

Introduction

Jean-Henri Casimir Fabre (1823–1915) was a French naturalist with a keen passion for insects. Although he taught classes in botany, chemistry, and physics, his real love was entomology, about which he wrote volumes. Unlike the impersonal and detached style of writing common in modern science, Fabre used a colloquial approach that engaged the reader as he personalized his little subjects, imbuing them with almost heroic and/or despicable qualities depending on their natural propensities. What follows is an adapted account in the life of the praying mantis, demonstrating Fabre's unique ability to capture the essence of a tiny little world that at that time most people knew little about:

Of the scenes of carnage which the praying mantis has left in my memory, let me relate one. The thing happened in the nesting area of the bee-eating *Philanthi*, a species of bee-killing wasp. These wasps feed their larvae on hive-bees, which they catch while the bees are gathering pollen and honey from flowers. If the wasp feels that her bee is swollen with honey, she never fails, before storing her, to squeeze her honey-filled stomach, either on the way or at the entrance of the nest, so as to make her expel the delicious syrup, consumed by licking the tongue which her unfortunate victim, in her death-agony, expels from her mouth at full length. This profanation of a dying creature, whose enemy squeezes its belly to empty it and feast on the contents has something so hideous about it that I should denounce the *Philanthus* as a brutal murderess if animals were capable of wrongdoing. During some such horrible banquet, I once saw a wasp, with her bee prey, seized by a mantis. And here is an awful detail: While the mantis held the wasp transfixed under the points of her double-saw front legs and was

already munching her belly, the wasp continued to lick the honey from the tongue of the bee, unable to relinquish the delicious food even amid the terrors of her impending death.¹

This scene could be multiplied a trillion times, with its scale reaching to the tiniest of microscopic organisms all the way to the towering beasts of the dinosaurian past. No ecological niche is safe nor harbors any relief from the perennial search of predatory animals and blood-sucking parasites, respectively bent on devouring their prey and ingesting their hosts.

Who, if anyone, is to blame for this situation? Up until a few hundred years ago, Christians would defer to the account of Adam and Eve's fall in the Garden of Eden where, in accordance with an Augustinian view of free will, blame could be cast upon our first parents. The consequences of their actions resulted in a cursed world where death, disease, and suffering reigned. Things have changed. Many modern Christian theologians and philosophers fully accept the idea of geologic time and Darwinian evolution, consequently admitting to the prelapsarian existence of death, disease, and suffering. As a result, a growing number of Christian academics have chosen to jettison the traditional Adam and Eve theodicy (AET) and propose various other solutions to explain the existence of animal suffering. This abandonment comes despite the supremacy of this now 'outdated' theodicy:

Earlier generations of Christians would have explained the violence in creation by reference to a Fall that occurred in the distant past, itself initiated by human sin. But we cannot follow this route, for we have to acknowledge that there never was a time when life on our planet was free from violence. Predator-prey relations existed long before the early hominids appeared. Millions of years before human sin, there was a 'dark side.'²

1. Adapted from Jean-Henri Fabre, *The Hunting Wasps*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), ch. 10. See also Ronald E. Osborn, *Death Before the Fall: Biblical Literalism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (InterVarsity Press, 2014), 15.

2. Jay B. McDaniel, 'Can Animal Suffering Be Reconciled with Belief in an All-Loving God?' in *Animals on the Agenda*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (University of Illinois Press, 1998), 162. See also Michael Murray, *Nature Red in*

The origin of animal suffering could be traced, by earlier generations, to the Fall of man – the whole world was infected by the uncreating rebellion of Adam. This is now impossible, for we have good reason to believe that animals existed long before men. Carnivorousness, with all that it entails, is older than humanity.³

That the fall, which now seems so grotesque in many quarters, made eminent sense is evidenced by the seamless unity of the story that has Adam and Eve at the beginning, the great images of restoration in the prophets, and the accomplishment of redemption in Christ. . . . This all came to a crashing end with the Enlightenment and then with Darwin.⁴

When it comes to providing a theological explanation for natural evil such as loss of the potential for serving, our religious ancestors had it easy. They could simply blame Adam and Eve for falling into sin. It was human sin that corrupted an otherwise paradisiacal creation. In the wake of Darwinian evolutionary theory and the concept of deep time, however, we can no longer locate a primordial paradise in history let alone an event such as the Fall.⁵

In light of this remarkable transparency, two observations become readily apparent. First, as the aforementioned authors confess, the leading reason why an AET is to be excluded is not because it has been overstated by exuberant ‘literalists’ nor because it lacks explanatory power. Rather, a historic Adamic fall is to be repudiated because it contradicts our modern love affair with evolutionary science. As a person who regularly interacts with this worldview, I do appreciate this temptation. I thoroughly believe that a careful, critical summary of the scientific data affords a powerful motive for enlisting alternative theodicies. When all is said and done, however, those committed to an evangelically-driven Christology must defer to the authority found in the Scriptures – an uncultured choice in the modern academic world, and one that is certainly not going to garner intellectual brownie points.

Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering (Oxford University Press, 2008), 106.

3. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (HarperOne, 2001), 86 (Kindle).

4. Nicola Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 150.

5. Ted Peters, ‘Extinction, Natural Evil, and the Cosmic Cross,’ *Zygon* 53, no. 3: 693.

Secondly, despite claims from leading Christian scholars who believe that the Edenic account of Adam, Eve, and the fall is a mythic innovation based on ancient Near Eastern science,⁶ an amalgamation of myth and history,⁷ or a highly symbolic record of proto-history,⁸ the classical AET *works*, and *works well*.⁹ To be sure, some of these scholars treat with great reverence the ‘historical impulse [that] likely lies behind the stories’ of early Genesis,¹⁰ but how is it that a largely ‘ahistorical,’ ‘mythic’ account of human origins based on pagan false religion ‘just so happens’ to successfully answer some of the toughest questions in Christian theodicy? This is a noteworthy observation, especially in light of the glut of modern alternatives – all of which struggle to furnish satisfactory answers (see chapters 2–4). Some of the latter commentators will no doubt point to the orchestral intentions of the divine mind working behind, in, and through these largely pagan accounts, so that the final redacted composition purposefully accomplished its divinely ordained task – exculpating God from the charge of creational malfeasance. Yet if that is the case, and this largely highly symbolic/mythic theodicy fits its theodicean function so well, then why did God not create this kind of world in the first place? As the next few chapters will demonstrate, this question is incredibly relevant given nature’s seemingly cold, indifferent, and sometimes diabolical strategies.

6. See Denis Lamoureux, ‘The Ancient Science in the Bible,’ *BioLogos*, 21 August, 2009, <https://biologos.org/articles/the-ancient-science-in-the-bible>; John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (IVP Academic, 2009), 14; and Daniel C. Harlow, ‘After Adam: Reading Genesis in an Age of Evolutionary Science,’ *Perspectives on Science & Christian Faith* 62, no. 3, 182.

7. See William Lane Craig, *In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration* (Eerdmans, 2021), 363.

8. See C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1-11* (Zondervan Academic, 2018), 148.

9. These particular scholars either subscribe to or fully endorse variant forms of theistic evolution. Old-earth *creationists*, however, fully accept a historical Edenic fall. Yet even so, some old-earth creationists (e.g., Mark S. Whorton, *Peril in Paradise: Theology, Science, and the Age of the Earth* [InterVarsity Press, 2005]; Hugh Ross, ‘Why Did God Make Animals to Be So Violent?’ [reasons.org](https://www.reasons.org), October 2, 2020) resist the theodicean intent of Genesis 3, seeking to explain natural evil in a variety of novel yet equally deficient ways (chapters 3–4).

10. Collins, *Reading Genesis Well*, 138.

If it is not already obvious, I will be defending a strong lapsarian AET in this book. I realize that many scholarly sources have sought to deconstruct this approach, and that the problem of *moral* evil continues to challenge theism in general, but, and notwithstanding the formidable *scientific* challenges traditional AETs encounter, these historically-grounded theodicies have stood the test of time and remain one of the most internally consistent approaches to the problem of *natural* evil – the focus of this book.

Although other young-age creationist books address this issue,¹¹ there is no *single* book-length resource dedicated to a comprehensive analysis of the topic. This is despite multiple books on the subject published from various old-earth positions.¹² I think this paucity in book-length treatments is the result of an overly confident young-age creationist commitment to traditional AET models. Things have changed. Contemporary old-earth evangelicals of all persuasions have, and I think rightly in many cases, identified weaknesses in these traditional and often overly simplistic AETs. Young-age creationists must, in light of these recent changes, reexamine many of their assumptions (see chapters 7–10).

Since this book has a narrow focus, I will not be defending foundational AET concepts (i.e., the problem of evil or the historicity of Adam), but will tacitly assume their cogency. Nor will I be seeking to defend traditional young-age creationist views, whether theological or scientific, as they pertain to the ‘literalness’ of the creational days of Genesis 1, the age of the earth, or the flood of Noah. Literature and

11. E.g., Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise: A Biblical and Scientific Refutation of ‘Progressive Creationism’ (Billions of Years) as Popularized by Astronomer Hugh Ross* (Master Books, 2004); James Stambaugh, ‘Whence Cometh Death? A Biblical Theology of Physical Death and Natural Evil,’ in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Master Books, 2008); and Andrew S. Kulikovsky, *Creation, Fall, Restoration: A Biblical Theology of Creation* (Mentor, 2009); among others.

12. See Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (InterVarsity Press, 2001); Whorton, *Peril in Paradise*; William A. Dembski, *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* (B&H, 2009); Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth*; Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering*; Osborn, *Death Before the Fall*; Jon Garvey, *God’s Good Earth: The Case for an Unfallen Creation* (Wipf & Stock, 2019); Bethany N. Sollereder, *God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering: Theodicy without a Fall* (Routledge, 2019); among others.

resources on these topics abound, and so, unless specific to the task at hand, none of these young-age creationist doctrines will be addressed.

This book is broken into two major parts. Chapters 1–6 will present the problem, discuss solutions, and critically explore the Scriptures. Chapters 7–10 will apply the content of chapters 1–6, and extract additional concepts from relevant – and mostly recent – theistic evolutionary, old-earth creationist (as well as young-age creationist) resources, for the purpose of building a cogent, rigorous, and consistent AET.

Succinctly, chapter 1 will address the problem of animal suffering *in general* – what does it look like, is there any objective legitimacy to its existence, and how have scholars historically responded to it? Chapter 2 will review theistic evolutionary theodicies. Chapter 3 will take a closer look at some old-earth creationist theodicies, as well as the Satan hypothesis – a middle ground theodicy common to both theistic evolutionary and old-earth creationist proponents. Chapter 4 will finalize this three-part ‘mini-series’ by looking at some old-earth creationist and theistic evolutionary non-theodicean solutions. Chapter 5 will explore the most applicable Old and New Testament texts pertinent to the discussion. Chapter 6 will explore the meaning behind *kâbash* and *râdâh* in light of recent old-earth applications that differ radically from the more traditional interpretation. Chapter 7 will get at the sense of ‘very good,’ furnishing the phrase with its intended scriptural meaning. Chapter 8 will address the problem of pain in the prelapsarian world and will seek to construct an incipient overall model of prelapsarian harmony which others can hopefully improve and build upon. Chapter 9 will look at animal ‘death,’ *in and of itself*, detached from other fall-related phenomena such as animal predation, suffering, and pain. Finally, chapter 10 will discuss rapid biological diversity.