

SCIENCE AND RELIGION
GRADED PAPER 2
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The thesis and arguments

You present a clear thesis, but it is not until later in the paper that I really understood what you were proposing. Your arguments are well structured and stay focused on supporting the thesis. Unfortunately, too much space is dedicated to examples and speculative interpretation, and not enough is used to predict likely objections and answer them. Nonetheless, the attempt is clever, and is (like Gosse's conjecture) logically consistent but of questionably persuasive power.

The writing

The writing is clear, direct, and technically sound. Nice.

Items marked on the paper

(1) It derided the purpose of the circles? Or it derided the scientific enterprise itself? More substantively, were scientists offended? Or did they simply identify that Gosse's conjecture was not a scientific hypothesis at all, and thus science was required to ignore it?

(2) Empiricism has always taken, as an axiom, that our senses are reliable indicators of some objective reality. If our senses are sufficiently unreliable, then science is indeed a lost cause. But even Gosse's conjecture would not so obviously invalidate or devalue science. We would still live in a vast, remarkably constructed universe that exhibits strong regularities. Understanding that universe and how it works would still have great value, and science could remain the most effective method for that exploration.

(3) The public's rejection of Gosse's book is interesting, but what is its relevance to your argument here?

(4) OK, this is a creative reading of Job, but doesn't it **still** require that humans and dinosaurs lived at the same time? Scientific dating of dinosaur fossils has never admitted to such an overlap.

Of course, you must address the most likely objection: The Bible is sufficient vast, contradictory, and vague that one can infer **anything** from some part of it. What evidence is there, other than convenience, that this proposed reading of the given passage of Job is the correct one? Aren't such readings more likely to be (increasingly) desperate attempts at Biblical interpretation to coincide with what we've learned about the natural world? That's an objection you must answer given your proposed line of synthesis.

(5) Is it really likely that religious people would be at all likely to accept this interpretation? It is a clever attempt to fit things together, and it does have the virtue of not offending, but it could also be called outlandish.

Grade: B+

Using Scientific Discovery to Reinterpret the Bible: A Potential Starting Point for a Logical and Desirable Synthesis of Science and Theology

In 1857, Philip Henry Gosse fashioned a new model of synthesis that attempted to integrate Christian theology with scientific discoveries in an effort to reconcile the differences between these two ^{WC.} illustrations of creation. Gosse claimed that God had planted misleading evidence of the ^Earth's age when he created it. The public largely rejected Gosse's synthesis; his book on the subject, *Omphalos*, sold poorly and was widely criticized ^{old citation format.} ("Philip Henry Gosse"). The idea of a devious God was distasteful to the religious community and his assertion of false implanted evidence ^① derided the purpose of many scientific circles. ^② Consequently, Gosse's hypothesis, while logical, was shunned because it was an undesirable synthesis that proved unfavorable to both religion and science. However, the potential for a fusion of these two seemingly conflicting sides that does not insult the principles of each discipline is still possible by using scientific discovery to reinterpret ~~S~~cripture.

In order to construct a starting point for such a synthesis, it is necessary to ^{redundant} pinpoint exactly where Gosse's attempt failed. The Gosse hypothesis ^{not an hypothesis} was undeniably logical. However, Gosse's synthesis claimed that God had planted false evidence during the Creation in order to deliberately mislead the people into thinking that the earth's age was older than it appeared to be. ^{confusing} ~~in the Bible~~ This aspect of his hypothesis ^{evidence?} obviously angered many devout Christians. *How* could God intentionally deceive mankind in such a manner? This notion of a 'trickster God' seemed antithetical to the image of God as a benevolent supernatural being. The latter image of God projects a wizened figure of immense power while the former description illustrates a God that is a mischievous prankster. It is understandable why many theologians might find this image of a

trickster God as heretical. Furthermore, the assertion that all of the evidence of the earth's mature existence was falsified is a direct jab at the reliability of data that many scientists use in their

research. By nullifying the accuracy of such proofs as dinosaur fossils and tree rings, Gosse essentially invalidated not just what appear to be facts and evidence of the earth's old age, but also the tools with which science constructs observations and hypotheses. This insult to scientific research and inquiry resulted in the dismissal of Gosse's claim by many scientific circles. But

perhaps the most important rejection of Gosse's synthesis was by that of the general public. The abysmal sale of his book *Omphalos* illustrates the poor reception that his model of creation received ("Phillip Henry Gosse"). It is likely that this rejection of Gosse's synthesis was largely due to what is now called the "omphalos hypothesis". The hypothesis states that, given that Gosse's claim of creation is true, the earth could have very well been created five minutes ago with all of man's memories being created along with it by God. This hypothesis is logically congruent with Gosse's synthesis but it was most likely a major reason for the poor reception of his book *Omphalos*. The concept that God could have fabricated our very memories was probably too heinous a notion for the public to accept. This hypothesis would essentially quash our individual histories – an aspect of ourselves that shapes our person and character. Due to these reasons, specific communities such as scientists and theologians, as well as the general public, were repelled by Gosse's synthesis. His claim was logical but it was the undesirable nature of such a claim that doomed its popularity and reputation from the outset.

Taking the example of dinosaur fossils as a starting point might evidence an illustration of a logical and desirable synthesis of science and theology. For many years and for many people, the existence of dinosaur fossils was seen as contrary to the word of God. The age of the fossils seems to contradict the timeline framed by the Bible. Furthermore, the Bible fails to

explicitly mention these creatures. These dinosaur fossils insinuate that the Word of God is not infallible. However, careful reading of Scripture can integrate the theology of Christianity with scientific evidence of the existence of dinosaurs. This integration would not shun the basic principles of each discipline, as Gosse's synthesis did, but embrace them.

Let us take the six "days" of Creation and turn them into "ages" in which the earth and all of the animals (including dinosaurs) were created by God. If this is to be believed, then why is it that dinosaurs are not mentioned in the Bible? The word 'dinosaur' was styled by Richard Owen in 1842 and is derived from the Greek language; it roughly translate to 'wondrous reptile.' So, while it is true that the term 'dinosaur' is never seen in the Bible, it is also true that the animals now called dinosaurs seem to be referenced numerous times in Scripture. In the Book of Job 40:15-24, an animal called 'behemoth' is described as having a "tail like a cedar" and "bones [that] are like beams of bronze" with "ribs like bars of iron." This behemoth "[ate] grass like an ox" and was "chief of the ways of God" (Holy Bible). Many believe that these characteristics can be attributed to that of an elephant or hippopotamus. In fact, many study bibles will substitute the word 'behemoth' with 'elephant' or 'hippopotamus.' These assumptions are not illogical since both elephants and hippopotamuses are large and bulky creatures. However, even if a certain level of hyperbolic exaggeration expected from a Biblical account is factored in, neither of these animals has a tail that is even remotely large enough to be compared to a cedar tree.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that either an elephant or hippopotamus would ever be "chief of the ways of God." That phrase conjures the image of a gigantic creature whose size was virtually unrivaled – such as that of a dinosaur. It is possible that the behemoth mentioned in the Bible is none other than the famous Brachiosaurus, which left behind the largest complete dinosaur skeleton ever discovered. The behemoth could even be the dinosaur Diplodocus, which rivals the

Brachiosaurus for size and is also well renowned for the extraordinary size of its tail. The tail of the Diplodocus, which was estimated to have been about forty-five feet, was so gigantic that it could be justifiably referred to as the size of cedar. Also, in Job 41 and Isaiah 27:1, a beast called the 'leviathan' is described as a scaly, sea-dwelling creature whose "breath kindles coals" with a mouth out of "sparks of fire shoot out" (Holy Bible). Often, the leviathan is viewed as an alligator or a crocodile. However, upon careful examination of the word of Scripture, it is clear that is highly unlikely for the leviathan to be an alligator or a crocodile. Alligators and crocodiles enjoy the water but their primary habitat is on land. Leviathan is described as a "reptile" that is "in the sea." The leviathan made its home in the sea while both alligators and crocodiles have a primary habitat on land. Furthermore, neither alligators nor crocodiles can breathe fire whereas numerous dinosaur fossils have been found with curious chamber extensions of the breathing passages. The function of these chambers has yet to be discovered by scientists but it leaves the possibility open that there were once dinosaurs that could breathe fire (Etinger).

Fanciful.

Is it?

It is clear from such evidence found in Scripture that there is great potential for a logical and desirable synthesis that adheres to the basic principles of both science and religion. While some may view the existence of dinosaurs as proof of the fallacy of Scripture, it is clear that an amalgamation of the reinterpreted word of God and scientific discovery is a feasible possibility with a vast capacity for expansion. Gosse chose to put forth a synthesis that alienated most of his readers by deriding both scientific and religious beliefs but a synthesis that meshes these two systems together without deriding their basic principles is very much a desirable and logical possibility.

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Works Cited

Messy: What citation
↓ format is this?

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Holy Bible. NIV. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.

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