

Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 1 | Issue 3

Article 9

7-1-1984

Frye, ed., IS GOD A CREATIONIST?

Frederick Crosson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

Recommended Citation

Crosson, Frederick (1984) "Frye, ed., IS GOD A CREATIONIST?," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 3 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol1/iss3/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

Robert Audi in several of his papers; cf., e.g., "Foundationalism, Epistemic Dependence, and Defeasibility," *Synthese*, 55 (1983), 119-39, esp. pp. 128-30. This and other issues raised in my critical comments are also illuminated in William P. Alston, "Two Types of Foundationalism," *The Journal of Philosophy*, LXXIII, 7 (April 8, 1976), 165-85.

4. Cf. Alston's article cited in the previous note.

Is God a Creationist?, ed. by **Roland M. Frye**. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. \$15.95, paper \$9.95.

Reviewed by FREDERICK J. CROSSON, University of Notre Dame.

Despite the rather odd title, this is a useful collection of eleven essays, drawn from diverse sources (conferences, magazines, books) and stitched together by an editorial prologue and epilogue. Six of the pieces address the creationist controversy directly, the others deal with the relations of science and religion or with scriptural exegesis (especially of Genesis 1-3). Five of the essays are by physical scientists and three by scripture scholars.

The occasion for the book, as for its first six essays, is the appearance on the American scene of "creation science" or creationism. Vigorously pressed by its supporters—mostly through state legislature—creation science is presented as an alternative theory to evolution in accounting for the origin of living forms and of the fossil record. As an alternative theory, its supporters have sought to gain access for it to the way in which biology is taught, especially on the high school level. The most recent case involved an Arkansas law of 1981 which required that equal time be given to creation science wherever evolution was taught in the schools. In 1982 a Federal District Court found the law unconstitutional on the grounds that, being specifically linked to the Bible, the mandated teaching represented an establishment of religion.

In an attempt to deflect this interpretation of the law in advance, the defendants filed a "Findings of Fact" which included this extraordinary claim:

Creation-science does presuppose the existence of a creator, to the same degree that evolution-science presupposes the existence of no creator. As used in the context of creation-science, as defined by 54(a) (sic) of Act 590, the terms or concepts of "creation" and "creator" are not inherently religious terms or concepts. In this sense, the term "creator" means only some entity with power, intelligence, and a sense of design. Creation-science does not require a creator who has a personality, who has the attributes of love, compassion, justice, etc., which are ordinarily attributed to a deity. Indeed, the creation-science model does not require that the creator still be in existence.

(Hume's Philo would have been pleased.)

Only one of the essays deals directly with this trial, a reflection by Langdon Gilkey on the arguments and underlying issues. Of the other pieces, the best are two by scientists and two by scripture scholars. Of the former, one is by Asa Gray, the 19th century Yale biologist, speaking to theological students on evolution (an unusual but successful inclusion), the other by Owen Gingerich of Harvard on creation and the big-bang theory. The scriptural studies are exegeses of the concept of creation as it appears in Genesis: one is by Nahum Sarna, the other by Bernhard Anderson.

Two central issues emerge from the book.

One is the literalism of Biblical interpretation which is the foundation of creation science and which is in turn "confirmed" by its interpretation of the empirical data. To take Genesis in this narrowly literal way is, e.g., to take creation of everything up to man to have occurred in six days, and to take the flood to have killed off many forms of life whose fossils remain in the strata.

The second is implied by the first: on the literal reading of creation science, Genesis is giving the same kind of account that geology or paleontology gives of the strata, or that biology gives of the origin of species. The only difference, fundamentally, is that it presents itself as an alternative account. Two weighty consequences follow.

On the one hand, biblical literalism of this sort strengthens the belief of many scientists that religion is simply primitive science which is disconfirmed and cast aside as scientific knowledge advances. (Not only is this belief strengthened, but the public raising of critical questions about anomalies in evolutionary theory tends to be discouraged.) On the other hand, creation science must respond to a large and growing amount of data which is not compatible with its tenets, e.g., on the age of the earth. Here is a creation science response:

The biblical cosmologist finally must recognize that the geological ages can have had no true objective existence at all, if the Bible is true.

(Henry Morris, *Biblical Cosmology and Modern Science*, p. 23)

Neither of these two central issues requires the Christian to subscribe to the positions taken by creation science. With respect to the literalist reading of Genesis, neither the notion of "biblical inerrancy," nor the Christian tradition of biblical interpretation (e.g., St. Augustine already construes the "days" of creation as figurative), nor the text itself require the narrowly literal reading. With respect to the accounts given by geology and evolution of the development of the earth and of species, they neither presuppose nor require—as creationists repeatedly insist they do—atheism. Physical science addresses and can address only the

question of proximate origin (how did A arise out of B?), not the question of ultimate origin of anything at all. The scholastic distinction of primary and secondary causality embodies the insight that God's creative action is effected through natural causes producing their own proper effects. No account of the world in terms of those natural causes (plate tectonics, gene pools, etc.) is inconsistent with God's providential employment of the same causes.

Only miracles *might* be understood to involve a direct action of God, suspending ordinary causal connections. But nothing in the text of Genesis requires the reading of creation as a series of such extraordinary interventions. There is ground for thinking, nevertheless, that behind the intellectual "set" that gives rise to creationism is the impulse to see the hand of God in a more vivid and empirical way, to see God as more a part of the way of the world, than the revelation of his transcendent difference from creation allows. If this suspicion is correct, then creationism is paradoxically and ironically a retention of a more archaic religiousness within Judeo-Christian revelation.

Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus, by C. Stephen Evans. Humanities Press, 1983. 304 pp. \$17.95.

Reviewed by MEROLD WESTPHAL, Hope College.

This volume is a companion to the two books from Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship which are attributed to Johannes Climacus. It is a companion rather than a commentary because it presents its close reading of these two texts (against the background of Kierkegaard's other writings) thematically rather than consecutively. Still, it has the kind of completeness one looks for in a commentary. There is practically nothing in the *Philosophical Fragments* or the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* which does not get discussed.

As the subtitle indicates, Evans takes the pseudonymity of these texts seriously. Though he acknowledges the depth and breadth of agreement between Kierkegaard and Climacus and regularly documents it with citations from what Kierkegaard wrote under his own name, he does not treat pseudonymity as a merely literary or biographical matter. Instead, he points to the substantive significance of the device both in terms of the distancing it permits between author and reader in an area where Kierkegaard believes indirect communication to be essential and in terms of the particular identity of Climacus, who writes about Christianity from the perspective of a philosophically sophisticated unbeliever.

The opening three chapters serve an introductory capacity. The first spells out the problems in reading and writing about the pseudonymous authorship in