of various topics for further development. The following year, the same Templeton-funded group met again at Azusa Pacific University and presented a variety of papers related to integrating open theism with various aspects of evolutionary naturalism. The papers were eventually published in two separate books: *Creation Made Free: Open Theology Engaging Science* (2009)¹⁵ and *God in an Open Universe: Science, Metaphysics, and Open Theism* (2011).¹⁶ In addition to these two books, David R. Griffin also published a book a few years later integrating evolutionary naturalism with open theism related topics (2014).¹⁷

To interject another interesting point in the recent modern history of open theism and its relation to evolution is noteworthy at this point. Whenever libertarian freedom (a foundation of open theism) is invoked, the word *creatures* as opposed to *humans* is almost always used. Nearly every

¹³ Pinnock et al., *Openness of God*, 167.

¹⁴ The Templeton Foundation is a funding organization that has an open theist and evolutionary agenda. On their website (www.templeton.org), they state, “We fund work on subjects ranging from black holes and evolution to creativity, forgiveness, and free will. We also encourage civil, informed dialogue among scientists, philosophers, theologians, and the public at large.” It is also noteworthy that the theistic evolution organization Biologos (biologos.org) was started with Templeton Foundation funding and posts articles and podcasts from a variety of contemporary open theists (e.g. Thomas J. Oord, Gregory Boyd, Craig A. Boyd, Karen S. Winslow, and Alan Padgett).

¹⁵ Oord, *Creation Made Free*.

¹⁶ William Hasker, Thomas Jay Oord, Dean Zimmerman, eds., *God in an Open Universe: Science, Metaphysics, and Open Theism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

¹⁷ David Ray Griffin, *Panentheism and Naturalism: Rethinking Evil, Morality, Religious Experience, Religious Pluralism, and the Academic Study of Religion* (Claremont, CA: Process Century Press, 2014).

open theist is always careful to use the indistinctive word *creature* because of his or her widespread proposition that libertarian freedom goes well beyond human choice. In this paradigm, every creature from bacteria to elephants – in addition to humans – have total libertarian freedom. The idea also implies that all creatures are connected in an evolutionary continuum of common ancestry to each other. Indeed, as will be seen, open theist theologians are also theistic evolutionists who embrace the hypothetical evolutionary tree of life, including the idea that humans evolved from apes.

NO DECREED PLAN FOR CREATION

According to open theism, creation and the multitude of creatures within it have total libertarian freedom; consequently, the result is nothing but a huge randomly evolving cosmic gamble. Thus, there cannot possibly exist a foreordained divine decree or plan for all the created order. Richard Rice¹⁸ said in the opening chapter of *The Openness of God*, “God’s will is not the ultimate explanation for everything that happens.”¹⁹ In the introduction to *God in an Open Universe*, the editors stated, “God knows the future in part as a realm of possibilities and probabilities, rather than of settled facts;” and, “According to open theism, God’s desire to be in relation with his creatures attests to the fact that the creatures have something of their own to contribute to this relationship—that they are not mere puppets or automata, carrying out a divine plan which in every detail has been scripted for them in advance.”²⁰

Along this line of thinking, Richard Rice believes that another reason why God cannot decree any plan for the future is that the evolving creation can actually inhibit his providential control. Rice said, “If God is disappointed, it isn’t because God did not make a wise decision; it’s because the creatures thwarted his plans.”²¹ In other words, the creatures seem to be largely in control of the world’s destiny and not God. Needless to say, this concept is blatantly unbiblical and defies numerous scriptures defining God’s decrees, providence, and specific fulfillment of prophecy as

¹⁸ Open theist Richard Rice received his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago for writing a dissertation on the process philosophy of the American philosopher-ornithologist Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000).

¹⁹ Richard Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” in *Openness of God*, 15.

²⁰ Hasker et al., *God in an Open Universe*, 1-2

²¹ Richard Rice, *The Future of Open Theism: From Antecedents to Opportunities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020) 57. Kindle.

thoroughly outlined in many orthodox systematic theologies the past several hundred years. Nevertheless, this proposition is important for the open theist not only to undergird their need for an open future, but also for naturalistic evolution to proceed unhindered.

AN OPEN DOOR TO EVOLUTION

Based on this idea of total creaturely libertarian freedom and a lack of a decreed plan for the world, the door to evolution is thrown wide-open – allowing open theists to create an inclusive theology even more palatable to a secular mindset. Open theist William Hasker stated, “the conception of God supported by open theism lends itself very readily to an evolutionary understanding of the cosmos and of life on this our earth.”²² Hasker then substantiated this thesis by claiming that the alleged evidence for evolution is overwhelming and even increasing. He said, “The evolutionary conception of the universe, and of the history of life on earth, needs to be accepted based on solid scientific evidence, evidence that is available in plentiful and ever-increasing quantities.”²³

For Hasker (who is not a scientist) to make a statement of “overwhelming” and “increasing” evolutionary evidence is completely in error. The evolutionary community is currently in a state of upheaval with many well-known secular scientists rejecting neo-Darwinian evolution because of a lack of any credible molecular mechanism or experimental evidence to support it and proposing the need for a “third way” or an “extended synthesis” while still rejecting biblical creation.²⁴ The only thing that is increasing is the seemingly infinite complexity of genomic, cellular, and organismal systems that utterly defy the gradualistic neo-Darwinian paradigm of mutation and selection. In addition to this controversy in the evolutionary community, the modern creation science movement has expanded greatly the past 30 years. In this respect, the evolutionary paradigm has also been utterly refuted, in addition to solid scientific evidence for a recent creation approximately 6,000 years ago and a global

²² Hasker et al., *God in an Open Universe*, 22.

²³ Ibid. 23.

²⁴ Jeffrey P. Tomkins, “Evolutionary Crisis and the Third Way,” *Acts & Facts* 45 (August 2016): 14; Jeffrey P. Tomkins and Jerry Bergman, “Neutral Model, Genetic Drift and the Third Way - A Synopsis of the Self-Inflicted Demise of the Evolutionary Paradigm,” *Journal of Creation* 31 (December 2017): 94-102; Jeffrey Tomkins, “Evolution’s Surprising New Critics,” *Answers Magazine* (May 2019): 62-68.

flood approximately 4,300 years ago. See a recent book published in 2020 by multiple scientists presenting evidence from biology, geology, astronomy, and physics that affirms a literal Genesis entitled, *Creation Basics and Beyond: An In-Depth Look at Science, Origins, and Evolution*.²⁵

In 2020, Oord stated the case for the current consensus of open theists when he asserted, “Most open and relational thinkers believe the scientific consensus that our universe is billions of years old. They affirm the development of complex life through a lengthy evolutionary process. But they say this process involves more than chance, genetic mutations, and natural selection. Creatures respond to their environments in self-organizing and self-causal ways. Symbiotic relations emerge and ideas pass through cultural forces that influence evolution’s course.”²⁶ Interestingly, it would seem that in making the statement that billions of years of evolution involve more than the standard neo-Darwinian paradigm of mutation, selection, and chance and then mentioning that creatures have innate abilities to organize and engage in organismal networks and symbioses that Oord is aware of the paradigm shift among evolutionists that was previously mentioned. Nevertheless, he still maintains a deep-time evolutionary perspective amenable to open theism.

GOD’S RELATIONAL DEPENDENCE ON CREATION?

Open theism puts a high emphasis on the idea that their system is fundamentally *relational* as if orthodox Christianity somehow is not. The problem is whether the open theist relational paradigm involves scriptural truth. Regarding this idea of God being relational to creatures, Richard Rice said, “God interacts with His creatures. Not only does he influence them, but they exert an influence on Him.”²⁷ In this relational give and take it is even suggested that creatures not only influence God, but also can inflict harm upon Him. Pinnock stated, “God is not cool and collected but is deeply involved and can be wounded.”^{28,29}

²⁵ Henry M. Morris III, John D. Morris, Randy J. Guliuza, Jeffrey P. Tomkins, Vernon R. Cupps, Brian Thomas, Timothy Clarey, Jake Hebert, Frank Sherwin, and James J.S. Johnson, *Creation Basics & Beyond: An In-Depth Look at Science, Origins, and Evolution* (Dallas: Institute for Creation Research, 2020).

²⁶ Oord, *Open and Relational Theology*, 87.

²⁷ Pinnock et al., *Openness of God*, 15.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 118.

²⁹ Pinnock’s assertion raises the issue of God’s impassibility, which open theists frequently and falsely attribute to orthodox theists as God being utterly

As a result of this warped relational presupposition, open theists reject the doctrine of God’s immutability and declare that creaturely and human actions are so significant that they have an influence on God’s very state of being. As creatures act – and as the universe changes (evolves) – God is directly affected by these actions and is constantly reevaluating and repositioning his response accordingly. Thus, God is himself in a state of *becoming* or *evolving* in response to the world. In *Open and Relational Theology*, Oord said, “God is also experiential. God has a series of life experiences, an everlasting series. . . . And as experiential, others influence God.”³⁰ Oord connected this into panentheism and every creature’s ability to affect God saying, “That’s how creation is ‘in’ God. Panentheism says all creatures and creation — not just people — influence each moment of God’s everlasting life.”³¹ In this sense, when God obtains new information of creaturely actions in an evolving world, he dynamically adjusts his plan and acts persuasively in an uncertain attempt to keep his purposes on track. Griffin said, “Although God has perfect power – understood as the greatest power that any one being could have – this is not coercive power, because the creatures necessarily have their own power.”³²

DEIFYING NATURE AND EVOLUTION

The deification of nature as having the power to evolve new creature variants via the mythical paradigm of natural selection is a problem not only recognized by creationists, but also even honest evolutionists. University of California Los Angeles evolutionary biologist Greg Gaffin made the following enlightening statement.

indifferent and unemotional towards his creation. The consensus orthodox position connects impassibility to self-sufficiency and immutability in that nothing in the world can afflict or hurt God. Relationally speaking, God’s feelings and emotional expressions (compassion, joy, anger, wrath) flow from his eternal and immutable (unchanging) nature. Immutability is not to say that God is immobile; He can and does act according to his will and purpose. The chief exception is where the incarnate Christ suffered because God foreordained it for his redemptive plan. For a recent essay on God’s impassibility and perspectives among evangelicals, see Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 3 vols. (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009) 1:211-13.

³⁰ Oord, *Open and Relational Theology*, 94.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Griffin, *Panentheism and Scientific Naturalism*, 32.

The trick is: How do you talk about natural selection without implying the rigidity of law? We use it as almost an active participant, almost like a god. In fact, you could substitute the word “god” for “natural selection” in a lot of evolutionary writings, and you’d think you were listening to a theologian. It’s a routine we know doesn’t exist, but we teach it anyway.³³

The mystical God-like ability attributed to nature and its mystical processes to create new life forms is part and parcel of open theism too. In *God in an Open Universe*, Hasker said, “An evolutionary universe is in a real sense self-creative; it utilizes the powers with which it has been endowed to become something distinctively its own.”³⁴ In support of this idea, Hasker cited a pre-publication work from theologian Michael Lodahl who attempts to claim that various aspects of the Genesis 1 creation account indicate that self-creative evolutionary powers were inherent in the ocean and land with the mantra of “creation as creative.” According to Lodahl’s thesis:

There is even an apparently playful punning in the Hebrew that may well reinforce this idea of creation’s creativity: the earth is called upon by God to “put forth” (*tadshe*) vegetation (*deshe*) and the waters are called upon to “bring forth” (*yishretsu*) swarming creatures of the sea (*sherets*). *Tadshe Deshe*—the earth, we might say, is called upon to produce produce, to implant itself with plants. *Yishretsu Sherets*—the seas, we could say, are called upon to swarm with swarms of swimmers. Creaturely elements are invited to contribute their distinctive energies and capacities to what God is doing in the labor of creation.³⁵

In quoting Lodahl, Hasker did not elaborate on how this idea of God calling forth an innate evolutionary capacity agrees with the creation week narrative. By accepting the evolutionary paradigm of millions of years of deep evolutionary time (in agreement with his other open theist colleagues), he obviously does not regard the creation week literally as six 24-hour days. Nevertheless, the thesis of Lodahl fits well with the title and whole topic of the book Hasker and colleagues put forth: *Creation Made Free*.

³³ David Biello, “Darwin Was a Punk,” *Scientific American* 303 (November 2010): 28.

³⁴ Hasker et al., *God in an Open Universe*. 22.

³⁵ Hasker quoted from Michael Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and Qur’an Side by Side* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007) 47-48.

Interestingly, open theists not only deify creation with creative ability, but also exalt humans in what they call the *co-creator model*. Open theist Robin Collins contributed an entire chapter in *God in an Open Universe* entitled, “Prayer and Open Theism: A Participatory, Co-Creator Model.” The gist of the model is the panentheistic contingency that exists between God and humans – God needs humans to help Him create a positive open future in a non-deterministic sense. In this paradigm, humans – with God’s persuasive power – can create a positive faith-filled atmosphere and bring forth their plans as free agents (co-creators) in a loving partnership with God. Collins said:

The basic idea behind the co-creator model is that for those cases in which petitionary prayer is efficacious, humans and God work together to help bring about the states of affairs for which we pray. Further, it claims, God has so restrained God’s self that typically he cannot (without violating his own constraints) act without our joint effort. The reason God has restrained God’s self in this way is to provide space for us to act on our own, and truly contribute to other people’s lives and the direction and development of the world.³⁶

Thomas Oord sees this co-creator model as also being important to embracing a progressive globalist agenda supposedly to save the earth, tackle climate change, reduce nationalism, and promote an interfaith ecumenical agenda. In his recent book *Open and Relational Theology*, Oord said, “The majority in the open and relational community take concrete action to help the earth and its inhabitants, even if there’s sometimes disagreement on what actions are best. My friends at the Institute for Ecological Civilization [a globalist ecumenical humanitarian organization], for instance, are helping us to live well as co-creators, among other co-creators.”³⁷

EVIL IN CREATION

Not only does the open theist model exalt mankind as an empowered co-creator and deify nature as having its own ability to create new entities using mythical evolutionary mechanisms, but it also exalts Satan well beyond what is described in Scripture. Amazingly, Satan (as yet another libertarian free agent) is given powers to alter creation at every level in a cosmic battle with God in a seemingly eternal conflict in ages past and into

³⁶ Hasker et al., *God in an Open Universe*, 161.

³⁷ Oord, *Open and Relational Theology*, 89-90.

the uncharted future. In fact, apparently Satan's future is yet open along with the rest of the universe. Alan Rhoda, said in *Creation Made Free*, "there is no such thing as a completely settled future for God (or anyone) to know" and "there is no complete and unique sequence of events subsequent to the present that is or that is going to be the actual future."³⁸ Regarding this great cosmic contest that God has with Satan, Gregory Boyd said, "The battle has raged for millions of years and, for all we know, it may go on for a million more."³⁹

Much of the open theist Satan-empowered paradigm is the work of Gregory Boyd which began to be promoted with Boyd's 1997 book, *God at War*.⁴⁰ For those wanting a more current and succinct perspective on Boyd's thesis with specific application to the topic of evolution, Boyd contributed a chapter to *Creation Made Free* entitled, "Evolution as Cosmic Warfare: A Biblical Perspective on Satan and 'Natural' Evil."⁴¹ Boyd, like Charles Darwin, had a hard time reckoning the violence observed in nature with a God of love. In regards to the violence observed in nature, Boyd said, "This has become one of the most common—and, in my opinion, the most forceful—objections to Christian theism."⁴² Boyd elaborated further, "Why would God create a world in which innumerable parasites, viruses, diseases, and genetic mutations torment and kill millions of adults, children, and animals every year? And why would a beneficent Creator allow "natural" disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, droughts, and famines to afflict nightmarish suffering on millions of humans and animals?"⁴³ Richard Rice, in his book *The Future of Open Theism*, concurs with Boyd: "The world we live in, characterized as it is by 'parasites, viruses, diseases, deformities, and natural disaster,' does not reflect the Creator's benevolent intentions. They are, rather, the result of Satan and forces of evil corrupting the creative work of the benevolent Creator."⁴⁴

While Boyd and other open theists want to make evolution a real process that God somehow endowed his creation to employ, they also want

³⁸ Alan R. Rhoda, "Beyond the Chess Master Analogy: Game Theory and Divine Providence," *Creation Made Free*, 151.

³⁹ Gregory A. Boyd, "Evolution as Cosmic Warfare: A Biblical Perspective on Satan and 'Natural' Evil," *Creation Made Free*, 146.

⁴⁰ Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 1997).

⁴¹ Boyd, "Evolution as Cosmic Warfare."

⁴² Ibid. 126.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Rice, *Future of Open Theism*, 103.

to bring Satan into the mix as well. Boyd stated that he wants to “put forth a brief biblical defense of the view that God wasn’t the only agent involved in the evolutionary process: Satan and other malevolent cosmic powers have also been involved” and “the process of evolution may be seen as a sort of warfare between the life-affirming creativity of an all-good God, on the one hand, and the on-going corrupting influence of malevolent cosmic forces, on the other.”⁴⁵

Boyd’s whole premise is total untenable from a secular evolutionist’s perspective because the entire Darwinian paradigm has evil as part of its fundamental system. Darwinian evolution is death-driven and involves a violent struggle for existence where only the most adapted creatures survive while the others are mercilessly culled.⁴⁶ Death selects against the unfit creatures. Consequently, in the open theist paradigm, evolution by default is a good process that allows for new creatures to evolve while the evil aspects of the world are the work of Satan re-engineering creation for malicious ends. The assertion is utter nonsense from every viewpoint and would not be satisfying to a biblical creationist or a secular evolutionist. Boyd and others are just imagining a bunch of contradictory ideas in a vain attempt to fit evolution, deep-time, and a non-literal Genesis into the open theist model.

A BIBLICAL AND SCIENTIFIC RESPONSE: A LITERAL ADAM

The majority of open theists want to embrace the totality of the evolutionary paradigm. For all practical purposes, the theistic evolution paradigm is identical to the secular neo-Darwinian paradigm of evolution. The only difference is that theistic evolutionists claim that evolution is the process that God used to create the diversity of life. In addition, theistic evolutionists reject a literal Genesis, maintain that death and evil have existed since the beginning of the world (which occurred millions of years ago), and they deny that the Genesis flood was a global cataclysm. Some theistic evolutionists deny that there was a literal Adam at some point in history while others affirm that he was a selected archetype at the end of a human evolutionary process. Nearly all affirm human evolution and deny a literal Genesis.

The problem of evil is a key entry point for open theists to begin promoting their model and they often include examples of human suffering

⁴⁵ Boyd, “Evolution as Cosmic Warfare,” 127.

⁴⁶ Randy J. Guliuzza, “Natural Selection’s Death-Driven Worldview,” *Acts & Facts* 51 (September—October 2022): 4-6.

as part of their rhetoric. In fact, Oord started his recent book *Open and Relational Theology* with several tales of human evil and betrayal with the first example occurring in a church setting (for added shock value).⁴⁷ While the problem of evil and why God would allow it in his plan for the world is a difficult issue to tackle (as acknowledged by John Frame in his *No Other God*, which is a rebuttal to open theism; see ch. 8), believers need to stick with the given biblical information and let the rest remain a mystery. Of course, a number of key features for discussing the origin of evil involves accepting a literal Genesis.

Ultimately the problem of evil is based on a literal Adam. Evolutionists – whether they are open theists or complete secularists – claim humans descended from apes through an evolutionary process over millions of years. Their assertion contradicts the biblical account of mankind’s unique creation in God’s image approximately 6,000 years ago on the sixth day of creation. A key scientific problem with the evolutionary argument is that there is no evidence of an ape-human transition in the fossil record. *Australopithecus* are ape-like fossils thought to represent the first precursor to the genus *Homo*, or human. However, nothing has been found to bridge the gap between the two groups. In a 2016 Royal Society paper titled “From Australopithecus to Homo: the transition that wasn’t,” two evolutionist paleontologists said, “Although the transition from *Australopithecus* to *Homo* is usually thought of as a momentous transformation, the fossil record bearing on the origin and earliest evolution of *Homo* is virtually undocumented.”⁴⁸

Even the field of human-ape DNA similarity research is empty in this regard. Both creationists and evolutionists have recently documented that the human and chimp genomes are no more than 84% similar.⁴⁹ For humans and chimps to have evolved from a common ancestor over an alleged timeframe of three to six million years, a 98 to 99% similarity is required according to models of theoretical evolution. The scientific data from both paleontology and genetics demonstrates a chasm of discontinuity between humans and apes, a situation that clearly supports the Genesis narrative.

⁴⁷ Oord, *Open and Relational Theology*, 1-26.

⁴⁸ William H. Kimbel and Brian Villmoare, “From Australopithecus to Homo: the transition that wasn’t.” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society London B Biol Sci* 371 (5 July 2016): 2015248.

⁴⁹ Jeffrey P. Tomkins, “Separate Studies Converge on Human-Chimp DNA Dissimilarity,” *Acts & Facts* 47 (November 2018): 9.

Open theists and others think they should not be overly concerned about the veracity of a literal Adam because they believe it is not directly related to the gospel message of Jesus Christ making atonement for sins but this is simply not true. Not only are humans created uniquely in the image of God, but also the story of a historical Adam is foundational to the gospel. Through a literal Adam and Eve, sin entered the world with man's Edenic rebellion in Genesis 3, along with death, misery, and corruption. The curse on creation accounts for the central problem of evil in the world. Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." The foundational gospel truth of sin entering the world through Adam is repeated in 1 Corinthians 15:22: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." Moreover, the pervasive and disastrous effect of mankind's sin on the whole creation is stated in Romans 8:21-22: "Because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption. . . . For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now."

Jesus Christ clearly affirmed the historicity of a literal human couple during his earthly ministry. In Matthew 19:4, He said, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female." The Lord not only confirmed the Genesis account of humanity's creation but also affirmed that this occurred at the very beginning of Earth's time frame. Detailed genealogies and chronologies throughout the Bible – combined with scriptural data on times of birth and death – indicate that Earth is approximately 6,000 years old.⁵⁰ The idea that after billions of years of primeval Earth history, followed by millions of years of evolution, humans somehow magically emerged from apes is completely unbiblical and is also unsupported by sound science.

CONCLUSION

Open theism is not only a disaster theologically and biblically (as demonstrated quite adequately by Bruce Ware and John Frame), but also it is made even more untenable by the addition of various evolutionary paradigms that have been added into it. From both a scientific and biblical

⁵⁰ Floyd Nolan Jones, "The Chronology of the Old Testament" (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2022); Chris Hardy and Robert Carter, "The Biblical Minimum and Maximum Age of the Earth," *Journal of Creation* 28 (August 2014): 89–96; James Ussher, *The Annals of the World* (1658; reprint, Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2010).

perspective, the evolutionary aspects of open theism fail to explain the presence of evil and the corruption of creation. The failure is due to a complete disregard for the scriptural truth and necessity of a literal Adam.