**Our Critique of Theistic Evolution Does Not Represent Misrepresent the Biologos Position**

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In 2017, I was a coeditor for the book *Theistic Evolution: a Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*.[[1]](#footnote-1) in my introductory chapter to that book, I defined theistic evolution as follows, using a definition jointly authored by the editors of the book:

*God created matter and after that did not guide or intervene or act directly to cause any empirically detectable change in the natural behavior of matter until all living things had evolved by purely natural processes (p. 67).*

But after the book was published, some reviews on the Biologos website objected that our definition had misrepresented their position. The primary statement of this objection was in a thoughtful and gracious review by Deborah Haarsma, President of Biologos.[[2]](#footnote-2) She proposed an alternative definition of theistic evolution (though she prefers to call it "evolutionary creation"[[3]](#footnote-3)):

*God creates all living things through Christ, including humans in his image, making use of intentionally designed, actively-sustained, natural processes that scientists today study as evolution.*

Haarsma adds, "God guided evolution just as much as God guides the formation of a baby from an embryo" (in the previous sentence she had cited Psalm 139:13, which says, "You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb"). She also says, "Although God in his sovereignty could have chosen to use supernatural action to create new species, evolutionary creations [sic] are convinced by the evidence in the created order that God chose to use natural mechanisms."

However, Haarsma's new definition does not actually conflict with our definition, but rather confirms the essence of our definition given above. We could modify our definition to *add* more things that she advocates, but the substance of the definition would remain, as in this example:

*God created matter* [with intentionally designed properties governed by "natural law"] *and after that* [God continued to sustain matter and preserve its natural properties but he] *did not guide or intervene or act directly to cause any empirically detectable change in the natural behavior of matter until all living things had evolved by purely natural processes* [which God actively sustained but did not change].

In this modified definition, I have explicitly added the Biologos belief that God actively upholds and sustains the activity of the entire natural world (as affirmed in Col. 1:17 and Heb. 1:3). I agree with that belief. But to define *creation* this way is to confuse God's *initial* work of creation with his *ongoing* work of providence. (Note the present tense verb in Haarsma's definition of theistic evolution: not "God created" but "God creates," thus drawing no distinction between God's initial creative work at the beginning of the universe and his subsequent sustaining work that continues today.)

The key point in our definition is the theistic evolutionist claim that God did not "*cause any empirically detectable change* in the natural behavior of matter" until all living things "had evolved by purely natural processes." Haarsma does not raise any objection to this crucial part of our definition, and in fact her proposed definition affirms the same thing: "God creates all living things… making use of intentionally designed, actively-sustained natural processes."

In another Biologos review, Jim Stump writes, "Yes, we believe that God guides evolution, the same as we believe God guides photosynthesis."[[4]](#footnote-4)

But this is a misleading use of the word "guide." People ordinarily use the word "guide" to refer to an action that influences the course of an object so that it changes the direction it was otherwise going. But the Biologos explanation shows that they use the word "guide" to mean "does *not* change the direction of an object but sustains it so that it continues in the direction it otherwise was going." So ordinary English speakers understand "guide" to mean "change the direction of something," but the Biologos foundation uses the word" guide" to mean "not change the direction of something," which is just the opposite.

I conclude that our definition of theistic evolution remains accurate. The advocates of theistic evolution who are affiliated with Biologos support a viewpoint that is correctly summarized in this statement:

*God created matter and after that did not guide or intervene or act directly to cause any empirically detectable change in the natural behavior of matter until all living things had evolved by purely natural processes.*

1. Edited by J.P. Moreland, Stephen Meyer, Chris Shaw, Ann Gauger, and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Deborah Haarsma, "A Flawed Mirror: A Response to the Book ‘Theistic Evolution,’" dated April 18, 2018: https://biologos.org/articles/a-flawed-mirror-a-response-to-the-book-theistic-evolution. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See p. 65, n. 6 for a discussion of why we retain the term “theistic evolution.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Jim Stump, "Does God Guide Evolution?" at https://biologos.org/articles/does-god-guide-evolution. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)