

## THE LEGACY OF DUYVENE DE WIT FOR CREATIONIST BIOLOGY: PART III — THE COSMONOMIC PHILOSOPHY: A CHRISTIAN ALTERNATIVE TO EVOLUTIONISM

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Received 15 August 1983; Revised 16 October 1984

### Abstract

*This is Part III in the series of articles dealing with the life and philosophy of science of Duyvene De Wit, a Dutch biologist. This part specifically focuses on how De Wit was influenced by the writings of Herman Dooyeweerd.*

#### A Posthumous Essay on Christian Philosophy

In previous articles I discussed the arguments, presented by the late Dr. J. J. Duyvene De Wit, a noted anti-evolutionary biologist, for the unscientific nature of evolution.<sup>1</sup>

In this, the last of a series of three, I will discuss an article which he wrote and dedicated to Professor Herman Dooyeweerd on the occasion of the latter's seventieth birthday. It was published after De Wit's tragic sudden death.<sup>2</sup>

Its main thesis is that *the Christian scientist can no longer ignore the philosophical implications of his discipline*. For the biologist this comes through loud and clear because of the nature of evolution. It is not a scientific theory but rather is a philosophical and religious view of the genesis of the living world. Its basic doctrine is that of continuous transformation of species and its accessory theories are mutation and selection.

Because of its philosophical character evolutionism is challenged by the Christian biologist who knows philosophy and who seeks the religious presuppositions behind such a philosophy. It is in this context that De Wit wrote:

Professor Dooyeweerd's Christian philosophy has opened my eyes to the tremendous task which lies ahead for those who feel compelled to contribute to an intrinsic reformation of modern biological and anthropological thought.<sup>3</sup>

De Wit began by stating that Dooyeweerd has made important contributions to the life sciences and has introduced a new approach to the interpretation of scientific data which allows Christians to see a more coherent picture of reality.

Dobzhansky wrote that nobody has yet offered a satisfactory definition of life. The reason for that, says Dooyeweerd, is that life is usually thought of as a "something," a metaphysical "substance." Yet, life is not a concrete "something" that we can put under a microscope, but a *characteristic* displayed by the concrete living things we observe.

De Wit dealt with the term "species," as used in taxonomy. The Greeks saw fixed, unchangeable "ideas" underneath the variable phenomena of living things. Such unchanging ideas led to the concept of unchanging species. Linnaeus built his taxonomic edifice on this basis: ON WHAT HE SAW, not on metaphysical "ideas."

Evolutionary thinkers first set out to destroy this Greek notion of the fixity of the species since it conflicts with the concept of evolution. In its place came population thinking, which is more consistent with it.

Aristotle assumed an immanent substance, an "essential form" behind all observed living things. He saw this substance as the "formal cause" of the development of matter into living things and of eggs into mature organisms.<sup>4</sup> This "cause" received the name of *telos* or *entelechy*, meaning "end goal" or purpose. The doctrine of seeing the end result of development as its cause became known as *teleology*. Dooyeweerd, wrote De Wit, demonstrated that this doctrine of teleology is of pagan origin. It is pure speculation without any scientific value and even defies simple logic.<sup>5</sup>

#### The Cosmic Philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd as a Basis for Biological Science

In the place of this pagan thinking about concrete things Dooyeweerd formulated his theory of the *Individuality Structures* of things in which all living beings display an orderly development which is governed by the laws, obviously given for each species. The entire *cosmos* to which they belong is governed by God's *nomos*. (Hence the name "cosmonomic" for this philosophy.)

These groups of laws, specific for each species, are the regularities which the Lord set for His creatures. They are the laws which we scientists investigate. Examples are the manner in which organisms grow, reproduce and make proteins. These specific law-groups through which God governs the individual members of a species Dooyeweerd called their "individuality structures."

As the complement to his theory of individuality structures Dooyeweerd formulated the theory of *Encapsis*, which accounts for the amazing ability of living beings to "capture" inanimate material. Organisms manage to transform this material and make it perform physical and chemical reactions in an orderly fashion, an order, not found among atoms and molecules when placed outside a living organism. And yet these particles, atoms and many small molecules, retain their own individuality and structure while in "captivity."

Dooyeweerd was careful to emphasize that his theories were based on observations which all biologists can make. They contain no untestable speculations about substances and autonomous striving towards a goal, i.e. teleology, as believed by the Greeks and the vitalists of the beginning of our century.

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### The Bankruptcy of Evolutionist Philosophy

In order to make evolution acceptable, its believers first had to destroy the basic modes in which we experience reality. They had to proclaim that the "life-mode" or "life-aspect" which we see is merely a complex form of matter in motion. The essential difference between dead and alive, which every human being intuitively experiences, had to be denied. Life was *reduced* to a special condition of inanimate matter. But that flies in the face of all scientific observation of reality. So, in order to make evolution acceptable, man must first *abandon the scientific method*.

Next, wrote Dooyeweerd, the individuality structures of living beings, the laws for their functioning which we abstract as the "laws of nature," had to go. *No laws, as discovered by experimental biologists, could have any permanent status*. They were mere transient peculiarities seen in organisms.<sup>6</sup>

It is obvious to even the most casual observer of life that each living thing functions under laws of great order and harmony. If life were to have arisen from atoms and molecules, which all function under their established laws of random interaction, these laws must have been suspended *for a time*. Thus the materialistic theory of abiogenesis suddenly requires something "supernatural": a miracle. In the past this was called a *spontaneous generation*. Its new name of abiogenesis does not make the theory less magical.<sup>7</sup>

The laws of genetics, wrote De Wit, have been found to affect only the inheritance and modification of characteristics *within* a species. Thus the theory of spontaneous transformation of one species into another one, regardless of the number of *assumed* spontaneous molecular misplacements in DNA requires the assumption of a concept such as "spontaneous generation" or a special "act of creation."

Guided by his doctrine the evolutionist *must* boldly take the jump into the unknown and declare that all species arose through such transformations. *Their faith left them no choice*. De Wit also gave evidence that points to the crucial role which the cortex and cytoplasm of the egg cell play in transmitting the characteristics of a species.

When the nucleus of a renal adenocarcinoma cell of an adult frog was transplanted to an enucleated, unfertilized frog egg, a nearly perfect frog embryo developed. He quoted Raven:

The group-specific fundamentals of the body plan which make the developing animal, e.g. into an anuran or a bony fish, are determined by factors residing in the cortex and the cytoplasm of the fertilized egg. Only after completion of the first phases of development, up to the beginning of gastrulation, do the nuclear genes begin to unfold their activity in order to establish the intraspecific characteristics of the developing organism.<sup>8</sup>

Experiments with grafting segments of cortex or cytoplasm have yielded similar evidence that confirmed the important role of the cortical membrane and cytoplasm of egg cells in heredity and the subordinate role of genes. Even the prominent evolutionist C.H. Waddington stated that many problems exist which cannot be solved by the methods of genetics and biochemistry.<sup>9</sup>

When all this knowledge of the role of cytoplasm in inheritance is confirmed and appreciated, wrote De Wit, theoretical biology will take a dramatic turn indeed. It effectively falsifies the "general theory of evolution" and it is entirely consistent with Dooyeweerd's theory of encapsis. In fact, through this theory of encapsis, biology can return to the investigation of reality without the inhibitions imposed on it by the unscientific mythology of the transformists.

De Wit noted that in the evolutionary "New Systematics," developed by Dobzhansky and others: "the role of the cortex in development is completely ignored because it does not support the basic tenets of the doctrine."<sup>10</sup> It becomes clear why this would be so. Given the transmission of the species characteristics through the cortex or cytoplasm, the whole theory that man has arisen from animal ancestry through some random misplacement of his DNA bases becomes irrelevant.

De Wit discussed this theory in the footsteps of Dooyeweerd, who wrote in this same context that we cannot come to an understanding of man by starting from the animal. Rather, observed reality points the other way, that the animal can only be understood *from man* and *by man* as we all note by common sense. Would anyone be prepared to state that the ability to formulate scientific theories started with the animals and that we inherited the trick of analyzing reality from them through a random mutation of their genes? This type of absurd consequence clearly demonstrates the bankruptcy of evolutionist philosophy. De Wit ended his essay with:

In this essay it was attempted to indicate the impact of Dooyeweerd's Christian philosophy on present day evolutionary biological thought. I hope to have succeeded in showing that this philosophy poses a number of essential questions and problems which have never been raised before by the leading transformist biologists of today. Moreover, it presents an earnest challenge to theoretical biological thought which, for the sake of a sound development of the biological and anthropological sciences, can no longer be evaded.<sup>11</sup>

### Creationists United Against Evolutionism

One lesson we can draw from the work of J. J. Duyvene De Wit is that the road of the Bible believer is made narrow to tread by reason not only of the professed enemies of the Lord, but also his fellow believers in science who have embraced evolution as a "theory." These evolutionists have dug some deep potholes in which any Christian, not familiar with biology, can readily stumble.

Theistic evolutionists have tried to dress up this religious doctrine-turned-scientific-theory with the mantle of Scriptural authority. Any Christian who refuses to believe in evolutionism is condemned as an obscurantist or a reactionary and is accused of cutting the lines of communication between Christians and unbelievers. In effect these "Christian evolutionists" try to throw their creationist fellow believers out of the scientific community. We can also learn that the best apologetics is to be found in demonstrating that the evolutionist is not driven by his *scientific* accomplishments but by his *religious zeal*. He wants to prove that there need be no God.

We cannot "prove" that God exists and created the universe. Creationism rests on faith, even though it fits with all scientific data, which is something evolutionism cannot claim. We have strong scientific weapons, as De Wit maintained, and if we do not wish to blunt them, we must at all cost avoid:

- 1) *Unscientific* speculations.
- 2) *Unscriptural* speculations.

If we do involve ourselves in the above, we effectively cut our lines of communication with those to whom we wish to bring the good news such as well-meaning Christian scientists, unbelieving scientists and non-scientists alike.

The philosopher Russell recently expressed his indebtedness to the creationist movement and regretted that reformed scholars seemed to have dismissed creationism for two decades. He deplored the fact that no one had: ". . . built upon the excellent work of J. J. Duyvene De Wit in the area of the critique of evolutionism and the outlining of a new philosophy of biology."<sup>12</sup> The reason for this may be that many creationists suspect that philosophy is injurious to conservative theology and to sound science. Hence few evangelical scientists ever receive philosophical training.

Schuurman, a professor in cosmological philosophy, emphasized that as creationists:

. . . we should continue to work for an inner reformation of the scientific disciplines. . . . Yet it is the weakness of reformational philosophy that among its proponents there are so few biologists and geologists. J. J. Duyvene De Wit has done much foundation work. . . . Nevertheless there remains a *crying need* for Christian scientists who oppose the exaggerated claims of science and who at the same time reflect on the 'internal structure of the discipline.' It is a cause for joy that someone like Russell, coming from the school of creationism, asks for that.<sup>13</sup>

It is time now for believing scientists and philosophers alike to unite. Science cannot remain neutral when one discipline tries to absorb another. Physics

and chemistry cannot swallow up biology with the mechanist's claim that "life is nothing but a special case of matter in motion." It is time to get to the philosophical root of the reductionist efforts of humanism, masquerading as "science."

Let us take up the thread, spun by Duyvene De Wit in the sixties, and follow it right into the enemy camp, where the fabric of evolutionism is woven. Let us teach our brightest students about the scientific and philosophic arsenal we have, so that the work of Dooyeweerd, De Wit and others can be carried on. Let us join hands and together work for the clarification of the difference between pagan speculations which lead science to ruin and our children astray, and sober scientific work that leads us to recognize the glory of God's creation.

### References

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5. De Wit. *Op. cit.*, p. 409.
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## A REPLY TO G. BRENT DALRYMPLE

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Received 2 November 1984; Revised 24 November 1984

Five years ago, I published a comprehensive geologically-based critique of radiometric dating,<sup>1</sup> and this has drawn criticism from Dalrymple,<sup>2</sup> who is one of the nation's leading authorities on radiometric dating. I thank Drs. George Howe and Emmett Williams for bringing this matter to my attention. Let it be noted, right at the outset, that Dalrymple reacts as a typical anti-Creationist, i.e., using a superficial and sophomoric reading of Creationist views coupled with misleading and emotionalistic assertions. Just as he gave a highly self-congratulatory and rosy facade of radiometric dating at the Arkansas Trial, so he has—in such typically anti-Creationist fashion—erected and demolished a straw man of my paper.

Consider, first of all, Dalrymple's charge that results from Coast Range Batholith<sup>3</sup> are not really anomalous. His initial claim that these results are really from Western Canada (not Alaska) and are cited (not initially reported) in my reference 42 are true but trivial. When an age-dated formation (in this case, the Coast Ranges Batholith) ranges beyond national borders, for the sake of brevity, I often list the nation of its most prominent or studied occurrence. Likewise, I have occasionally cited secondary sources if the primary source was not readily available, was more difficult for my readers to look up than the secondary source, or contributed to an unnecessary proliferation of references. It can thus be seen that Dalrymple's nitpicking is trivial and carries no weight.

Proof that results from the Coast Range Batholith are anomalous (although the authors Lanphere, *et al.*,

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