

PHILIP P. DUCE

In Search of a More Focussed Response: A Reply to Professor Van Till

I am grateful for Professor Van Till's response to 'Complementarity in Perspective' (*Science & Christian Belief* 8, 145–161, 1996) and am encouraged that he is inclined to agree with my principal conclusion. However, I found some aspects of his discussion disappointing, and in turn I offer some comments on selected features.

The aim of my paper was modest: essentially it was simply to ask whether 'complementarity' is as useful, or as stable, as some of its major expositors imply, and if not, to indicate a possible response. This was partly prompted by the continued reiteration of complementarity, for example in the reissued *Real Science, Real Faith* collection and the first issue of the CiS student magazine.

Van Till is of course correct to recognise the need for clarity in identifying the parties involved in the relationship under scrutiny, and the character of that relationship. A number of different, related, pairings may be posited, for example:

- the created order—the Biblical text;
- the contents of particular scientific disciplines—the contents of Biblical teaching, or Biblically-derived theology;
- philosophy of science—Biblical hermeneutics;
- philosophy of science—theological method;
- the character of scientific practice and belief—the character of 'faith'; etc.

Clearly, such pairings differ in character to a greater or lesser extent, and the elements of a given pair may or may not be 'complementary' in some sense. [Note that 'my' comparison of complementarity with Bacon's 'two books' metaphor is Colin Russell's (cf. CP footnote 1).] I might suggest that in Van Till's pairing of the Creation and Scripture as '“categorically complementary” sources of information', his discussion also incorporates the idea of 'categories of appropriate questions', which seems to be slipping over into his next category of 'interpretation and analysis'. Unless one adopts a bare, positivistic, meaning for 'data', the 'givens' of Creation and Scripture arguably already incorporate some crypto-interpretation. 'Appropriate questions' for each source can only be identified within the hermeneutical circles. Indeed, the title 'Creation' and the fact that we are concerned with the *Bible* and not some other book show that we have already

HOWARD J. VAN TILL

Response to Duce

At this stage of our exchange, I believe that Dr. Duce and I have made our differences and criticisms sufficiently clear. In spite of these differences, I believe we can nonetheless agree on the general proposition that in discussions regarding the relationship of biblically-informed Christian theology to empirically-informed scientific theorising any simplistic or unqualified appeal to the concept of complementarity is likely to be problematic. The relationship of scientific and theological theorising is far more complex than any one analogy or label can capture.

The one claim regarding the term ‘complementarity’ that I would continue to defend is that, when thoughtfully qualified, it can serve as a meaningful label for one type of relationship between two entities of comparable ontological status (e.g., the biblical text & the natural world, or Christian theology & the natural sciences). My own inclination has been to apply it when the pair of entities (whether they be questions, theories, or sources of information) are concerned with the same reality but focus attention on different qualities of that reality. In such cases one may well encounter two differing descriptions of that reality that are neither contradictory nor unrelated. I shall presume that Duce and I are still in general agreement on this broad issue.

On the particular question of how a Christian today might evaluate the scientific concept of biotic evolution, however, Duce and I will presumably choose to remain in disagreement. Duce’s reference to the desirability of an ‘evangelical approach’ that is to be contrasted with what he labels as ‘liberalising approaches to Scripture’ suggests that we have substantively differing views regarding the specific manner in which the biblical text has epistemological relevance to scientific theorising. In the North American context in which I am immersed, there are two tendencies within the evangelical approach that I find especially objectionable: (1) a tendency to minimise the effects of the ancient Near Eastern cultural setting which supplied both the conceptual vocabulary and the literary genre for much of the text; and (2) a tendency to overestimate what one might rightly expect the text to supply in the way of particulars (e.g., a timetable for the universe’s formational history, or some limitation on the mutability of ‘kinds’) of direct relevance to contemporary scientific theorising.

Similarly, Duce’s disparaging references to ‘theistic evolution’ as a concept that may have been influenced too little by sound theological critique and too much by the ‘origins research’ conducted by a ‘predominantly secular academy’ and perhaps ‘subject to naturalistic bias or distortion’ suggest that we have also reached quite different conclusions regarding the soundness of contemporary

scientific theory evaluation. There are indeed strident preachers of a naturalistic worldview who seek to exploit the successes of scientific theorising for their own rhetorical purposes, but I see no cause for alarm regarding the manner in which theory evaluation is carried out in the actual day to day conduct of the natural sciences. I am alarmed, however, by the growing tendency of Christians, especially in North America, to expend great amounts of energy in the search for evidence that the Creation was never sufficiently gifted by God to make possible something as remarkable as genealogical continuity among all of his creatures. Instead of engaging in a search for gifts withheld from the Creation, I prefer to celebrate all gifts given-including those that make evolutionary continuity possible.

Howard J. Van Till is Professor of Physics and Astronomy at Calvin College, 3201 Burton Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546 USA.

The Editors of *Science & Christian Belief* wish to congratulate Michael W. Poole for his 1996 Exemplary Papers Award from the Templeton Foundation for his paper "A critique of aspects of the philosophy and theology of Richard Dawkins" published in *Science & Christian Belief* 6, 41-59, 1994.

A reprint of this article and the subsequent debate with Richard Dawkins is available (ordering details on p. 148).

entered such (intertwined) circles.¹ Van Till's point that 'theorising in both science and theology draws from a diversity of fruitful sources' is consistent with my reiteration of the need for a symbiotic or eclectic model.

With regard to defining the character of the relationship between science and theology according to the complementarity approach, I followed the discussion given by Ratzsch (cf. CP footnotes 3, 4): in complementarity, science and theology are held to be 'independent of each other in that they describe (with distinct, characteristic concepts) and explain (with distinct explanatory principles) different levels or aspects of reality, but are not inconsistent with or contrary to each other'.² If different commentators have differing understandings of what 'complementarity' may or may not mean, then to my mind this only serves to reinforce the perception that the concept is inherently slippery or unstable. I might also comment that nowhere in my paper do I refer to 'isolation' of science and theology, and that I am at a loss to see how Van Till's married-couple analogy serves to clarify an epistemological issue.

With respect to the 'floating definition' or 'shifting referent' of 'science' in the examples given, I was simply reporting some instances of the application of complementarity by a few senior expositors.

Thus, I readily concede the need for clarification in my own paper—but would also like to suggest that this in part reflects the same need in the main expositions of complementarity. Does the basic deficiency lie primarily with the expositors (the 'fallible flock'), or with the concept itself? I would also add that while the discussions of complementarity to which I had access routinely resist "fundamentalist" or liberal approaches to the relationship between science and Scripture, none interact with logical analyses or critiques such as Austin's (cf. CP footnote 26). I would have welcomed some engagement by Van Till with such analysis, in preference to repetition of material from his own paper in the previous issue of *Science and Christian Belief*.

On the question of 'gaps', Van Till claims that I suggest that without clear instances of 'gaps' at the level of scientific description in at least some phenomena (e.g. Jesus' miracles), we would be left without 'sufficient' epistemological evidence for the justification of Judaeo-Christian theism. However, I did not state that 'sufficient' evidence would be lacking, only, in passing (following Moreland), that 'important' evidence would be—a weaker claim. Discussion of implications for apologetics was beyond the scope of the paper.

I drew on J. P. Moreland as a writer who has penetrated important philosophical issues and who has offered a helpful perspective on the place of

1 Indeed, Van Till has acknowledged as much: 'The concept of creation is influenced not only by knowledge gained through scientific investigation, but also by prevailing concepts of biblical hermeneutics and the proper epistemological role of the biblical text in the formulation and evaluation of both theological and scientific theories, especially theories regarding the formative history of the creation' [Van Till, H. J. 'Can The Creationist Tradition Be Recovered? Reflections on *Creation and the History of Science*', *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (1992) 44(3), 184].

2 Ratzsch, D. *Philosophy of Science*, Leicester: IVP (1986), p. 133.

complementarity, rather than reiteration of the usual exposition. I commended his 'eclectic' model on this basis—a key feature being that in *some* cases, science and Scripture can in principle interact at the *same* level of description in epistemologically positive and negative ways. In general, I did not find this feature offered by the distinguished contributors listed by Van Till, because it is largely precluded either by their implementation of complementarity, or the adoption of a somewhat liberalising approach to Scripture [although Peacocke's discussion is noteworthy (CP footnote 41)].

Interaction with Moreland's particular implementation of his model in biological evolution was beyond the scope of my paper. Van Till personally finds Moreland's approach here 'barren of promise' and would have preferred me to commend the work of the well-known senior authors. A detailed response is not possible here, but I would say, firstly, that I cannot see how yet another commendation of these authors, by an obscure one (myself), would have been of much value; secondly, if an *evangelical* approach is required, then the contributions of Polkinghorne and Peacocke must surely be resisted at the points where these exhibit liberalising approaches to Scripture or some doctrinal content; thirdly, *within* an evangelical context, I would want to question, say, Berry's exegesis of Scriptural texts dealing with Adam; fourthly, and in general, expositors of theistic evolution rarely seem to interact with serious exegetical and theological critiques of their position (cf. CP footnote 44), or purely scientific critiques of the biological theory. To repeat Arthur Jones' observation, 'theistic evolutionists may appear to be scientifically sounder, but it is the soundness of those who have never fought, not of those who have fought and won'.³ Furthermore, whether, and to what extent, origins research as practised within the predominantly secular academy is subject to naturalistic bias or distortion, and whether any such bias is easily separable, are important relevant questions.⁴ While the debate is certainly about scientific 'facts', it is also about epistemological values.⁵

With regard to Van Till's own admittedly attractive picture of functional integrity, here I can only state that I remain unconvinced that it is a good example of restatement and explanation of the Biblical *doctrine* of creation,⁶ not

3 Jones, A. 'A Challenge to Theistic Evolutionists', *Origins* (Biblical Creation Society) (1991) 4(10), 13.

4 Here the degree of optimism (bias is present but may be fairly readily identified and separated out) or pessimism (bias is deep and pervasive) will be influenced by the implicit or explicit understanding and application of common grace and its limitations: optimism may well reflect a fundamentally Thomist approach, pessimism a Kuyperian approach. Clearly, some subjects within the sciences are more susceptible than others to the risk of suppression or distortion under the influence of a *priori* religious and philosophical commitments—and Christian scientists also have their own preferences or, unfortunately, prejudices.

5 See, for example, Johnson, P. E. 'Shouting "heresy" in the temple of Darwin', *Christianity Today* (24 Oct 1994), 22–26.

6 As is claimed in the Editorial, *Science and Christian Belief* (1996) 8(1), 2. Van Till himself distinguishes between a *picture* and the *doctrine* of creation [*S & CB* (1996) 8(1), 27]; how far these may be distinguished, and the character and extent of their mutual influence, are points which require further consideration.

least because in his reading of Augustine's and Basil's readings of Genesis, neither level appears to be free from extra-Biblical presuppositions which arguably result as much in eisegesis as in legitimate exegesis.⁷

In the closing paragraph of his response, Van Till lists some key questions. These are predominantly ontological. If, as Van Till states, we are going to 'draw from all disciplines, including science and theology, in our efforts to construct answers', then do we not still need to articulate *some* kind of epistemological or methodological model for proper integration of the content of contributions from the sciences and theology and Biblical interpretation? To my mind at least, Van Till moves too quickly from *how* to draw on these disciplines to *what* they may tell us. Perhaps Ratzsch's comments are again pertinent:

Exactly how to shape [the] dialogue is not currently obvious, but probably must be discovered in the doing of it, just as the proper process of science itself was and must continue to be discovered in the doing of science. There are probably no iron-clad rules for this dialogue and no convenient a priori short cuts, just as there seem to be none in science itself.⁸

I commended Moreland's model as *one possible starting point* for structuring the dialogue in an evangelical context.

Van Till's statement that 'turf wars do not provide the most direct access to understanding' is surely axiomatic for CiS members. I consider a more searching question to be whether, in the 'theistic evaluation of the scientific enterprise', we have been as successful as we would like to believe in escaping from the deep influence of Enlightenment dualism. May God grant us grace and renewed vision in our search together, for *truth*.

7 See Hasel, G. F. 'The "Days" of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal "Days" or Figurative "Periods/Epochs" of Time?', *Origins* (Geoscience Research Institute) (1994) 21(1), 5-38. Hasel gives a thorough review of the issue, observes that 'the obvious consensus is that there is no consensus on the literary genre of Genesis 1', and concludes with ten considerations which support the concept of a literal creation week. Note that Hasel also gave the seminal exposition of the implicit or explicit polemical emphases in Genesis 1 [Hasel, G. F. 'The Polemic Nature of Genesis Cosmology', *Evangelical Quarterly* (1974) 46, 81-102], and states that this feature 'does not diminish in the least the author's intention to write an account that has a literal intent to provide factual and historical information' ('Genesis 1', 36).

8 Ratzsch, D. 'Science', in Atkinson, D. J., and Field, D. H. (eds.) *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*. Leicester: IVP (1995), p. 764.