



What's Happening?

More Sound Reasons

The next chapter event is scheduled for Saturday, April 9. The topic will be "Will This Be the Last Christian Generation?—Keeping Our Young People in the Faith." This is a critical topic since surveys indicate that a staggering 80% of Christian college students will lose their faith. Two speakers will share valuable information on how you can help prepare young people to meet this challenge.

Mark your calendar and plan to join us on April 9 at Highlands Community Church Fellowship Hall in Renton, 8:30-11:00 AM. There will be a continental breakfast from 8:30 to 9:00 and, after the talk, plenty of time for fellowship and Q&A. For directions go to <http://highlandsc.org> and click on the Renton campus. If you plan to attend please RSVP at apologist2@comcast.net so we have a headcount for the continental breakfast.

We are also continuing to explore the possibility of bringing Hugh Ross or another RTB scholar to the area sometime this year. We are particularly interested in having speaking events at schools and colleges. If your church or group is interested in hosting a presentation, contact us ASAP at seattle@reasons.org.

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Where is God When Bad Things Happen?

By Rich Deem

The presence of natural evil in a world supposedly designed by a loving God is a formidable barrier to faith for many people. For example, atheist philosopher Brian Marston says, "Although an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God could be justified in allowing moral evil, such a God is never justified in creating a world in which natural evil occurs."¹ Nicholas Tattersall defines the evil that is incompatible with God's existence as "gratuitous evils."² This essay will not deal with moral evil—inappropriate actions taken by free will beings resulting in hurt to themselves or other free will beings. The free will defense explaining the presence of moral evil is delineated elsewhere.



I am convinced that the majority of people who make the claim that natural evil must be eliminated by God have not considered the implications of their ideas on the way the world would operate if they were in charge of the earth's design. Are these "natural evils" really gratuitous or do they serve important functions in the earth's design? This page is a comprehensive examination of what the world would look like if atheists would have had the ability to create a "better" universe. So, for the purpose of this essay, we are going to assume that the atheists are right and that all forms of natural evil must be eliminated from the universe.

Rejected Christian Responses

Numerous Christians throughout the ages have argued for specific explanations why there is natural evil. Some have suggested that natural evil was created by Satan and his angels. We reject this argument because nowhere does the Bible suggest that Satan has creative ability or took part in the way the universe was designed. We also reject the argument that all natural evil is required for spiritual growth. Some natural evil may pull at our hearts to encourage us to get involved in helping others. However, many forms of natural evil probably do not consistently result in a greater good in this way. So, we reject the argument that spiritual growth is the primary reason for the

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Meet our Members



Introducing Greg Moore

What do you do for a living?

I work for the City of Everett and administer our water conservation program (as well as other things).

How and when did you become a Christian?

I was raised Catholic and fell away from the faith in college. After I married and had children, my wife and I tried to plug into a local Catholic church, but it never really took hold. About 15 years ago, I lost my job and was unemployed for quite some time. Looking back it was truly a God thing that brought us to a local Christian church where I accepted the Lord and became a devout Christian. My wife and I now attend Mars Hill Church in Ballard.

How and when did you discover RTB?

My wife and I were very involved in the high school group at our Church. The youth pastor asked me to speak on creation. I was totally aware of the age of the earth controversy and most of what I read in preparing for the talk was young-earth. Then I came across Hugh Ross' "Beyond the Cosmos." This was a life changing experience that opened my eyes to the fact that science and scripture agree, and sparked a new passion for God's Word

When did you become a part of the Seattle Chapter?

I was fortunate to hook-up with Stan Lennard, now a board member at RTB, and we met with local folks about the possibility of starting a local RTB chapter. Through Stan's leadership, this developed into an official chapter and as they say the rest is history.

What is your role in the chapter?

I was president for several years, having recently turned it over to Mike Brown. I continue to serve on the leadership team and produce the monthly newsletters. My passion is writing articles where I try to communicate complex issues in a way that is understandable to laypeople.

What is your favorite pastime?

I have to say my, our, favorite pastime is our grandkids. We now have five all under the age of seven and we truly love spending time with them on the weekends.

What is the most interesting thing you've done?

My wife and I have done several trips to Mexico to build homes for the poor. We also love to travel, especially doing cruises, and have visited many interesting places.

Bible & Science In the News

■ Putting Cosmic Creation to the Test

This RTB article by Hugh Ross discusses how astronomical discoveries over the past five decades confirm that big bang cosmology is correct. Since the Bible accurately describes the fundamental elements of that cosmology, it is a dramatic example of the Bible's predictive power. Go to www.reasons.org/putting-cosmic-creation-test.

■ Eggsploration

This *tothesource* article by Jennifer Lahl discusses the release of *Eggsploration* a documentary on the business of human egg donation. The documentary which reports on the unethnical practices was awarded Best Documentary at the 13th Annual California Independent Film Festival. Go to: www.tothesource.org/2_9_2011/2_9_2011.htm.

■ Purposeful Plate Tectonics

In a series of articles and podcasts, RTB is responding to the issue of why God permits such earthquakes and tsunamis. Here Jeff Zweerink directs readers to posts on plate tectonics and related issues. He also links readers to RTB Science News Flash episodes for RTB's perspective on issues in Japan. Go to www.reasons.org/purposeful-plate-tectonics.

■ Some Views More Equal than Others

This article by David Klinghoffer posted on the Discovery Institute site talks about the spate of lawsuits and complaints questioning whether people who hold unorthodox views on Darwinian theory merit being fired, denied a job or otherwise penalized. It not only has a deadening effect on science, but the freedom of thought. Go to www.discovery.org/a/16491.

■ Fine-Tuning of Earth's Atmosphere

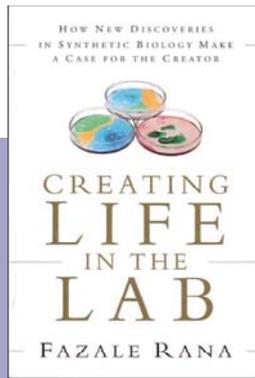
This RTB article by Hugh Ross discusses how Earth's primordial atmosphere was fine-tuned over the course of several billion years through several carefully orchestrated events in order to provide a life-sustaining composition of gases that made advanced life possible. Go to: www.reasons.org/earths-primordial-atmosphere-must-be-fine-tuned.

Book Review

Creating Life in the Lab

Fazele Rana
Baker Books, 2011

Reviewer: Mike Brown



Staggering! That's the word that kept coming to mind as I read Dr. Rana's latest book. Thousands of the world's best scientists have been working for decades attempting to produce synthetic life. They have faced the overwhelming complexity of producing even the simplest life forms—whether working from the bottom up, or the top down approach. While those in synthetic life research are closer to their goal than origin-of-life researchers, they are still not there.

There's a cartoon in Ankerberg & Weldon's book *Darwin's Leap of Faith* that depicts a scientist hard at work with a contraption made of glass tubes and beakers next to him. Behind him is a plaque recognizing fifty years of dedicated research. He is saying to himself, "If I can just synthesize life here...I'll have proven that no intelligence was needed to form it in the beginning." As I read *Creating Life in the Lab*, I realized that to be realistic the cartoon would need to show thousands of scientists working for decades. Of course, these scientists are only proving how much intelligent design did go into creating life in the first place.

Dr. Rana points out that: "...human beings interject themselves into the experiment's design, ironically, to demonstrate that life can emerge all on its own without purposeful intervention....This concern makes a critical assessment of researcher involvement essential. Remarkably, such considerations are seldom mentioned when scientists reflect on the success (or failure) of their experiments. In fact, more often than not, any impact the investigators had on the outcome of their experiment is ignored. As a consequence of this oversight, origin-of-life researchers often appear closer to accounting for life's start than they really are." (p. 115)

In high school, I had little interest in biology and chemistry. There are portions of Dr. Rana's book which are more technical than I am able to fully appreciate, but they are necessary to show the—what's the word I'm looking for—oh yes, *staggering* intelligence, research, and controlled laboratory work involved in attempting to create the simplest synthetic life form. I highly recommend the book to anyone—not just those with a background in biology or chemistry.

existence of natural evil.

Young earth creationists say the fall of Adam and Eve resulted in corruption of the physical creation, and that all the bad things are the result of sin. We reject this explanation, since the Bible makes it clear that the physical laws of the universe were in full operation before the fall. In addition, it is not clear from their explanations how sin caused all the "bad" processes to begin. Ultimately, even their explanation must put the blame for the existence of natural evil upon God. However, instead of designing the universe with natural evil, young earth creationists believe that God's curse upon the creation went way beyond what the Bible indicates.

Another popular Christian response is that all natural evil is due to the judgment of God. Although the Bible indicates that God has used "natural" processes in judgment (e.g., the Noaic flood) and will do so in the future (e.g., earthquakes and drought), not every natural disaster that occurs can be blamed on God's judgment. So, we also reject judgment as the primary reason for the existence of natural evil.

The Purpose of Natural Process

The physical world is subject to a number of laws that govern its operation. There are four fundamental forces of physics that operate in our universe:

1. Strong nuclear force (keeps protons within atomic nuclei from flying away).
2. Weak nuclear force (responsible for phenomena within the atomic nucleus, such as radioactive decay).
3. Gravity (attraction between masses).
4. Electromagnetic force (which governs interactions of charged particles).

These laws are absolutely essential for the proper operation of the universe as it exists. Without these fundamental laws exhibiting the exact values they do, the universe would consist solely of charged and uncharged particles and random forms of electromagnetic energy floating through space. We are going to go with these laws for now, since designing a universe with completely different laws would amount to mere hand waving (Anything is possible in philosophy, but science is a little more demanding). However, we will discuss alternative kinds of universes later in this essay.

God's Requirements for the Universe

First, we need some minimum requirements that the universe must possess in order to comply with God's stated purpose for designing the universe, according to the Bible. So, this essay will not address possible purposes for the universe as delineated in other religious writings, which, I believe, do not provide much of a challenge to the non-belief of skeptics. Therefore, I do not intend to defend the easily refuted claims of other religions or atheists'

ideas about how best to create the optimal universe. None of the requirements below represent some fringe Christian beliefs, but are central to the tenets of all Christian beliefs. Justification for each requirement is listed below. Any atheists' claims that these requirements are not central to Christianity are spurious, at best. Here is the list:

1. The universe must allow for the existence of sentient creatures.
2. These sentient creatures must have the ability to make moral choices.
3. The universe must operate by physical laws that are reliable, so that the sentient creatures will be able to interact reliably with their surroundings and each other.
4. The universe must declare the power and glory of God

Sentient Creatures

It seems somewhat unnecessary to defend the existence of sentient creatures, but for the sake of completeness, let's examine what the Bible says on the issue. According to the Bible, God created the entire universe,³ including time.⁴ Towards the end of God's creative acts, He created soulful creatures, including human beings.⁵ Human beings were given dominion over the earth to manage and protect God's creation.⁶ Such a task could not have been accomplished by non-sentient creatures. In addition, the Bible makes it clear that God wants to be in a relationship with human beings.⁷

Moral Choices

Atheists may not agree that sentient creatures must be allowed to make moral choices, but the Bible clearly states that this is one of the fundamental purposes for which the universe was created.⁸ Since we are arguing against the existence of the God of the Bible, we must accept the requirement as absolutely necessary.

Reliable Physical Laws

The universe must operate through reliable physical laws, since it would be impossible for sentient creatures to make sense of a universe in which the physical laws were randomly applied. The Bible explicitly says that God fixed the laws that govern the universe.⁹

Power of God

According to the Bible, God isn't a wimp. In fact, the Bible says that God's power is unlimited¹⁰ and that He created the universe through His awesome power.¹¹ According to the Bible, one of the reasons for the existence of the universe is to declare God's power and glory.¹² So, we wouldn't expect the universe to look wimpy, but it must demonstrate God's power and glory.

Eliminate All the Negative

Our strategy to examine the claims of atheists is to eliminate all the "nasties" that they say a loving God would never have allowed into His creation. We will do

this by attempting to eliminate the underlying causes of all this natural evil. In theory, when we are finished, we will be left with atheism's "perfect world." For the sake of being thorough, I intend to eliminate all forms of natural evil, including those that might, at first glance, seem trivial. The following is a list of natural evils, according to atheists:

- Collisions in the universe (Crabtree, 200713)
- Earthquakes (Tattersall, 1998,2 Marston, 1998,1 Crabtree, 200713)
- Volcanic eruptions (Marston, 1998,1 Crabtree, 200713)
- Landslides (Tattersall, 19982)
- Floods (Marston, 1998,1 Crabtree, 200713)
- Hurricanes (Marston, 19981)
- Tornadoes (Marston, 1998,1 Crabtree, 200713)
- Lightening strikes (Rowe, 197914)
- Fires (Tattersall, 19982)
- Painful death from an incurable terminal disease (Marston, 19981)
- Infectious disease (Crabtree, 200713)
- Animal pain (Rowe, 197914, Marston, 19981)

Let's start with the universe and work down in scale until we get to human beings.

Meteorites

Every year, a few people are killed by falling meteorites.¹⁵ Although an extremely rare event, you probably wouldn't want a meteorite to land on you. So, we must eliminate this form of natural evil. It seems like a trivial matter—God waves His hand and all the billions of meteorites and asteroids are instantly eliminated from the Solar System. The problem is that God has just produced a contradiction in the nature of the universe. Solar systems are formed through the collapse and accretion of dust and gases from a solar nebula. In our Solar System, most of this material went into the formation of the Sun, with the remainder forming the planets and moons ~4.6 billion years ago. Left-over pieces collided with these bodies at incredible rates through the late heavy bombardment (~3.9 billion years ago), which is why the Moon looks like Swiss cheese. So, if God had eliminated all the smaller objects in the Solar System, it would contradict the method by which it was created. Scientists examining the universe would be unable to figure out how the Solar System came into being. In essence, God would be telling a lie, something that the Bible says He can't do. So, this mechanism would violate requirement 3, above.

Could God have created the Solar System in some other way? Obviously, a God who is all-powerful could create the Solar System any way He wished. So, God could have created the universe and the Solar System in a completely different way. Many atheists have suggested that God could have created just one planet orbiting just one star. This method would have certainly solved the meteorite problem. However, this idea would violate one purpose for which the Bible says God created the universe the way He

did—to declare His power and glory—violating requirement 4, above. Atheists always complain that there isn't enough evidence for God's existence, so removing the remaining design evidence would have justified their unbelief—something God seems to have been unwilling to do.

Earthquakes

I live in one of the earthquake capitals of the world—the West coast of the United States. I have personally survived a couple Richter ~7 and a number of smaller magnitude 5-6 earthquakes, the latest during the writing of this article. If one were to examine atheist literature, one would think that these are capricious “acts of God” that serve no purpose to life on earth. Of course, the implication (never directly stated) is that earthquakes are a physical flaw in the “design” of the earth and that if God had really designed the earth, He could have done much better. Let's look at the reason earthquakes happen to see what could have been done to eliminate that cause.

Earth Sciences 101 – The reason for the existence of earthquakes is that the earth's continental crusts are floating on the earth's molten mantle. Since the continents are floating, the plates that make up the continents tend to run into one another. When they slip past one another, the grinding of the plates results in the release of a large amount of energy, causing the plates to shake. So, there are a few ways to “fix” the “problem.” We could just eliminate the mantle and make all the continents fixed in position. On the surface, it sounds like a good idea. In fact, all other rocky planets in the Solar System have no molten core, and, therefore, no seismic activity. However, it turns out that a molten interior of the earth is absolutely essential to the existence of life. The independent rotation of the molten interior of the earth results in a magnetic dynamo that produces a charged field (magnetosphere)¹⁷ around the earth. This magnetic field produces the Van-Allen radiation shield, which protects the Earth from radiation bombardment. If this shield were not present, life would not be possible on the Earth.

Get rid of radiation? – Maybe God could have designed the universe without deadly radiation? It turns out that the production of electromagnetic radiation is absolutely necessary to the ordinary functioning of the universe. Nuclear fusion, the process by which stars produce light and heat (and radiation) is necessary for the existence of life. In addition, the materials needed to produce rocky planets (and “rocky” organisms) is produced through this process. So, changing the weak nuclear force to preclude the generation of short-wavelength electromagnetic radiation, would prevent the formation of rocky planets and life altogether, violating requirement 1, above. In addition, it is the decay of radioactive materials that keep the earth's interior molten, allowing for magnetosphere to protect the earth from deadly radiation.

Earthquakes are good! – When the earth was first created, it was molten and the surface was uniform in height.

As water was delivered to earth (through the accretion process described above) and condensed, the planet became a waterworld, completely covered by a global ocean. Tectonic activity resulted in giant earthquakes and volcanoes that formed land masses over the earth. In addition, without continuing tectonic activity, the land masses would have returned to the ocean through erosion. Getting rid of the water cycle (to prevent erosion) is not an option, since fresh water is required for life. So, not only is the underlying cause of tectonic activity required to shield the earth from radiation, but the process itself is required for the formation and maintenance of continental land masses. It turns out that the number and strength of earthquakes is significantly less now compared to when the earth was first formed.¹⁸ This is primarily due to the reduction of radioactive materials in the earth (estimated to be one-fourth of when the earth first formed¹⁹). So, one could say that God has already reduced the suffering caused by earthquakes to the minimum level required for the existence of advanced life on earth.

Earthquakes and civilization – Despite the fact that earthquakes can be disruptive to civilization, 13 out of 15 of the first civilizations developed in the vicinity of earthquake fault zones (with the exceptions being ancient Egypt and China).²⁰ Scientists have speculated that plate boundaries often have ample water supplies that might have attracted early settlers, and that volcanoes help create rich soils. Obviously, earthquakes could not have been that detrimental to human beings if the vast majority of ancient civilizations developed there.

Tsunamis – When earthquakes occur under the oceans, the plate's movement dissipates its energy through the ocean in the form of waves known as tsunamis. When these waves make landfall, they can be up to 100 feet high and travel inland for several miles. The 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean caused widespread devastation to surrounding coastal areas, while killing over 200,000 people. We have already discussed the problems involved with stopping earthquakes and have determined that stopping them would result in a greater evil (lack of continental land masses and excessive solar radiation on the surface of the earth).

Volcanic Eruptions

Volcanoes are a relatively minor source of “natural evil,” since very few people are impacted by their eruptions. Living on or near a smoking, rumbling mountain can't be said to be a really smart thing to do. However, since people can be forced from their homes or killed because of choosing to live near volcanoes, we must try to eliminate this form of natural evil. Unfortunately, volcanic activity has the same underlying cause as earthquakes—tectonic activity. In fact, the map of worldwide volcanic activity looks strangely similar to the map of earthquake activity. So, the same problems involved in eliminating this “evil” are encountered compared to eliminating earthquakes.

Volcanism during the past has been much more severe than it is today. For example, the Columbia River basalt flows 12-17 million years ago produced 41,000 cubic miles of lava flow.²² So, God has reduced the level of volcanism at this time to the minimum amount required to sustain advanced life on earth. Therefore, we reject the elimination of volcanic eruptions as being possible on a world that contains sentient creatures.

Landslides

Here in California, we experience landslides during almost every rainy season (mostly December through February). For California, the landslides usually follow fires that remove the plant growth, whose roots tend to hold the soil in place. Without the plants, the soil is more susceptible to erosion during heavy rainfall, resulting in a landslide. Dozens to hundreds of people in California are left homeless and a few are killed by landslides every year. Removing the water cycle is not an option, since all life needs water. Making all the land flat would be eliminate landslides, but would require some major tweaking of plate tectonics. There is no natural process that would produce completely flat continents (which are actually mountains raised thousands of feet above the sea floor). Besides, a completely flat continent would experience flooding, since there would be no effective way to drain the land after a storm. From an aesthetic viewpoint, the world would be quite boring without mountains (with apologies to those of you who live in Iowa or Florida). Eliminating the water cycle or making continents flat would result in greater evils than putting up with a few landslides every year.

THIS CONCLUDES PART 1 OF THIS ARTICLE. PART 2 WILL APPEAR IN THE APRIL NEWSLETTER.

Note: For the footnotes cited, please go to Rich Deem's website for the original article at www.godandscience.org/apologetics/natural_evil_theodicy.html.



Seattle Chapter Reasons To Believe

Who Are We?

The Seattle Chapter of Reasons To Believe is a local extension of the worldwide, interdenominational Reasons To Believe ministry. We exist to support our parent organization and foster local involvement in the ministry. We serve the Puget Sound and are composed of Christians of different ages and backgrounds.

It is our conviction the same God who created the universe inspired the Bible. Therefore, God's Word must agree with the facts of nature. We reject the notion that science and the Bible are at odds and provide a scientifically-sound and Biblically-faithful alternative to Darwinism and young-Earth creationism.

What Do We Do?

Our mission is to remove the doubts of skeptics and strengthen the faith of believers. We provide scientific, historical and philosophical evidence that supports the Christian worldview and helps remove barriers to a belief in God, the Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We carry out this mission by:

- Helping people access RTB and other scientifically and biblically sound resources.
- Bringing nationally-known speakers into the area to promote the scientific reliability of the Bible.
- Assembling a team of local apologists to address questions about science and the Bible.
- Building alliances with local churches, ministries and groups to maximize the exposure of RTB.
- Reaching out to unbelievers with gentleness and respect, to expose them to God's word.

We welcome your involvement and support. For more information, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to: Seattle RTB, PO Box 99683, Seattle, WA 98139-0683.

Questions? Get Answers.

If you're looking for scientific support for your faith or answers to questions about God, the Bible, and science, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. Or call the RTB hotline seven days a week, 5:00 to 7:00 PM at 626-335-5282.