Review of Ken P. Coulson's *Creation Is Fallen: The Curse, Animal Suffering, and the Problem of Natural Evil* (Genies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2026)

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Ken Coulson is a creation scientist (Ph.D. in earth science) who is well versed in Scripture and theology. This 274-page book (excluding the front and back matter) is not light reading, but it is worth the effort, especially for those who want a substantive and polite defense of the traditional Christian understanding that natural evil arose after the creation of Adam and Eve and as a consequence of their sin. I do not include everything that Coulson addresses and may have misunderstood some things, but I hope this will be a helpful summary.

The present world is filled with disease, predation, suffering, and death. Christians until the last few centuries were largely agreed that this natural evil was part of the divine curse that was meted out as a consequence of the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden. Because of human rebellion, this world is not the way it is supposed to be, not the way it came originally from the hand of God. Though it is headed for an eternal state in which all such things will have been expunged, a state in which there will be no death or mourning or crying or pain, for now it bears the brokenness of sin's invasion.

Modern Christian theologians and philosophers who accept deep time and Darwinian evolution must reject this traditional explanation of natural evil because, in their scheme, disease, predation, suffering, and death were a feature of the world ages before Adam and Eve were created. Therefore, they are left to explain how God, after the arrival of Adam and Eve, could pronounce his creation "very good" when it included such grisly features and why God would not be morally culpable for creating through a process red in tooth and claw. Various attempts have been made to address these challenges, but as Coulson explains, they all fall short. He argues, successfully in my mind, that the traditional Adam-and-Eve theodicy, as elaborated by him, is a superior Christian explanation.

Chapter 1 is devoted to demonstrating the reality of animal suffering in the world. He cites the classic examples of the cuckoo bird and the ichneumon wasp and includes the terror and protracted agony of animals who are burned to death or eaten alive. He also includes within natural evil, rather than moral evil, the butchering and cannibalizing of early humans because "to almost all old-earthers, these human victims were not created in the image of God," being before the time of Adam.

In chapter 2, Coulson addresses attempts by theistic evolutionists to explain how the evolutionary process is compatible with a good, beneficent God. He groups those explanations in three general categories, which he labels "kenotic free process," "only way," and "cosmic cross."

The "kenotic free process" group of solutions, as best I understand it, proposes that God limits his knowledge of the future, and though he lures creatures in the developmental direction he desires, he leaves them free to develop toward complexity in the manner they choose. As one

proponent of the view states, "If God has really made creatures free, then God allows creatures to 'create themselves,' and does not regulate [coercively] how evolutionary tactics emerge." So, though the processes of natural selection, predation, and extinction exist as possibilities in creation, "their emergence depends on the 'freedom' of individual organisms who are seeking to actualize themselves through 'selving.'"

Coulson criticizes this group of proposed solutions for their unorthodox restriction of God's omniscience, omnipotence, and sovereignty, but also for removing God from the alleged evolutionary process, which involves the pain, suffering, and extinction that are the problem, and then insisting that he be given credit for the complexity resulting from that process. As he says, it "is akin to 'having your cake and eating it too.'"

The "only way" group of solutions claims that creation by the evolutionary process was necessary to achieve certain greater goods. In other words, the natural evil inherent in the process was essential to producing things that make that natural evil worth it. These alleged greater goods include the making of human beings, various benefits arising from regularity in physical phenomena, and various benefits from the existence of a diversity of complex organisms. A major problem, as Coulson explains, is the assertion that these goods could be achieved only through the evolutionary process. Regarding the making of human beings, for example, God could miraculously create a human who was identical in every way to a human who arose through a long process of evolution, so the process cannot be essential to the existence of any human properties.

It is unclear to me how the "cosmic cross" group of solutions functions as a solution to the problem of natural evil. It seems they are a species of the "only way" solutions, adding the claim that all animals that suffered and died in the necessary process of evolution will, by Christ's sacrifice, be resurrected to a glorious eternal existence. Coulson points out that these attempts suffer the same flaw as all "only way" solutions, that is, the seemingly false assertion that the alleged goods could be achieved only through the evolutionary process. Moreover, their theological underpinnings, such as the claim that God in Christ became by implication foxes and sparrows, grass and soil, are foreign to Scripture.

In chapter 3, Coulson examines solutions to the problem of natural evil proposed by old-earth creationists and some theistic evolutionists who accept the reality of Adam and Eve and the fact that nature is in some sense fallen. He first explores the claim that, though natural evil existed for eons before Adam and Eve, it was caused retroactively by their sin in the Garden. He criticizes this view for (1) depending on the understanding of Genesis 1 and 2 as two distinct, non-overlapping creation accounts instead of complementary facets of the same creation account and (2) basing the hypothesized retroactive implementation of the divine curse for Adam and Eve's sin on the prospective application of Christ's saving work to Old Testament saints. Regarding the former, he explains in chapter 5 why Genesis 2 flows seamlessly from Genesis 1. Regarding the latter, he notes, among other things, that a retroactive curse doctrine is found nowhere in Scripture and that it would mean that God pronounced as "very good" the sin-cursed disaster zone into which Adam and Eve were placed.

Coulson then explores at considerable length the claim of some old-earth proponents that natural evil is caused by Satan and other evil spirit beings (demons). He summarizes his objections this way:

> Since Satan's powers are local, *supernatural* manifestations, we cannot credit Satan for the comprehensive existence of *providentially* derived destruction, pain, and suffering in the natural realm. Equally unlikely is the presence of a satanically-derived principle of disintegration and disorganization. Such a principle finds no analogical connections to Adam's fall or Scripture in general, and it is irreconcilable with God's 'very good' assessment of all that he had just created in Genesis 1. A syncretic approach to the SH [Satan Hypothesis], whereby Satan is granted comprehensive access to DNA, furnishing him and his cohort with genetic powers of evolution is equally unlikely, since such an approach naturally attributes to Satan creational powers that are rightly reserved for God alone.

Coulson also rejects the "free process" defense of natural evil, which he explains as: "God built chaos systems into every facet of creation, and as long as these systems remain in equilibrium (no major perturbations), then natural evil is circumvented. However, if the perturbations get out of control, then equilibrium is lost, and a world of natural evil results." That possibility was allegedly realized billions of years ago. Coulson remarks, "It appears [this claim] is divorcing nature from God's providential rule and sort of equipping it with a 'will,' as though nature can 'make a decision' or 'choose its path.'"

Chapter 4 addresses specific examples of the "only way"/"greater good" solutions of chapter two, claims that the world of disease, predation, suffering, and death qualifies as "very good" because that natural evil was necessary to produce benefits that are sufficiently valuable to justify the evil. Coulson notes, as he explains more fully in chapter 7, that "very good" in Gen. 1:31 refers contextually to the intrinsically very good design of Genesis 1, in contrast to the bad situation that unfolds in chapter 3, not to God using suffering for our good and his glory. Moreover, this attempted solution fails because there is inadequate reason to believe that the alleged greater goods could only be secured by allowing the evil or that those goods are sufficiently valuable to justify the evil. Thus, there is inadequate reason to believe that it is within the rights of the one permitting the evil to permit it.

Coulson also addresses the claim that the notion of a fallen creation is a human fabrication that is not taught in Scripture and was not known (or was an extreme minority view) until the Protestant Reformation. If that were true, if natural evil was indeed part of the original creation, then God's pronouncement that creation was "very good" necessarily would include natural evil. But it is not true. It was widely recognized in the early church that Scripture teaches that natural evil arose as a consequence of the sin in the Garden of Eden. As Coulson explains, citing Hans Madueme, "the majority of the early church, especially in the patristic period, fully accepted a prelapsarian animal vegetarianism and the occurrence of an historic, cosmic, and very palpable Adamic fall."[1]

[1] See, e.g., Ashby Camp, "The 'Fall of Nature' in Scripture and Early Tradition."

In chapter 5, Coulson tackles some key texts related to the question of whether the Bible teaches a fall of nature. He rejects the claim of many old-earth advocates that Genesis 1 and 2 are distinct and contradictory creation accounts. Genesis 2:5-7 does not teach that there were no plants when humans were created, contrary to the order of creation revealed in Genesis 1, but rather refers to two specific forms of vegetation, "shrub of the field" and "plant of the field," that were not present prior to the sin in the Garden. I disagree with some of the details of how he, relying on John Sailhamer, develops this insight, but I agree that it defeats the charge that the two accounts are distinct and contradictory.[2] Coulson bolsters his claim that Genesis 2 is merely an expansion of the general account of Day 6 in Genesis 1 with the fact that Jesus in Mat. 19:4-5 links Gen. 1:27 and 2:24 in discussing the traditional case for marriage. As for the objection that Gen. 2:18-20 has God forming the animals after he formed Adam, contrary to the order of chapter 1, he notes that the relevant verb in 2:19 can be translated "had formed," as in the ESV (and the NIV and LSB).

After plowing through various arguments and objections, Coulson concludes, "Genesis 1:29-30 *in conjunction* with Genesis 9:1-3 makes a compelling argument favoring prelapsarian herbivory for humans *and* animals."[3] Regarding Gen. 2:16-17, he denies that Adam and Eve were created with a natural disposition or tendency toward death. Rather, they were created conditionally immortal, meaning that they had the theoretical capacity to die *if they sinned* but lacked the permanent immortality of glorified saints. He concludes, "Physical human death that begins immediately, internally, and as a consequence of Adam and Eve's sin is by far the most contextually satisfying, parsimonious, and compelling interpretation."

Coulson rejects the suggestion that Abel's offering to God the firstborn from his flock in Gen. 4:4 means that animals were an acceptable part of the human diet before the flood. He notes, "Abel's offering sacrifices cannot be used to infer Abel's eating of them." He also explains why God's post-flood promise in Gen. 8:21 to "never again curse the ground because of man" does not mean that he rescinded the curse upon the ground in Gen. 3:17. He concludes that the curse of Gen. 3:17 "is as present and intrusive today as it was in the postlapsarian pre-flood world."

Coulson argues that the fall and its consequences, most notably death, provide the likely basis for the distinctions between clean and unclean creatures as identified in the dietary restrictions of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. If that is correct, the distinctions serve to corroborate the fall. He acknowledges some difficulties with the claim, and though he offers possible solutions, the uncertainty weakens its force.

The fact God is associated with predation in Ps. 104:21, Job 38:39-41, and Job 39:27-30 does not mean that predation, suffering, and death were part of the original creation. Those texts reflect God's providential provision in a post-fall world. God cursed creation as a consequence of sin, but he did not abandon it. Even the cursed world reflects his power and wisdom, and he is glorified through it. Coulson elaborates on this in chapter 10.[4]

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[2] For details, see, Ashby L. Camp, Genesis 1 – 3: Creation and the Fall, 34-38.
[3] See also, Ashby L. Camp, "A Reply to Bruce Gordon's Biblical Critique of Young-Earth Creationism," *Answers Research Journal* 8 (2015), 56-57.
[4] See also, Ashby Camp, "The 'Fall of Nature' in Scripture and Early Tradition," 2-3.

Coulson explains why the prophetic vision in Isa. 11:6-9 and 65:17-25 "almost certainly" portrays a future blessed state, which he takes to be the millennial reign of Christ, in terms of the pre-fall state of creation in which animal predation and hostility were absent. I consider this a prophecy of the eternal state, but whether referring to the millennium or the eternal state, the point stands that predation and death are inconsistent with God's ideal and thus were not part of his original "very good" creation. As I have written elsewhere:

> Isaiah 11:6-9 and 65:25 describe a coming state of blessedness as one in which animals no longer pose a threat to each other or to mankind. Animals will no longer be carnivorous ("the bear shall graze" and "the lion shall eat straw"), so those that are predators today will at that time peacefully coexist with those that are now their prey (wolf/lamb, leopard/goat, lion/calf, bear/cow). And venomous snakes shall pose no threat even to little children. In this "end age," carnivory, predation, and killing will have no place because animals hurting and destroying each other or human beings is inconsistent with God's ideal: "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9). This same ideal was reflected in the pre-Fall prohibition of carnivory and predation as explained above. Carnivory and predation are hurting and destroying, and since hurting and destroying are contrary to God's ideal, he would not label as "very good" (Gen. 1:31) an existence that includes them.[5]

Coulson concludes chapter 5 with a discussion of Rom. 8:18-23. He rightly argues, in line with most scholars, that when Paul speaks of the futility and bondage to corruption to which the creation was subjected, he is referring to the judgment related to Gen. 3:17-19. The text "powerfully and forcefully speaks to a world that was subjected to futility and corruption only *after* Adam's transgression."[6]

Chapter 6 addresses the claim that pre-fall natural evil is implicit in the fact that before Adam and Eve sinned they were commanded to "subdue" the earth and "rule" the animals. It is alleged by some that subduing and ruling involve force and violence, which would be necessary only in the face of hostility or rebellion, thus indicating that nature was in some sense opposed to mankind from the start. Coulson explains that "subdue" and "rule" need not carry such connotations, and he therefore rejects the asserted inference that pre-fall nature was hostile or in rebellion. This does not mean that the pre-fall world was "perfect," a description Coulson reserves for the coming eternal state, only that "subdue" and "rule" cannot support the claim of pre-fall natural evil. One need not accept all of Coulson's vision of what subduing and ruling in the pre-fall world would entail to agree that, as humans filled the earth, they were to use, control, and manage its natural resources as God's representatives.

Chapter 7 addresses in more detail the meaning of God's pronouncement in Gen. 1:31 that the finished creation was "very good." Coulson justifiably derives his understanding of that phrase "from the contrasting 'very bad' and *truly* 'hostile elements' that are *plainly* found in the

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[5] Ashby Camp, "The 'Fall of Nature' in Scripture and Early Tradition," 10.
[6] See also, Ashby Camp, "The 'Fall of Nature' in Scripture and Early Tradition," 13-15.

fall narrative" of Genesis 3. "This means that the existence of post-fall human death (both physical and spiritual), 'increased' pain during childbirth, marital power struggles, and thorns and thistles, are not to be included in the 'very good' world of Genesis 1." He continues in the chapter summary:

> The closer context of Genesis 6-9 tentatively allows us to augment this list to include animal violence against other animals and humans, and by implication animal-on-animal predation together with the anatomical changes required for this dietary transformation. This conclusion is further substantiated when we consider the physiological changes God wrought upon the 'snake,' and the synchronous biological changes fated towards other animal groups (Gen. 3:14). Taken together with Genesis 1:29-30, Genesis 3:18, Genesis 9:2-5, Isaiah 11:6-9, and Isaiah 65:17-23, the universal implications for a revamping of earth's biological systems becomes provocatively compelling.
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> Based on the strong contextual link Paul makes with Genesis 3 in Romans 8:18-23, we can also conclude that natural disasters – including volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis (as well as various other geologically-destructive processes), diseases, drought, and plagues – were almost certainly excluded from the 'very good' world of Genesis 1.

In chapter 8, Coulson rejects the claim that the pre-fall world could not possibly be free from accidents, injury, pain, and suffering. He accepts that God may have miraculously protected humans and other creatures from such things, but he thinks it is more likely that mishaps and their related consequences were avoided, at least primarily, by a deeper divine governance, by God's overarching providential rule, by which he effects his will "through the *ordinary* workings of nature (Heb. 1:3), *not* through the agency of miracles." In other words, God created "a world that, although operating through natural mechanisms, nevertheless proved 'safe' for its inhabitants." Since God somehow managed the outcome of those mechanisms, the difference seems more one of degree than kind, but either way, a world created and superintended by God could be free from accidents, injury, pain, and suffering.

As Coulson points out, all old-earthers who remain faithful to the historicity of Adam and his fall-induced physical death must accept that prior to the fall humans were by some means divinely protected from the panoply of mortal threats they claim were rampant in the world when Adam was created (lethal microbes, poisonous flora, venomous creatures, carnivorous beasts, and natural disasters). Since they acknowledge that God protected humans from death in that dangerous pre-fall world, they have no basis for insisting that he could not in a similar way protect all creatures from accidents, injury, pain, and suffering.

Coulson acknowledges that some pain is beneficial, such as the minor negative sensations that prevent bodily damage by influencing one's gait, but he distinguishes this from the intensely negative sensations that constitute suffering. Prior to the fall, humans and animals were allowed to experience only those minor negative sensations that were beneficial for their protection and development. The pain that would have accompanied giving birth prior to the fall, as implied in Gen. 3:16 ("I will surely *multiply* your pain in childbearing"), was in that category.

Chapter 9 addresses whether prior to the fall animals not only were free from predation and suffering, a point previously established, but also were free from serene deaths, one without pain or disease. Coulson does not think Rom. 5:12 and 1 Cor. 15:20-26 are sufficient to rule out all pre-fall animal death because they only expressly link human death to the fall. But he thinks the exclusion of all pre-fall animal death follows from the examples in Scripture of animals experiencing suffering and death as a result of human sin, when combined with Rom. 8:18-23 and Genesis 3. He states, "Taken together with everything in this book, this principle – linking human sin to the fate of animals – strongly supports the traditional young-age creationist doctrine that restricts animal death to the postlapsarian world." As for whether that means animals were "immortal" before the fall, Coulson applies to animals the distinction Madueme makes between the "permanent immortality" of humans in the eschaton and their "conditional immortality" before the fall.

Chapter 10 deals with the difficult issue of how some of the harmless and non-predatory creatures of the pre-fall world transformed into well designed killing machines in the time available in recent-creation models and how the animals on the ark diversified as rapidly and extensively as required by recent-creation models. Having made the biblical case for pre-fall herbivory on chapters 5-7, Coulson accepts as "an objective *scriptural* reality" that some previously herbivorous animal groups transitioned to carnivory and states, in light of texts like Gen. 3:17-18 and Rom. 8:18-23, that "young-age creationists can confidently assert that indeed, rapid, and presumably supernatural biological change certainly defined the transition from the pre-fall to the post-fall world." He adds:

> Of course, these transitions may not have been instantaneous, as inferred by Schaeffer. They also may or may not have involved normal biological processes, we just do not know. But based on the Scriptures *in their entirety*, we can be certain that the world was 'very good' before the fall and cursed after the fall. The 'fleshing out' of the curse, however, might have taken weeks, months, or even years, and may have transitioned from supernaturalism to naturalism over time.

Coulson recognizes that even the cursed, fallen creation reflects God's wisdom and that he is due glory "for His incredibly well-designed predatory adaptations." I would reinforce that assertion with the following:

> The curse God imposed in response to sin was intended not only as punishment but as the background necessary in a *sin-invaded creation* to optimize his appeal to sinners. In other words, the pervasive reality of the curse is needed in this sin-tainted world to reinforce, subliminally if not consciously, the truth that choosing sin over God yields disaster. Even the revolting horrors sprinkled throughout the natural world serve to keep fresh before mankind the horror of sin, to provide an ongoing, visceral display of the tragic consequences of rejecting God. It is a way of communicating to the emotional and subconscious side of mankind that this world is not the way it is supposed to be, which impression is part of the epistemological environment in which God calls humans to choose him.

> And since God desires a great multitude of redeemed humans to spend eternity with him in the new heavens and new earth, the cursed creation must continue until that full number has been reached. To that end, the elements of the curse were designed and arranged to sustain the functionality of the biosphere for that length of time. In this way, even fallen creation reflects God's wisdom and glory. As part of his counteraction against sin's invasion, he has cursed creation in such a way that a world red in tooth and claw will continue for however many millennia are necessary for his purpose. Thus, God remains the ultimate source of provision for all his creatures in this fallen world, predators included, and rightly is praised for it, as well as for the integration of parts and ongoing balance of the entire system of nature.[7]

Regarding the rapid diversification after the flood, Coulson thinks that animals may have been designed originally with a potential for diversification, which is expressed through historical processes as providentially used by God, possibly including horizontal gene transfer. He states in conclusion: "Young-age creationist ideas are definitely in the minority, but as I have hopefully demonstrated, they are not as far-fetched as Whorton and other critics claim. Imagine what kinds of new discoveries await those brave enough to take a stand against the 'establishment,' pioneering new and exciting fields of research."

In the final chapter, titled Conclusion, Coulson restates the difficulty of reconciling creation by evolution, creation over deep time that is red in tooth and claw, with a *good* God and reasserts that the traditional Adam-and-Eve theodicy, as elaborated by him, is a superior Christian explanation. He is convinced that there is much scientific evidence in support of Darwinian evolution and deep time and that the present scientific evidence in support of a young-age worldview will not, on its own, without a commitment to the truth of Scripture, change people's minds. He appeals to old-earth Christians "to candidly ruminate over *everything*" he wrote in the book. He also urges them to consider that (1) one needs to be cautious about heeding scientists who have swerved from their lane of expertise, (2) there is a spiritual battle raging and scientists are not exempt from Satan's influence, (3) "science is limited in its ability to convey accurate descriptions of reality," (4) scientific evidence for God's existence can be interpreted in more than one way, and (5) scientific knowledge is distinct from the faith necessary for salvation. He ends with a recap of his understanding.

The back matter consists of a 15-page bibliography, a 19-page subject index, and a 5-page Scripture index. This is followed by a few pages of advertisements for other books published by Mentor. I appreciate Mentor sending me a copy of the book without charge.

[7] Ashby Camp, "The 'Fall of Nature' in Scripture and Early Tradition," 2. Coulson expresses the idea this way in the following chapter: "So, rather than redefine God's judgment on the world, we should be embracing it, using the thunderous reality of natural evil to point people back to God, but then teaching them that one day things are going to change in remarkable ways."