Created Agencies of Creation in Genesis 1

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1 Comparing Narratives

Explanatory narratives, both scientific and theological, are verbal depictions of the world. Perhaps the greatest challenge for the readers of creation narratives, whether considered diachronically or synchronically, is to integrate with cosmological narratives of time, space, and virtually uncountable constellations of stellar objects. How are theological creation narrativists and scientific cosmological narrativists to communicate? There is a good query as to whether scientific reasoning is competent to do theological reasoning and vice versa. Both would like to offer a single explanatory narrative, believing that the narratives either can be collapsed into one another or that one or the other should eliminate the other. One simple response is that creation narratives are folk belief and in no way “theoretical.” They therefore occupy a different place in human thought than critical reasoning; the relation is asymmetrical and will always occupy their own cognitive role, never to be eliminated.1 But this is only helpful if science is free of non-theoretical concepts and discourses or if theology is free of theoretical content, i.e., immune from critical reason, and of course there are myths and theories on both sides. What is determinative is the difference between their foundational narratives. To the extent that scientific reasoning and pedagogy are full of metaphor, the relationship is far more humanly complex. Are the cosmological narratives of science and the creation narratives of theology united through a notion “hyperchronicity,”2 the subsuming of one to the other or through separating them hermeneutically. In scientific and theological narratives of origin, both have a metaphysical cast, the former, materialist, with no transcendent referent, the latter hearkening to the ancient narrative deposit that ever commands that orientation of faith to the obligation to order a world of habitation for humans and other

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2 In this sense, “hyperchrony supplements diachrony’s historical focus and synchrony’s atemporal focus with the broadest conceivable temporal perspective, with a view . . . to engage the vast majority of life’s history on our planet . . . ,” Lyle Eslinger, “The Enigmatic Plurals like ‘One of Us’ (Genesis 1:26, 11:22, and 1:7) in Hyperchronic Perspective,” Vetus Testamentum 56, 2 (2006): 171–84, p. 181.
life forms. The swing between either the universe as a complexity of material relations with no transcendent referent and human beings as the instance of a pinnacle of observation—we know of no other observers than ourselves on this planet or of its place in the cosmos. Cosmogonies, creation stories, present constructs beyond the horizon of common human experience—this is a characteristic of prophetic texts whatever their genre. One may have an intellectual aversion to such models that would claim universal validity about the universe. The biblical cosmology of the creation narrative, particularly of Genesis 1, holds a singularly strong place within the scriptural canons of the world. The two narratives will be told, but there is a natural tendency to want to see them converse, as it were. One way is to detect in the biblical narrative, spaces through which to behold the scientific one. The ideal place, this paper contends, is in the passages which speak of the origination of life—plant, animal, and human—and precisely how the text indicates the first occurrences of life.

In the creation story we may observe traces of reference to causal agency connecting human beings with God and the created environments that God caused to engender life. This is asserted in light of severe problems in the history of harmonization of cosmology and creation narratives. Although the relationship between “religion and science” continues to be a tortured one, it is regarded here as part of the larger modern configuration of the “promise of cooperation between science and literature.” Indeed, in basic ways this modern relationship has been a war over pedagogy in terms of what is necessary for the cultivation of humanity and the formation of responsible human beings. A strange polarization has resulted between anti-theological cosmological narrativists and anti-science young earth narrativists. Rejection of scientific narrative is not quite as strange and retrograde when seen in light of the opposite in rejection of theological narratives. The two strategies are flip sides of rational problems from over-simplification: reductionism down to totalizing scientific explanation or reductionism up to totalizing theological explanation. Both “sides” have correlative problems of reading the perspectival other because of a penchant for singular models of explanation. Both sides tend to ignore the

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