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Now I doubt that the author of Genesis 2 to 3 had read Darwin, even though we do debate the date of the Yahwist, but that's probably a safe bet; but he was profoundly interested in the place of human beings in their relationship to animals on the one hand and divine beings on the other.

Now if you remember the story, God first forms the creature that is to become the human, the Adam, from the dust of the earth, the *adamah*, the soil. When God places the creature in the garden, there is one and only one condition: don't eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad.

Now as you probably know, these terms don't simply mean moral good and moral evil, but rather more broadly, to the capacity to discriminate, make decisions in any matter concerning what's good and what's bad. It refers to the capacity for rational, deliberative choice. As the story later makes clear, that capacity to make deliberative choice is one of the things that characterizes divine beings and whatever the Adam is, it's not a divine being.

In fact, the Adam is created to be simply what we would call an animal. Now I say this because when it occurs to God that the creature might be lonely, God attempts to make a helper corresponding to it, and what does God make? Other animals and birds. From God's perspective, the Adam and the other animals are of the same nature, all of them made from the dust of the earth.

Well, this is also what we discovered in scientific terms in the nineteenth century, with the theory of evolution. Our ancestral species is that of the apes, which appear approximately 23 million years ago. The earliest hominid, *homo erectus*, appears about two million years ago and our own species, *homo sapiens*, a bare 150 to 200,000 years ago. We're that young.

Now in the Yahwist's imagination in Genesis 2, we start out with two kinds of beings in the world, animals and divine beings. But by the end of Genesis 3, there are going to be three kinds of beings: animals, humans, and divine beings. How does it happen? Well, as you know, it involves that Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad, the image that represents the capacity for rational discrimination, rational deliberation and discernment.

One of the Yahwist's profound perceptions is that this is a feature that does not characterize animals. Now today of course we probably have a slightly more nuanced view of animal cognition, but the Yahwist's perception is basically on target. Animals are more hardwired than are humans with the instincts that they need to live. They don't have to draw on rational processes in quite the same way that humans do. Animals don't need to create culture to the extent that humans do. They don't have or need the capacity for complex, symbolic thought or developed full language.

So the Yahwist claims that this ability to make rational, deliberative choice is a characteristic of divine beings, not animals, and as the wily talking snake, the trickster figure of the story, says to the woman, You know, as soon as you eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, your eyes are going to be opened and you're going to be like divine beings, who know good from bad. When the human beings eat of it, what happens? It's a funny scene. Their eyes were opened and they saw that they were naked.

Now that hardly seems like divine knowledge, and I think the scene is intended to be funny, but it is a shrewd observation. The term naked is one you cannot use intelligibly of animals. You don't say that a deer or a lion is naked. You only use that term meaningfully of humans. When they recognize they are naked, they are no longer animals.

The concept of nakedness is one of the sharpest dividing lines between humans and other animals. Now why is that? Well, it's because our capacity for reflective self-consciousness, which underlies our sense of bodily self-consciousness and shame, is dependent upon the large developed brains that humans uniquely have. So what the Yahwist depicts in this economical image is the birth of the

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defend against. They were unable to reproduce fast enough to meet the evolutionary challenge that we presented. We imposed change too rapidly, and that's been our story ever since.

Our cleverness, so wonderful in and of itself, completely outpaced a world that had evolved to a different tempo, and the tempo of the changes we have wrought upon the earth have only increased until the past 250 years. They have become unbearable for the earth. Two-hundred-fifty years: that's a millisecond in evolutionary terms.

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unprecedented technological prowess that truly seems like the power of beings who have become gods.

So Deuteronomistic time is a time of intensity and focus, a purposeful time, but it's also a heavy time. It's a time in which both success and failure are still possible and thus it's a time of judgement. What we do will be judged. The objective judgement of the climate itself, for one, but the judgement of the coming generations, which will either praise us for finally acting courageously or curse us for blithely stumbling into catastrophe.

And it's really easy to find one self mentally and spiritually exhausted. The sense of responsibility, the fear of failure, the anxiety about the future; but Deuteronomistic time is not the only time. I find both comfort and hope, perhaps surprisingly, in eschatological apocalyptic time.

Now when I first started teaching my course on the Bible and environmentalism, apocalyptic imagery and apocalyptic literature with its eschatological or end-time imagery was the one topic I dreaded. This was the one thing in the biblical corpus that seemed irredeemably anti-environmental: For I am about to create new heavens and new earth. The former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

Oh, great, I thought. A biblical version of a disposable world. Just what we need. But the more I lived with the conversation between the Bible and environmental concerns, the more I've come to believe that a vitally important perspective on time is embodied in the perception of apocalyptic eschatology.

Now, not surprisingly, apocalyptic eschatology and its sense of time emerges in the centuries after the fall of Judah to the Babylonians, after the Exile. The difficult time of living after a crisis that was not only national and political, but also spiritual and religious. It was a way of thinking about time, about

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We discovered that there was a time when these astonishing creatures, and not us, dominated the planet, and that with each successive age, a different repertoire of plants and animals flourished. There was a time before flowering plants. There was a time before mammals. There was a time before dinosaurs, a time before reptiles, a time before there were any land animals, any land plants.

Geologists have documented these five mass extinction events in Earth history, but have noted that as each is an ending, so it is a beginning, or as the Dead Sea Scroll prayer speaks of such transitions, destroying what was of old, but creating new things. Extinction events are also recognized as evolutionary gateways, opportunities for nature to experiment with new forms of life. Although the apocalyptic theologians were predestinarians in a way that geologists certainly are not, they would have grasped what the geologists perceived, and understood it to be part of what they called the *raz nihyeh*, the mystery of what was, and is, and is to be.

Now apocalyptic time, or the long view of geological time, does not take away our responsibility or our answerability for our actions. It will not take away our guilt before God and the rest of Creation if we bring about a mass extinction. It will not make our grief and our shame at the destruction that we've caused any less, but by contextualizing our actions within a much larger story, it saves us from despair and apathy, and I think it frees us from paralyzing anxiety.



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So there's that sense of a wholeness between the flourishing of the earth and human responsibility, and if we simply extend the analysis of the types of sins that we look at, and to think in terms of what constitutes idolatry in our time, and it oftentimes is the worshipping of the technological gods that we have sold our souls to.

Participant: Thank you for your talk. I was intrigued by your use of Genesis 1 to 11, which is often passed over in silence, but I'm glad you did such a good job with it. One of the points that I've found in

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certainly one way among many that we're literally discovering that this God that was so generous as to not just simply walk among us, but to be one of us, and show us that we have some divinity within ourselves, planted there by God, and that when we crucify God, we not only crucify God, but ourselves, and that that's what's going on. So the Gospel stories have a lot to tell us about . . . I just was wondering what . . .

Dr. Newsom : I think you've just said it. [laughter] But that is important to look at those motifs, and I think yes, the emotional pattern, too, of going through the despair when it looks like all the forces of death have won and then to realize no, no, the Resurrection. Those forces of darkness have not triumphed.

That's a very important, I think, hope to make central as we go through what feels like a very dark time, and not to lose sight of the fact that the patterns that we find in our religious faith are patterns that reaffirm again and again the divine intentionality and the divine triumph over those forces.

Participant: I really enjoyed this talk and I learned a lot from it and I'm also wondering at the same time . . . And I love having another alternative vision for how to think about time, but both sort of loss and repair, I guess, but I'm wondering also how you prevent this narrative from becoming escapist, for the folks who say, No big problem, technology will fix it.

Dr. Newsom: Oh. [laughter]

Participant: So escapist both in terms of our responsibility now, but also saying escapist thinking, we don't have to do anything, it'll just work itself out.

Dr. Newsom: Yeah. Oh. I think that we do have a tendency to want to grab hold of anything that looks like hope and turn it into a way of evading. We simply have to guard against that. Hope is not rightly a Pollyanna-ish attitude, but rather hope is that fierce refusal of despair; and I think that's where the depth of that kind of hope can function.

As far as the technological thing, you seem to see some of that shallowness . . . there are many scientists who are very thoughtful, very profound, but you have some who are so infatuated with the successes of very narrowly conceived technologies that I think we do run some risk in, once again, putting our faith in false gods.

That, I think again that people who come from religious traditions, who understand the limitations on human understanding, human knowledge, who understand the nature of our sinfulness as a part of who we're constituted, but this brings with us, yes, we want to use technologies. Yes, they are very important in aiding us; but that we have to look at those resources, those tools, with the deepest humility, and those are all, I think, things that people formed in the religious traditions have responsibility for keeping front and center.

Well, I want to thank you very much. This has been , like I say, an honor for me and a pleasure to share this time with you. Thank you.

[applause]