Created and Evolved:

Describing a nuanced theological anthropology for the contemporary church

through the writings of Gregory of Nyssa and Charles Darwin

by

William John Nielsen

Date:___April 5, 2023___

Approved:

J. Warren Smith, 1st Reader

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
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ABSTRACT

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The following thesis addresses an issue in ways of knowing that is both common and destructive in the contemporary American context. Specifically, the issue of misunderstood anthropologies is posited to be an unnecessary destructive force against American churches already in decline. This damage is caused by wooden and polarizing theological and evolutionary anthropologies that underlie the basis of how many define themselves. This project endeavors to show that theological and evolutionary anthropologies are not necessarily adversarial. To this end, the theological anthropology of Gregory of Nyssa as described in On the Making of Man (de Hominis Opificio) and the evolutionary anthropology as described by Charles Darwin in The Descent of Man are defined and compared. These seminal yet still authoritative works are shown to be making different statements about humanity’s coming into being, more so than confrontational ones. The lack of mutual exclusivity between these two anthropologies is heightened by a number of interesting points of connection between them, such as reason being the definitive characteristics of humanity as well as the notion that humanity is continually becoming a more good creature. These ideas will serve to remove barriers of belief for many, all the while providing for a more holistic view of the origins of humanity and thus humanity’s place in the world.
Dedication

This project is dedicated to the followers of Jesus that I am honored to serve, as they give me place for theology to be more of an action than an idea. I especially am grateful for the support of the congregation and leadership of Northwoods United Methodist Church, from whom Olivia supported myself and my family with meals, Kevin made space for me to be able to write, and Field reminded me that my calling was tied to some of the ideas of this project.

More than anyone, this project is dedicated to my family, my father Lou who taught me the value of gentleness and intellectual pursuits, my mother and best friend Doris who convinced a fairly recalcitrant young man that he could do anything, and my in-laws Diane and Carlo who continually support the sometimes hard to understand call on my life into which their daughter has been dragged. Especially, though, I am grateful for my dear wife Aimee and son Lou, who from the beginning of this project picked me up when I fell, encouraged me when I was feeling done, and loved me without question throughout. This is for you.
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both our origin and our destination. I am immensely grateful for his guidance on this project and encouraged by his modeling of how one might live as a practical theologian.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Anthropology

Anthropology is simply the study of humanity, the word coming from the Greek *anthropos*, meaning human being or related to human being(s), combined with *logia*, which means to have discourse about, or to study.\(^1\) This field of study is inherently fundamental to human knowing as it seeks to describe, in a multitude of contexts, the various ways we know ourselves. Anthropology is important not only in an academic sense of defining who we are, but because these definitions then have strong influences on all areas of human life. It is not hyperbolic to suggest that every endeavor or investigation of humanity has an anthropological component.

Anthropology in our contemporary context is a broad term which encompasses almost every way of human knowing. The two major disciplines of physical and cultural anthropology, while still helpful in describing an overall mindset, are overwhelmed with a good number of interrelated subcategories.\(^2\) Indeed, as humanity’s scientific toolbox has become much weightier in the twentieth century, defining humankind has become a most complex and necessarily interdisciplinary endeavor. Adding to the twentieth century fields of social anthropology, linguistic anthropology, archaeology, or primatology, we now include evolutionary anthropology, forensics, political anthropology, medical anthropology, even Africanist and feminist


anthropologies, as well as numerous other subfields, to the ways humans study ourselves. In the end, we are complicated creatures, who study and describe ourselves through complex tools from multitudes of interrelated angles. The intersection of these angles can hold some of the most important and interesting anthropological discussions, teaching us the most about ourselves.

For the purposes of this project, the relationship between two fundamental ways of knowing ourselves are in play. Theological and evolutionary anthropologies, which describe humankind as created and/or evolved, will be outlined using work from seminal thinkers in these two fields. Specifically, the theological anthropology described by Gregory of Nyssa in *On the Making of Man (de Hominis Opificio)* (HO) will be described and put into conversation with the evolutionary anthropology described in Charles Darwin’s *The Descent of Man (Descent).* These seminal writers in the areas of theological and evolutionary anthropologies still hold pronounced authority in their respective fields within our contemporary context. They also provide rich and well studied anthropologies from their particular points of view which offer numerous areas for comparison key to this project.

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4 The authority of these two writers in our contemporary context will be described at the beginning of the chapters describing their work. §§ “Why Nyssen,” 9-11; “Why Darwin,” 36-37.
1.2 Contemporary Anthropologies and Church Decline

This project proposes to investigate the relationship between theological and evolutionary anthropologies, specifically those proposed by Gregory of Nyssa and Charles Darwin respectively. While one must assume some degree of relationship to exist between all anthropologies, in sharing the same subject matter, it is fair at this point for one to question the depth of connections between these two ways of describing humanity. It is fair due to the wooden and thus exclusive evolutionary and theological anthropologies held and communicated by some of the loudest voices in our contemporary setting.

Here, one should note creationist anthropologies that demand the exclusion of evolution, at least at the level of speciation, from being a true way of understanding humanity. Driven by literal wooden biblical interpretations, these creationist anthropologies promote an exclusion of many modern ways of knowing. This view promotes specific and pointed clashes in the areas of speciation of humanity from a common ancestor with other extant apes, as well as the related age of the earth. Prominent contemporary voices in this area are exemplified by the ARK Encounter and Museum of Creation in Kentucky.5 Here, founder and young earth creationist Ken Ham uses biblical literalist presuppositions mated to pseudo-science to construct a wooden theological anthropology. In a similar vein, young earth creationist Adnan Oktar, under the pen name Harun Yahya, has produced an impressive and beautiful Atlas of Creation.6

This attempt at proselytization was sent to many prominent researchers in the areas of evolution and anthropology as evidence against speciation by evolution, mostly by noting the lack of intermediate forms/species.\textsuperscript{7}

Lest one might think the woodenness and exclusivity to be held by only those with theological anthropologies, the popularity of the Flying Spaghetti Monster as well as the footed Ichthus with the name “Darwin” added suggest otherwise. The former, The Flying Spaghetti Monster, is a creation of physician Bobby Henderson in response to a Kansas court ruling to mandate inclusion of intelligent design in public school teaching as an alternative to evolution.\textsuperscript{8} The ”religion” that it spurred, The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (CFSM), or Pastafarianism, is not only religious satire, but the backbone of legal fights of those seeking freedom from religion, both in the United States, it’s country of origin, and throughout Europe.\textsuperscript{9} Adding to CFSM as a vocal and even legally powerful jab at the rationality of faith, is the legged ichthus. Here, an ancient symbol for Christians and Christ, the ichthus (fish), is co-opted by the addition of feet alluding to a creature evolving form the water onto land, as well as removal of the Greek acrostic meaning “Jesus, Christ, of God, Son Savior” which sometimes fill the ichthus outline, and replacing them with the name Darwin.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{9} Gilsinan, Kathy. ”The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster.” The Atlantic, (2016), 23.
\textsuperscript{10} Aquilina, Mike. Signs and Mysteries. (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2008), 24-25.
Even given the antagonistic stances of some of the most vocal dipoles of the theological and evolutionary ways of describing ourselves, somehow the two stances do coexist in many contemporary people. In fact, as a full-time pastor in the United Methodist Church, who spent much of his former life as a bench scientist in areas ranging from protein science to microbiology to molecular evolution, your author is a witness to this. This can present problems, however. Accepting both anthropologies, which amounts to accepting two distinct worldviews, with the wooden nature of what seems to be the loudest expressions of these positions, can lead to an uncomfortable parsing of worldviews within an individual or even within an organization. Indeed, it is the experience of your author that this is the way most churchgoers and those who subscribe to some belief in the divine deal with their dichotomous feeling of acknowledging evolution as a means of human origins. This is an uncomfortable space in which neither way of knowing self or world feels sufficient. The end result is an intellectual dishonesty in which means of knowing and expressing truth are necessarily qualified. At the level of organization, the church, at least the United Methodist Church (UMC), is not much better. In this case, while the governing document of the UMC, The Book of Discipline notes “science’s descriptions of cosmological, geological, and biological evolution are not in conflict with theology,” most pastors, never mind members, of UMC churches would have a hard time explaining how this might be true, if they believe it is true.11

The damage caused by these wooden anthropologies does not stop at the level of

intellectual discomfort within a church or church member, however. Wooden anthropologies exacerbate a sense of mutual exclusivity between theological and evolutionary anthropologies that assuredly plays a role in the decline of the church in America. Christendom is gone and the church seems not to have noticed, at least in terms of its loudest witness. Charles Taylor, in *A Secular Age*, notes that our contemporary secular Western culture “has moved from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.”12 Within these options, the universal laws that govern science have driven a palpable change in epistemology. Taylor goes on to note that there is a sense within many that feel an incompatibility between science and religion, that “the Christian religion they were familiar with belonged to an earlier, more primitive or less mature way of understanding.”13 He further suggests that this idea is the reason that for millions of contemporary Americans “faith never even seems an eligible possibility.”14 Here, faith is simply an epistemological choice among many, but one that often appears to lie outside the bounds of reason.

Unfortunately, these ideas are much more than theoretical. In *Modeling the Future of Religion in America*, Pew Research endeavors to find out how far-gone Christendom is, as well as projecting the next few decades of continual church decline.15

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13 Ibid., 363.
14 Ibid., 3.
As of 2020, Pew Research estimated that about 64% of Americans were Christian, with non-religious people making up about 30% of the population, and other faith traditions the remaining 6%.\textsuperscript{16} This is down about 10% from 2009 numbers, with pretty much the entirety of the loss adding to the category of those who now claim no religious affiliation, often called “nones.”\textsuperscript{17} Unfortunately, modeling the data into the future shows a continuation of this trend, and leads to a fairly dire picture for American churches, at least in numbers. Forecasting out to 2070, Pew’s modeling predictions suggest Americans who identify as Christian will make up somewhere between 54% and 35% of the population.\textsuperscript{18} The difference in the predictions center around “switching,” which is a forecast of the numbers of those moving in and out of religious groups. At the upper end of the prediction (54%) there is an assumption that no switching is going to be taking place in the future. Of course, this is unlikely. With current amounts of switching the percentage of Christians predicted in 2070 America drops to 46%.\textsuperscript{19} This is likely closer to reality. Unfortunately, the most realistic prediction, which predicts that “in each generation a growing share of Christians switch out before they turn 30” yields the lowest percentage of predicted 2070 Christians in America – 35%.\textsuperscript{20} From 1972 numbers, this is almost a 55% decline.\textsuperscript{21} To say that within the century that most readers of this project

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
have lived, Christianity in America has lost, or will lose, its dominance is an understatement.

This preponderance of data notwithstanding, one doesn’t need to look at spreadsheets to see the decline in the church in America. One needs only turn up on any given Sunday. Chances are, no matter which flavor of Christianity one chooses, you will see the decline. Most unfortunately, the decline can be seen as much in those in attendance as those missing. The loss of attendees can have a pronounced negative effect on those who remain. As fear of the future overwhelms the very hope which is purportedly a central Christian characteristic, congregations enter a self-fulfilling prophesy of eminent closure. Too often this leads to toxic congregations that abuse each other as well as their pastor.22 This fear not only disrupts the inner workings of an already troubled church, but usually brings an inward turn which insulates the unsettled congregation from its community and has the effects of depreciating its witness and hastening its closure.

1.3 Anthropological Issue/Anthropological Solution

The United States used to stand as an example of a modern society that seemed insulated from the secularization that all other modern Western societies had undergone.23 Current data suggests that America was only trailing the pack.24 This

24 Ibid., 1520, 1523-1526.
secularization that follows modernization, and the attending loss of religiosity by all metrics now is an undeniable part of the American landscape.

The decline in religious engagement in America is deeply rooted in the way Americans define themselves, that is, within their anthropologies. It intersects and is influenced by ideas of freedom and self, as well as contemporary epistemologies. Fortunately, anthropological issues have anthropological solutions. Charles Taylor suggests that there exists a middle ground between self-sufficiency and ultimate religious dependency, between total self-trust and inerrant authority, whether in the form of a religious figure such as the Pope, or in literal reading of the Bible. This middle ground, Taylor would posit, is where one can find “much of today’s spiritual/religious life,” with much of the debate over the validity of religion being from “extreme positions” such as orthodox religion and materialist atheism. This would suggest that movement from religious and anti-religious dipoles in ways of knowing humanity might allow for a greater accessibility of both theological and evolutionary anthropologies. The only real question then, is whether a theological or evolutionary anthropology that is accessible to this middle ground, can hold the central elements of each.

It is the position of this project, that mutual exclusivity between theological and evolutionary anthropologies is unnecessary and is often just a biproduct of the lack of understanding of one or both ways of knowing humanity. Charles Taylor echoes this idea in *A Secular Age*, noting a lack of “cogency” between what Charles Darwin writes in

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26 Ibid., 512, 598.
Descent and the claim that “Darwin refuted the Bible.” The work that follows will endeavor to show that non-exclusive theological and evolutionary anthropologies can still be authoritative and rich in describing these ways of knowing humankind. This is an important move away from the individual and experiential spirituality of Taylor’s somewhat empty middle ground, dominant in the contemporary religious landscape, into a rich and traditioned theological space much more able to offer a full Christian witness.

The pages that follow endeavor to lead towards a nuanced theological anthropology for the contemporary American church, one that allows for other ways of knowing such as through an evolutionary context. The adoption of such a theological anthropology will provide a way for the contemporary church to affirm contemporary epistemological loci which too often are mistakenly depicted as at odds with theological understanding, and in more than theoretical terms. It will provide a way for the contemporary church to not only espouse affirmation of other ways of knowing, especially in terms of anthropology, that will enrich the theological landscape of the church. Most importantly maybe, a nuanced theological anthropology might give those who hold other ways of knowing a fundamental permission to believe.

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28 Taylor, Secular Age, 6, 512.
2. THE THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF GREGORY OF NYSSA

2.1 Why Nyssen

In searching for a theological anthropology to study from within the corpus of Christian writers, the anthropology of Gregory of Nyssa put forth in his *On the Making of Man (de Hominis Opificio (HO)*, stands as uniquely authoritative.\(^1\) This is for a number of reasons. First, Nyssen himself is an authoritative figure, whose contributions in forming early Christian understanding of theological and Christological precepts still holds influence in the contemporary church.\(^2\) For instance, the Cappadocians (Nyssen, along with his brother Basil and his friend Gregory of Nazianzus) played a major role in the codification and expansion of the ideas of the council of Nicaea in Constantinople in 381, resulting in the understanding of the Trinity stated in the Apostle’s Creed still recited in many traditional Christian churches on any given Sunday in the world today.\(^3\) A trinitarian understanding that today’s Christians take for granted, even in its inherent complexity, was a source of real and ongoing debate in the first few hundred years of the church. Nyssen speaks comically to the ubiquity of debate noting:

\(^2\) Following the convention of Morwenna Ludlow in *Gregory of Nyssa: Ancient and [post] modern*, I have chosen “contemporary” to denote the time period loosely around the time of writing of this project to avoid the confusion of the terms modern, post-modern, or current, which have their own frames of thought. Ludlow, Morwenna. *Gregory of Nyssa: Ancient and [post]modern* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), 2 fn. 15.
Every place in the city is full of them: the alleys, the crossroads, the forums, the squares. Garment sellers, money changers, food vendors—they are all at it. If you ask for change, they philosophize for you about the generate and ingenerate natures. If you inquire about the price of bread, the answer is that the Father is greater and the Son inferior. If you speak about whether the bath is ready, they express the opinion that the Son was made out of nothing.⁴

Nyssen, along with his Cappadocian counterparts, worked out language describing the connection of the three persons (GK., hypostases) of the Trinity being of the same substance (GK., ousia) in an understandable linguistic sense.⁵ This formulation still forms the backbone of the current Christian understanding of the relationship within the Godhead, that is, of Father, Son, and Spirit.

Along with the authoritative gravitas of Nyssen as an influential figure in formation of early Christian thought, another reason to consider his work in construction of a theological anthropology is the fact that the study of Nyssen’s work is well represented in modern scholarship. While more influential on Eastern mysticism than Western theology/Christology for centuries, due in part to the lack of available Latin translations of his work, interest in this Cappadocian has seen a resurgence in the past few decades.⁶ His large body of work, a concentration on biblical exegesis to drive

⁵ Placher, History, 76-79.
theological ideas, broad and engaging subject matter, and a complex theological mind, drive much of the contemporary interest in Nyssen scholarship.7

Finally, Nyssen’s completion of his brother Basil’s creation account by taking on human origins developed a rich and scripturally based theological anthropology in HO that gives much room for both intellectual and spiritual interaction. It is important to note, however, that Nyssen’s commitment to the biblical text does not mean that he is bound by literal or otherwise wooden interpretations of the scriptural accounts of human origins. On the contrary, he is a deeply imaginative theologue who brings all of his knowledge and spiritual intuition to bear on his reading of the text. Influenced by Origen as well as the writers of the New Testament, Nyssen’s hermeneutic draws on the philosophical and allegorical.8 But he is never a slave to these inputs. The things that most drives and bounds Nyssen’s biblical interpretations are what he knows of God. Smith observes a general principle for his theological machinations that “he reasons not from human experience to the divine, but from the divine to the human.”9 There is no better measure of correct contemplation, whether for biblical interpretations or our very lives. For this reason, the rich theological anthropology he describes, his corpus of work, and his gravitas as an early theologian that still influence church thought and practice, Nyssen’s

8 For an informative discussion of how the Gospels inform reading of the OT and vice versa, see the chapter on “Retrospective Reading” in Richard Hays’ Reading Backwards. Hays, Richard B. Reading Backwards, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014); J. Warren Smith, Passion and Paradise, 8.
9 Ibid., 2.
exegesis of the biblical creation account and the anthropology he derives from it are simply ideal.

2.2 The Theological Anthropology of Gregory of Nyssa found in On the Making of Man (de Hominis Opificio)

2.2.1 Logical Fit to Ubiquitous Schema

While humanity, in a sense, is a special case from both evolutionary and theological standpoints, it is most reasonable to expect that humankind would arise from a larger ubiquitous schema through which all creatures come about. Johannes Zachhuber notes that Nyssen, in his understanding of the creation of humanity expressed in HO, gives “no indication that the creation of human nature differs, in principle, from that of the world in general.” Since exceptions at least weaken if not disprove rules, this lack of need for a unique event or events to explain human origins lends credibility to our understanding by linking it, with few complications, to the origins of all other living things. In other words, God created/creates everything through these same means, including humanity. Nyssen’s theological anthropology described in HO accomplishes this very thing, as it logically lies within the larger framework of Judeo-Christian

\[\text{References}\]

10 While theological creation accounts, such as found within Genesis 1-3, supply a rationale for the origins of all things living and not, our question of comparison within theological and evolutionary anthropologies limits our discussion to include living things.

11 It is of note that Zachhuber also expresses here the apparent interchangeability of the words “man” and “human nature” for Nyssen. This is due to what the creation even of Genesis 1 expresses for Nyssen, the creation of all humankind. Zachhuber, Johannes. Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 145.

12 The popular idea that exceptions prove rules is a statement about the ability of an exception to prove in a testing sense more than a sense of making true. In a logical sense, things which do not fit the normal schema of things make the schema less trustworthy.
understanding of how everything came into being. In fact, situating human origins within the larger creative context was Nyssen’s intent. He wrote *HO* to complete the *Hexaëmeron* written by his older brother Basil, which ended its discussion of the creation account before examining the creation of humanity.²

*HO* opens with this in mind, as Nyssen offers discussions which place humanity within the larger creative context. While there exist important differences which point to the special nature of humanity, it is clear that Nyssen fits the creation of humanity within the scriptural accounts of the larger creation context driven by God’s will and wisdom. Speaking of the Genesis account of creation Nyssen writes, “‘This is the book of generation of heaven and earth,’ saith the Scripture, when all that is seen was finished.”¹⁴ In fact, Nyssen draws no lines of distinction between how humankind and the rest of creation came into being, at least not in any differences that point to the source of creation. Again, Zachhuber summarizes that within Nyssen’s understanding of the first Genesis creation account “Man is simply one of God’s creatures.”¹⁵ The differences that Nyssen describes between the creation of humanity and all other things lie more so in temporal distinctions and template. God’s creative will exercised through God’s word stands as the ubiquitous creative engine.

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2.2.2 Template and Timing Definitive of Human Creation

2.2.2.1 Imago Dei as the Template for Humanity

While created within the same schema of all other creatures, even all other living things, the template for its creation supplies the center of humanity’s special nature. This is humankind’s bearing of the *imago Dei*. And it focuses Nyssen’s theological anthropology on Genesis 1:26-27.

> 26 And God said, let us make man according to our image and likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the flying creatures of heaven, and over the cattle and all the earth, and over all the reptiles that creep on the earth. 27 And God made man, according to the image of God he made him, male and female he made them.16

Being created in the image of God suggests two main points that form the core of Nyssen’s theological anthropology. First is the understanding that while humanity bears the image of God, humankind is something ontologically different from God. After all, a good picture is still only a picture. Nyssen puts this in terms of “archetype,” which we should understand as Christ, who not only bears God’s perfect image but also perfect likeness, and humanity “a thing which has been made in [the archetype’s] image.”17 Nyssen enumerates this distinction by listing a number of dichotomies that highlight the differences in Creator and creature. He notes God as “incorporeal” and humanity as having a “body,” God as “eternal” and humanity as “temporal,” God as “immutable” and

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17 Gregory uses some of his trinitarian logic in this section, highlighting both the sameness and uniqueness of the persons of the Godhead in this section., Nyssen, *Making of Man*, XVI 3,5, 12.
humanity as “mutable,” God as “impassible and incorruptible,” and humanity as “subject to passion and corruption,” and finally God as “absolutely free from evil,” as opposed to humanity who “constantly dwells with evil.”18 Here, humanity is corrupted by these things foreign to the imago Dei which it bears. This distinction between image and archetype within the image Dei serves as a clever illustration of the insurmountable separation between creature and creator.19

But the imago Dei, as a template for the creation of humanity, does a lot more than form a distinction between prototype and copy. It also importantly joins humanity to God. And it does this by showing the ways we are like, or can be like God, just as it shows how we are necessarily different from God as discussed above. And here we see a real beauty in Nyssen’s characterization of humanity’s bearing the imago Dei. He poetically describes our participation in the Divine writing, “As then painters transfer human forms to their pictures by the means of certain colours… our Maker also, painting the portrait to resemble His own beauty, by the addition of virtues, as it were with colours, shows in us His own sovereignty: and manifold and varied are the tints, so to say, by which His true form is portrayed.”20 He goes on to list these virtues as “purity, freedom from passion, blessedness, alienation from all evil, and all those attributes of the like kind which help to form in [humanity] the likeness of God.”21 Strikingly, Nyssen lists love as a necessary virtue one must have to rightly bear the imago Dei. Quoting John

18 Ibid.
19 J. Warren Smith, Passion and Paradise, 22.
20 Nyssen, Making of Man, V. 1.
21 Ibid.
13:35 he writes, “He says, ‘shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another’ – thus, if this be absent, the whole stamp of the likeness is transformed.”22 It is quite interesting that Nyssen suggests that the ability to grow in some of the virtues, the lack of which separate the creature from the Creator, is a mark of bearing the very image of the Creator, and further, that what Jesus suggests as the weightiest of commandments, to love, serves as a necessity for bearing the image correctly.23

But this characteristic, love, which Nyssen would posit as necessary for bearing the imago Dei rightly, is not suggested as the most prominent or distinguishing characteristic in participating in God through God’s image. To this end, the mind/rationality/reason predominate for Nyssen.24 The intellect of humanity, and the ability to reason and act rationally serve as the central characteristic humanity shares with the divine. While noting what distinguishes humanity from brutes (non-human animals) Nyssen makes clear this distinguishing mark of bearing the imago Dei, writing, “man seems to me to bear a double likeness to opposite things-being moulded in the Divine element of his mind to the Divine beauty, but bearing, in the passionate impulses that arise in him, a likeness to the brute nature;” 25 While this double likeness will be discussed in a following section, it is important to note here, that whatever else humanity

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22 Ibid., V.2.
23 When Jesus is questioned as to which is the greatest commandment He responds, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Mt 22:38-39).
24 While separate in some sense, the ideas of mind and intellect, with reason and rationality as descriptions, are treated somewhat synonymously by Nyssen.
25 Nyssen, Making of Man, XVIII. 3.
is, the link between humankind and God is predominantly found within humanity’s ability to reason. Nyssen writes that “mind and reason we cannot strictly say that He gave, but that He imparted them, adding to the image [of humanity] the proper adornment of [God’s] own nature.” It is in this characteristic of intellect or mind, where Nyssen would have us most clearly resemble the Divine. This gives humanity the ability to reason rightly and rationally, imparting a specialness to humankind which allows for a participation in the divine by choosing God’s goodness. Nyssen suggests that this participation in the Divine can be seen in the application of intellect and reason which centers the bearing of the *imago Dei* in the soul of humankind. The following section addresses this idea.

### 2.2.2.2 Form and Function in Humanity’s Bearing of the *imago Dei*

For Gregory of Nyssa, humanity’s form and function are tied together by the bearing of the *imago Dei*. In *HO*, Nyssen describes this connection to be expressed in at least 3 important ways; (1) illustrating how the form of humanity has been used to establish its rule over the rest of creation, (2) describing how the form of humanity sets it apart in its relationship to God, (3) suggesting the eschatological function served by the created form of humanity.

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26 Thorough discussion of Nyssen’s dual character of humanity’s creation will follow in this chapter’s final section. See § “2.2.2.3. Dual Character of Creation of Humanity,” 26-34.
First, Nyssen describes the special place humanity has within the created order by noting its creation last and with forethought. He then further situates humanity within the created order with a note about the special nature of humanity. Nyssen writes, “only to the making of man does the Maker of all draw near with circumspection, so as to prepare beforehand for him material for his formation… to make for him a nature appropriate and allied to the operations, and suitable for the object at hand.” He then expands on this special nature of humanity and its connection to the Divine by describing humankind’s suitableness for royal rule over the rest of creation. In this case, the physical form of humanity and its bearing of the *imago Dei*, specifically in humanity’s ability to reason, are tied to humanity’s charge of rule over and care of God’s creation. This concept of linking the rational nature of humanity to humanity’s rule is furthered by a brief discussion by Nyssen of the frailty of humanity in relation to other animals, and how this would necessitate the reasoning of humanity to bring stronger, faster, and creatures with additional abilities such as flight under human rule.

The next move Nyssen makes in linking the form and function of humanity concerns the ability of humanity to interact with and for the Divine by the use of the ability to reason. Here, Nyssen notes some physical characteristics which he imagines

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30 Ibid., III.2.
31 Ibid., IX.4.; For this project the notion of human soul can be considered a living essence with the ability to reason. For a succinct description of the trichotomous structure of soul to Nyssen consult J. Warren Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 65-74.
32 Nyssen, *Making of Man*, XVII.
bring humanity closer to God, such as walking upright, and having hands.\textsuperscript{33} Here, humanity’s upright stance, “aloft towards heaven” marks its “sovereignty” and requires humankind to use its ability to reason to stay safe from and thus assume the role of ruler over creation.\textsuperscript{34} Similarly, human hands facilitate eating and thus allow the human face to be arranged differently than “the quadrupeds,” yielding a face that brings speech in service of reason.\textsuperscript{35} Gregory then puts some real beauty behind his expression of how humanity has its physical form connected to the reason imparted to humans by God as part of the \textit{imago Dei} through the metaphor of instruments. He writes:

As some skilled musician, who may have been deprived by some affection of his own voice, and yet wish to make his skill known, might make melody with the voices of others… so also the human mind being a discoverer of all sorts of conceptions, seeing that it is unable, by the mere soul, to reveal to those who hear by bodily senses the motions of its understanding, touches, like some skillful composer, these animated instruments, and makes known its hidden thoughts by means of the sound produced upon them.\textsuperscript{36}

Here he is describing the necessity of our form in being able to communicate the thoughts of a rational mind. He goes on to suggest that the physical form of humanity not only expresses the rationality in which we bear the \textit{imago Dei}, but actually feed it. Here, Nyssen extends the musical metaphor by noting that in the same way human rationality operates our “instrument” (body form) for the production of sound, it also uses our form

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., VIII.1-2, 8.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., VII.-VIII.1.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., VIII. 8.
\textsuperscript{36} “Soul” as housing the human/rational mind., Nyssen, \textit{Making of Man}, IX.2.
for the “reception of concepts.” Nyssen, Making of Man, X. 2-3. What follows the musical metaphors serves as a stunning wrapper that suggests the real impetus of the connection of the physical form of humanity, its bearing of the imago Dei especially through human reason, and the impetus or intended function – to show God to the world through imitation, albeit limited. Nyssen writes that “one of the attributes we contemplate in the Divine nature is incomprehensibility of essence, it is clearly necessary that in this point the image should be able to show its imitation of the archetype.” Nyssen, in this fairly brief discourse suggests holy intentions for not only our imparted rational mind but in our physical body plan, from our upright stance, to our hands, to our voices, along with all our means of perception, we are designed to use these things not just to rule over creation, but to interact with our surroundings in ways that help us contemplate and communicate to and about God.

This ability to know and contemplate God, due to the rational mind gained from bearing of the imago Dei, leads to the third point where Gregory describes an important connection within humanity’s form and function. This is expressed through Nyssen’s eschatology. Here, one finds what stands as maybe Gregory’s greatest contribution to Christian thought, albeit much less well known or commonly understood when compared to concepts like the Trinity. It is Nyssen’s idea of epektasis, that is, humanity’s participation in God from the present to infinity, as well as the journey between. Here,

37 Nyssen, Making of Man, X. 2-3.
38 Ibid., XI. 3.
39 J. Warren Smith, Passion and Paradise, 104-106.
Nyssen draws on Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi where he writes of the goal of being with and like Christ in the resurrection, “I do not consider that I have made [the goal] my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.” Jean Daniélou proposed “epektasis” as a description for Nyssen’s idea of humanity’s perpetual and infinite progress towards God’s likeness in Platonisme et Théologie Mystique, noting it as one of Gregory’s greatest contributions. He was almost certainly not overstating, as epektasis speaks powerfully to the rationale for the creation of humanity, to be the creature that is connected to God, moving towards a future greater connectedness, but beginning today. We see this threefold temporal understanding of humanity through its creation and bearing of the imago Dei in the introduction of HO. While the idea of epektasis is more developed in other areas of Nyssen’s corpus, HO, his treatise on theological anthropology has many references to the idea. In a section addressing the origin of the human soul he links the soul (again, think place of human rational mind) and body in both creative impetus and their progress towards their eventual end in perfection. Following a metaphor of wheat having all it needs to grow into its eventuality even within the smallest grain, he writes, “in the same way we suppose the human germ to possess the eventuality of its nature… advancing its

40 (Philippians 3:13)
42 Nyssen, Making of Man, INTRODUCTION. 3.
own self in due course to the perfect state.”43 And further cementing the connection of soul and body on the journey towards perfection, that is to say full participation in the Divine, Nyssen writes, “as the body proceeds from a very small original to the perfect state, so also the operation of the soul, growing in correspondence with the subject.”44 In his next section, in which he comments on the physical nature of human bodies, Nyssen returns to the idea of epektasis by noting, “[the human body] at once displays, by this artificial and scientific process of formation, the power of the soul that is interwoven in it, appearing at first somewhat obscurely, but afterwards increasing in radiance concurrently with the perfecting of the work.”45 Most poignantly Nyssen then suggests that there is not just a detriment in humanity’s wearing bodies like the brutes, a negative that must be overcome, but more so that this very fleshy human form participates in bringing humankind to its eventual perfect state. Of course this state is not static for Nyssen, but a perpetual growing into the Infinite. To this he writes, “the Divine image does not at once shine forth at our formation, but brings man to perfection by a certain method and sequence, through those attributes of the soul which are material, and belong rather to the animal creation.”46 It is of note that Nyssen is commenting here on God’s use of the

43 Ibid., XXIX. 3.
44 Ibid., XXIX. 8.
45 Nyssen, Making of Man, XXX. 29.
46 Ibid., XXX. 30., VIII. 4., Note here that Nyssen is referencing one of three souls he introduces earlier which reside in humanity: the vegetative, which is held by all living things, the sentient, which is held by animals, and the rational, which is held by humanity, and which can be thought of as holding those attributes such as reason. For a detailed discussion of Nyssen’s ideas surrounding the three levels of souls, see J Warren Smith, Passions and Paradise, 65-74.
creatureliness of humankind’s two-fold organization to aid humanity’s ascension to the divine.47

Along with the idea of how epektasis would link the creation of humanity with its end goal, are Nyssens thoughts surrounding the timing of the eschaton. In the next section we will think about a major component of Nyssen’s creation theology, and thus his theological anthropology, with discussion of his idea of the dual nature of creation. Suffice to say at this juncture that Nyssen separates the idea of humanity’s creation by God from its instantiation.

Here, the idea of humanity’s creation is not only driven by the *imago Dei* as a template, but enumerated by how many instantiations would occur. That is to say, before a single human was ever created, God knew what they would be and their number. It is this number, residing only in the mind of God, but that was known by God at the beginning of God’s creating, that sets the time of the eschaton, the return of Christ. This is simply Nyssen’s eschatological alarm clock. In a section where Gregory is attempting to address the unknowable nature of the second coming of Christ he notes that the “Truth” knows, but humanity cannot know.48 This concrete link of the creation of humankind to its eventual number determines the entirety of the course of human existence and ties the origin of humankind in an unbreakable way to its eternal eventuality. He writes, “the full number of men pre-conceived by the operation of

48 Ibid., XXII.3.
foreknowledge will come into life by means of this animal generation.”49 This is Nyssen’s description of the instantiation of God’s predetermined number of humans, junctions of body and soul, by reproduction as other animals—the second part of his dual character of creation. Discussion of this dual nature of creation follows.

2.2.2.3. Dual Character of Creation of Humanity

When Gregory picked up writing on the origin of humanity to complete the cosmic creation account begun by his brother Basil, the obvious place to begin was in Scripture.50 With a description of humanity’s template residing in the first creation account of Genesis, this imago Dei centered Nyssen’s work on understanding the creation of humanity. But he needed a way to explain the difference in what he knew to be humanity’s creative template found in God’s image and what he observed in humankind. He resolved this by a deep look at the text of Genesis 1:26-27, which he came to understand as describing more than one event.

To the issue of the bearer of the image not matching the archetype Nyssen asks, “How then is man, this mortal, passible, short lived being, the image of that nature which is immortal, pure and everlasting?”51 Or as he later emphasizes, “How is it that while the Deity is in bliss, and humanity in misery, the latter is yet in Scripture called ‘like’ the former?”52 With this crux in his mind, Nyssen begins to dig deep into the two verses

49 Ibid., XXII.5.
50 Nyssen’s theological work can be understood as deeply rooted in the biblical text., Ludlow, Ancient and [post]modern, 3.
51 Nyssen, Making of Man, XVI. 4.
52 Ibid., XXVI. 5.

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which first describe the creation of humanity in Scripture, Genesis 1:26 and 1:27. When he does, he finds Genesis 1:26 to be describing the creature created, that is, who humanity is and the role humanity would play in God’s creative order. But this offers little help in reconciling what Nyssen sees in the flawed creature he witnesses, who is also created in God’s image.

Nyssen continues from the description of humanity he hears in Genesis 1:26 to Genesis 1:27 where he hears less of a description of humankind, and more of a description of the actual event(s) of creation of humankind. It is here that the dual character of humanity’s creation begins to take shape for Nyssen. He describes how in verse 27 that creation pauses, and then continues after creation of humanity in the image of God. This pause, and second taking up of creation of humankind, is demonstrative for Nyssen. He writes, “There is an end of the creation of that which was made ‘in the image’” noting that something had occurred in completeness, not only begun, but finished, and then paused. Nyssen understands the rest of verse 27 to be a recommencement of God’s creating and contuse his line of thought suggesting, “[Scripture] makes a resumption of the account of creation, and says, ‘male and female created He them.’” Simply, Gregory breaks the creation account of Genesis 1:27 into two events, with an ending and new beginning of creation activity between the verses “in the image of God created He him” and “male and female created He them,” and then

53 Ibid., XVI. 7.
54 Ibid.
parses these two statements into events of intention and instantiation.\textsuperscript{55} It will be helpful to understand these two elements of human creation before discussion their interplay.

First, we will describe Nyssen’s interpretation of “in the image of God created He him.”\textsuperscript{56} Here, Gregory of Nyssa concludes that this is God’s creating of a potentiality.\textsuperscript{57} To answer the question of exactly what was created in this first creative event of Genesis 1:27, Nyssen looks for an explanation within the text. Here, he notes that the word used for humanity is of an “indefinite character,” that is, a reference to humanity in general and not the first human commonly assigned the proper name “Adam.”\textsuperscript{58}

As an important aside, it should be noted that while Nyssen is working with the Greek text of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, the original Hebrew text makes this point clearly as the Hebrew word for humanity is simply אָדָם (Eng. a-`dam). It is further of note that even when the definite article is applied in the original Hebrew text, it would be impossible to distinguish the particular from the general as אָדָם is a singular noun which means both human and humankind.\textsuperscript{59} Adding the definite article would only specify the object of the grammatical construction, that is to say, “the humanity or the human,” not necessarily a particular such as a named human such as Adam. This naming convention comes only from traditions of reading the text in both Jewish and Christian

\textsuperscript{55} Genesis 1:27
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} For a good discussion of how Nyssen is differentiated or aligned with Greek philosophers around the ideas of particulars and universals, etc. see J. Warren Smith, \textit{Passions and Paradise}, 33-38.
\textsuperscript{58} Nyssen, \textit{Making of Man}, XVI. 16.
settings. When examining currently used English translations of Jewish Torah, one finds that the use of Adam as a proper name in translation begins in chapter 3 around verse 17, following the Fall and God’s discovery of what had happened. The same is true for Eve’s generic to specific naming convention. Whether this is a loss of the role the first instantiated human as an model or not is interesting but purely speculative.

So, when Nyssen includes the “entire plenitude of humanity” in this one created body of Genesis 1:27 he is not just following logic, but also simply the text. This first creation account specified in Genesis 1:27 is to be understood as inclusive of all humankind that will ever live, that is, be united with humanity’s rational soul, the place of humanity’s bearing of the imago Dei. This potentiality or intention to create is more than an idea however. Remember the enumeration of this potential in Gregory’s connection of creation and the eschaton discussed above. More than the creation of a blueprint, this is a foreknowledge of every human ever to be created. “In the image of God created He them,” for Gregory of Nyssa, contains the fullness of God’s creative intention for humanity. But while this intention is specific as to what will be created, from template to number, this is not the reality Nyssen sees in humanity.

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61 Ibid., XVI. 17-18.
62 See § “2.2.2.2. Form and Function in Humanity’s Bearing of the imago Dei,” 19-25.
63 Ibid., XXX. It is of note that Nyssen is here speaking into divisive current issues such as abortion, as well as pastoral implications for those who have lost a child before term.
64 (Genesis 1:27); Nyssen, Making of Man, XVI. 7.
This then brings us to the second part of Genesis 1:27, “male and female created
He them,” and its link to our sharing something with the brutes and thus imperfectly
sharing the template of God’s intention, the imago Dei. Of this gendered creation Nyssen
asks, “how it was that after the making of His image God contrived for His work the
distinction of male and female” seen in this ending of Genesis 1:27?65 He answers
himself as quickly as he asks the question writing:

He saw beforehand by His all-seeing power the failure of their
will to keep a direct course to what is good, and its consequent
declination from the angelic life, in order that the multitude of
souls might not be cut short by its fall from that mode by which
the angels were increased and multiplied,- for this reason, I say,
He formed for our nature that contrivance for increase which
befits those who had fallen into sin, implanting in mankind,
instead of the angelic majesty of nature, that animal and irrational
mode by which they now succeed one another.66

Here Nyssen is taking a careful reading of the biblical text to highlight a textual
curiosity he then interrogates theologically, that is, with what he knows of God. Tying the
scriptural account of the creation of humanity with the template of the likeness of an
ungendered God, to a verse describing the creation of gendered humanity, gives Nyssen a
proposition to both explain and express his theological anthropology. We are bearers of
the image of God, that needed to be redirected to meet God’s plan for us. With
foreknowledge that humanity would turn away from God before the number of souls God

65 Ibid., XVII. 4.
66 Ibid.
intended would be reached, a procreative means other than that of humanity’s first state, that of angels, was put into God’s creative plan.

Here, souls are those parts of humankind that bear the *imago Dei* rightly, this is the part of humanity within which resides human rationality. There are two points that must be understood here. First, moving away from the influence of Origin, Nyssa did not believe in pre-existence of the soul. While his understanding of the creation account of Genesis 1:27 speaks to a dual character of creation for Nyssen, indeed two creative events separated by a pause, he took care to express the first creation to not be creation of a soul sans body. In his argument for the necessity of body and soul he writes that “as man is one, the being consisting of soul and body, we are to suppose that the beginning of his existence is one.”

Of course, the result of humanity’s inability to “keep a direct course to what is good” brought more than a necessary procreative change for humanity, it brought the corruption of humanity’s rational soul by the irrational or animal soul, a step away from the *imago Dei*. This second aspect of the rational/human souls corruption serves as the second major defining aspect of Nyssen’s theological anthropology. This interplay explains how the participation of humanity in the Divine by our rational nature/soul is not perfectly expressed in what we see in humanity. Nyssen notes that “as brute life entered the world, and man, for the reason already mentioned took something of their nature (I

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68 Nyssen, *Making of Man*, XXVIII.
69 Ibid., XXIX. 1.
70 Ibid., XVII. 4, 18.
mean the mode of generation), he accordingly took at the same time a share of the other attributes contemplated in the nature.” 

He then lists some of the attributes we have as gendered creatures. Anger, pleasure, cowardice, boldness, the desire of gain, the dislike of loss – all things Nyssen likens to the brutes from which humanity took our present mode of generation. To these he adds the passions which drive humans to act more instinctually than with reason. It is interesting to note that Nyssen ascribes all these things to be of benefit to brutes, that is, animals sans the template of the *imago Dei* and the intellect and ability to reason that it imparts. It is as if Gregory needs us to not fault other irrational creatures for the way they were made, holding these characteristics that are detrimental to humanity as the rational animal.

Lest you think that a plan of all good, to which was added some unavoidable corruption to be humankind’s unfortunate state, Nyssen needs us to know that there is a benefit to God’s “two-fold organization” which lies in the notion that in it [humanity] might enjoy both the Divine and the earthly. In *HO* Nyssen suggests that there are things of our enjoyment both in the earthly and heavenly realms, and that having a degree of participation in both natures, at least temporarily, allows humanity to find enjoyment in the good things of both the Divine and the earthly. In a sense, it is as if God lets

71 Ibid., XVIII. 1.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., XVIII. 2.
74 Ibid., II. 2.
75 Ibid.
humankind keep a toe in the garden, or at least points us to the goodness of the situation in which we find ourselves.

Further, there is a certain Christological bent to the place of humanity as creatures existing in a theological space somewhere between God and our world’s less rational creatures. Indeed, Nyssen describes the nature of humanity to be “the mean between them.” 76 As Christ as the perfection of this role, being fully God and fully man, offered an unusual light and hope to the world, so might be the charge of humanity as not only a sentient but rational animal. The role we have in God’s creation can here be thought of as more than just sovereign ruler, or even caretaker, but source of God’s light and thus bringer of hope.

Finally, there is the idea of gender being ancillary to those parts of humanity that are most important to God. This is discussed in some depth by Morwenna Ludlow in *Gregory of Nyssa: Ancient and [post]modern.* 77 Here, Ludlow’s focus is on a feminist perspective of theological anthropology. That said, Smith similarly notes that the addition of gender to humanity is in a sense a modification of God’s original creative intent, with no “significant role for us eschatologically.” 78 In our current American culture in which various ways to think of gender are often divisive tools in an already polarized political climate, thinking in ways about each other that move gender to a secondary characteristic is a helpful component of a nuanced theological anthropology.

76 Ibid., XVI. 9.
2.3 Chapter Conclusion

Gregory of Nyssa, as an authoritative figure in the burgeoning early church who continues to wield influence in the contemporary church, is an ideal source of a defining theological anthropology for this project. The anthropology he describes in On the Making of Man (de Hominis Opificio (HO)), driven by how humanity came into being, is detailed, rich, and well-studied. Within HO he describes the creation of humanity to follow in the schema of the creation of all other things, by God’s creative Word. Humanity is special, however, in that God pauses to contemplate before creating humankind and in their bearing of the imago Dei. This bearing of the image of God is mostly through the intellect or reason which is part of the rational (human) soul. This ability to reason is a key element in connecting the form and function of humanity, as the body is both meant to serve and be served by the rational (human) soul. Creation for Nyssen holds a two part nature in humanity. Here the potentiality for every specific indidual who will ever be created was created in God’s mind in the beginning of Genesis 1:27. Following a pause, the second part of Genesis 1:27 describes the initial instantiation of humanity, which continues today, and will continue until the eschaton. At each instantiation, humans begin their eternal journey towards God and God’s goodness. Nyssen calls this phenomenon epektasis.

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80 Ibid.
81 See § “2.2.2.1. Image Dei as the Template for Humanity,” 16-19.
82 See § “2.2.2.3. Dual Character of Creation of Humanity,” 26-34.
83 Ibid.
84 See § “2.2.2.2. Form and Function in Humanity's Bearing of the imago Dei,” 19-25.
3. THE EVOLUTIONARY ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHARLES DARWIN

3.1 Why Darwin

When searching for a singular basis, a scientist or scholar, a single publication, or even a single idea that might stand as representative and authoritative in construction of an evolutionary anthropology, the name Darwin is unavoidable. It is likely that most anyone in America would offer his name if asked to assign a person to their understanding of evolution, or specifically human origins in evolutionary terms. And while it is true that “standing on the shoulders of giants” is the backbone of scientific endeavor, and even noting the credit Darwin himself gave to those who preceded him as well as his contemporaries, the work of Charles Darwin must be considered first when constructing a description of humankind in evolutionary terms.¹ This has been true for well over a century.²

But the choice of Darwin is not just about name recognition. Along with the name of Charles Darwin being somewhat synonymous with the ideas of evolutionary anthropology and evolution in general, it is important to recognize that his ideas in proposing speciation through natural selection, often just called evolution in popular terms, are extremely well developed and simply the most studied on the topic. In fact,

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Google Scholar ranks him in the company of the most elite modern researchers, with almost 200,000 citations, over 40,000 since 2018, and more than 500 publications that are cited at least ten times. Of course there are detractors who note the guesses that Darwin consciously made, sometimes curiously flawed, in filling gaps in the understanding of his day. That said, to have laid out the broad strokes of evolution by natural selection as Darwin did, sans current understanding of heredity at the molecular level, is all the more extraordinary. In the end, it would be hard to make a case that there is a more influential evolutionary anthropology to consider. In fact, Francisco Ayala and Camilo Cela-Conde note in *Processes in Human Evolution*, that this Edinburg medical student, who transferred to Cambridge after two years to become a clergyman, and who finally turned research scientist, is the founder of the modern theory of evolution.

3.2 Darwin’s Evolutionary Anthropology as Described in The Descent of Man

3.2.1 Logical Fit Within Ubiquitous Schema

Darwin’s evolutionary anthropology was the subject of his 1871 *The Descent of Man (Descent)*. This book outlined how the principles set forth in his earlier work from 1859, *The Origin of Species (Origin)*, could be applied to human evolution. Origin, as his seminal work on the theory of speciation by natural selection was at its core a

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6 Charles Darwin, *Descent*.
7 Charles Darwin, *Origin*.
universal account of what Darwin saw in his observations of the variability of traits within and among different species. The universal nature of Darwin’s theory was a necessary component to his ideas of how random variation could lead to propagation of traits most favorable, and eventual speciation. Darwin expressed this necessity for the universality of his theory of evolution, as specific instances applied to individual species rely on the larger framework of his ideas for power. In *Descent* he notes, “when we confine our attention to any one form, we are deprived of the weighty arguments derived from the nature of the affinities which connect together whole groups of organisms.” But the universality of Darwin’s ideas held as much power as necessity in their ability to describe levels of connectedness across course to fine levels of variation. In the introduction to *Origin* Julian Huxley writes:

[Darwin] realized that evolution must be a universal phenomenon. If different species of groundfinches or armadillos could be produced by evolution from a common ancestor, then, given enough time, the same must hold for different families, orders, and classes and for the diversity of life as a whole: all living organisms must be related through their common descent from some simple original stock.9

Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection not only imparts a credibility to his ideas surrounding human origins by inclusion within a larger logical schema, but empowers it by suggestion of phenomena less or not observable in a single species. His ideas impart both a connectedness and a specialness to all organisms, which comes

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8 Darwin, *Descent*, v.
9 Ibid., xi.; Julian Huxley was an important evolutionary biologist in his own right but also the grandson of T.H. Huxley, often called “Darwin’s Bulldog,” a strong and vocal proponent of Darwin’s work. Ayala and Cela-Conde, *Processes in Human Evolution*, 3.
through in general terms within *Origin*, and is highlighted specifically in the human context within *The Descent of Man*.\(^\text{10}\)

### 3.2.2 Natural Selection

It is necessary, before any discussion of the evolutionary anthropology derived from Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection can be undertaken, that his ideas be laid out. In *Origins*, Darwin does this work for us by summarizing:

> Can it then, be thought improbable, seeing that variations useful to man have undoubtedly occurred, that other variations useful to each being in the great and complex battle of life, should occur in the course of many successive generations? If such do occur, can we doubt (remembering that many more individuals are born than can possibly survive) that individuals having any advantage, however slight, over others, would have the best chance of surviving and procreating their kind? On the other hand, we may feel sure that variation in the least degree injurious would be rightly destroyed. This preservation of favorable individual differences and variations, and the destruction of those which are injurious, I have called Natural Selection, or the survival of the fittest.\(^\text{11}\)

This is Darwin’s basic description of his theory of evolution through natural selection.\(^\text{12}\) Ayala and Cela-Conde break this down into three main ideas, (1) that heritable variation occurs, with some variations being advantageous to an organism and others less so, or even deleterious, (2) more organisms are produced than can survive to

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\(^{10}\) Darwin, *Descent*.

\(^{11}\) Darwin, *Origin*, 77.

\(^{12}\) It is important to note that evolution and natural selection are not synonymous terms. Evolution can happen in other ways from natural selection, such as human selection or “cultivating” as noted above, genetic drift which is random, or gene flow which usually opposes natural selection. But submitting to the idea that natural selection is a driver of evolution not the driver of evolution, the terms can be understood as used fairly interchangeably throughout this work, as the evolution in discussion is that which is driven by natural selection.
reproduce, and finally, (3) that offspring with favorable variations will produce more offspring themselves.\textsuperscript{13} Of course, in \textit{Origin} Darwin was writing some 94 years before Watson and Crick published their famous article outlining the molecule of inheritance, and 142 years before publication of the Human Genome Project’s initial draft sequence and the current reality of understanding humanity in these terms.\textsuperscript{14} In fact, any suggestion of a mechanism was a good ways off, with Mendel’s work on heredity beginning independently a decade or so after the publication of \textit{Origin}, and unknown to Darwin until the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{15} Darwin was simply suggesting basic principles driven by his observations. And primary to this was his understanding that human selection, that is “cultivating” variations in plants or animals to yield varieties for human benefit, might be expandable in “natural” ways to all animals.\textsuperscript{16} He first discusses variation in domesticated animals and how they arise in individuals and are then propagated by specific breeding. Importantly, he suggested that the idea held by “naturalists,” that sexual reproduction is the source of all variation, cannot be true. He noted here how gardeners would occasionally find a unique bud to arise spontaneously on a plant, and that these new variations could sometimes be propagated by seed, or how wild and domesticated ducks exhibited inheritable differences in bone densities.\textsuperscript{17} Expanding the concepts of “cultivating” to a natural environment, he surmised that selection in this case would be much more powerful, with greater changes in life acting on not only variation

\textsuperscript{13} Ayala and Cela-Conde, \textit{Processes in Human Evolution}, 1-2.
\textsuperscript{15} Ayala and Cela-Conde, \textit{Processes in Human Evolution}, 3.
\textsuperscript{16} Darwin, \textit{Origin}, 10-12, 43-46.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 12-13.
perceivable by man, but nature having the ability to act on variation throughout an organism, “[acting] on every internal organ, on every shade of constitutional difference, on the whole machinery of life.”\textsuperscript{18} Further, in the case of natural selection as opposed to human selection (selective breeding), the ability to live and procreate, also mostly invisible to man, would drive selection as it would mean that the inheritance of the desired trait would increase.

Adding to this first principle of Darwin’s theory of evolution through natural selection, Ayala and Cela-Conde also note that in his theory (2) all offspring will not survive to reproduce. This second requirement is, in simple terms, competition. In characterizing the power of this “struggle for existence” in propagation of favorable variation Darwin writes:

Owing to this struggle, variations, however slight and from whatever cause proceeding, if they be in any degree profitable to the individuals of a species, in their infinitely complex relations to other organic beings and to their physical conditions of life, will tend to the preservation of such individuals, and will generally be inherited by the offspring.\textsuperscript{19}

Here, the scarcity of resources and the resultant inability of all organisms to live, power the selection of inheritable variability. Darwin describes this as the “high rate at which all organic beings tend to increase” and the resultant situation in which “more individuals are produced than can possibly survive.”\textsuperscript{20} He writes, “Lighten any check, mitigate the destruction ever so little, and the number of the species will almost

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 78-79.
\textsuperscript{19} Darwin, \textit{Origin}, 61.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 63.
instantaneously increase to any amount.” The resulting necessary competition lends value to variations that help one organism struggle better than another. Indeed, without the competition in Darwin’s “struggle for existence” evolution, both within and across species, would be blind to variation. It is of note variation that empowered by competition should be understood to span all levels of granularity, from molecules to morphology, within and across species.

The power in this competition results, of course, not just in the ability of an organism to live, but from the ability of the organism to live through its reproductive age and thus be able to make use of the advantage in passing on the profitable inherited variation. This is the third, principle of Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection highlighted by Ayala and Cela-Conde. And is simply characterized as, (3) the heritability of profitable variation to offspring. Here, it is of note that Darwin’s theory is more about the struggle for existence of a variation, which we would later understand at a genetic level, than an individual. It is more about the struggle for procreation than the struggle for existence. Darwin understood this, and to the above quotation added that those variations profitable to the individual will not only “generally be inherited by the offspring,” but that, “the offspring also, will thus have a better chance of surviving.”

Critics of Darwin’s ideas sometimes make the point that he either convolutes or misunderstands the driver of evolution by natural selection as the “struggle for life” or in Darwin’s words, “the survival of the fittest,” when the driver is actually the fecundity

21 Ibid., 65.
22 Darwin makes this point beautifully with a discussion of the struggle for existence of mistletoe. Ibid., 62.
(reproductive capacity) of an organism not their life span. It is clear, however, from the above words of Darwin himself, that he understands the reproduction of an organism to be key.

3.2.3 Natural Selection and Human Origins

With a basic understanding of Darwin’s ideas of evolution through natural selection set before us, we move to the specific, Darwin’s ideas on the origins and thus the nature of humanity. As noted above, his 1871 book *The Descent of Man*, will inform our understanding of Darwin’s evolutionary anthropology as it was intended to “see how far the general conclusions arrived at in my former works were applicable to man.” With this rationale in mind, Darwin’s logic in addressing his project, and the questions that it brings, will guide our understanding of the evolutionary anthropology he develops. In describing the impetus of *Descent* Darwin writes, “the sole object of this work is to consider [1] whether man, like every other species, is descended from some pre-existing form; [2] the manner of his development; and [3] the value of the differences between the so-called races of man.”

On point one [1] Darwin is simply asking the obvious first question as to whether humanity fits within the larger schema of evolution driven by natural selection. To investigate this question, Darwin begins to look for connections to other organisms. In *Origin* he describes evolution through natural selection as the key to taxonomies that naturalists have been missing. He writes that “the true affinity between any two or more

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25 Ibid., 77, 61.
26 Darwin, *Descent*, v.
27 Ibid.
species, are those which have been inherited from a common parent… that community of
descent is the hidden bond which naturalists have been unconsciously seeking.”28 Here, it
is “descent with modification” that drives the connectedness.29 Of course, this allows
morphological comparisons to be used to connect and taxonomically distinguish extant
species and to speculate about extinct common ancestors. This is the starting place for
Darwin’s connection of humanity to the larger evolutionary framework in Descent on
Man.

3.2.3.1 Darwin’s Evidence of Human Evolution by Natural Selection

To assert that humanity is not a one-off, but a connected creature with
evolutionary links to other creatures, Darwin begins Descent with a discussion of the
morphological similarities between humans and other species. He opens with a discussion
of body structure, noting the well-studied similarities of the human body plan and that of
other mammals, going so far as to say that “it is notorious that man is construed on the
same general type or model as other mammals.”30 He goes on to say of humankind that
“all the bones in his skeleton can be compared with corresponding bones in a monkey,
bat or seal.”31 He carries this further to include “his muscles, nerves, blood-vessels and
internal viscera,” even extending the comparison to the brain, “the most important of all
organs.”32

28Darwin, Origin, 437. It is of note that the science and techniques of Darwin’s time limited taxonomies to
gross morphological characteristics. The genealogies that he understood to underlie taxonomic relatedness
were not accessible to Darwin in the way they are today with more than 3,000 genomes currently available
to the scientific community.
29 Darwin, Origin, 437.
30 Darwin, Descent, 7.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
From the discussion of body plan Darwin makes a sophisticated turn to infectious disease and parasites. While this might seem like an obvious or reasonable next step due to the experience of veterinarians and farmers and their incidence of contracting diseases from other animals, immunity is a place where relations between species are known in our current time to stand out. While immunity is complex and usually shared most strongly among the nearest species in taxonomic terms, more recent work has shown the same immune responses to some viruses to be present in distantly related species such as birds and mammals.33 Darwin was thus maybe a good bit ahead of his time in noting that “[rabies], smallpox, glanders, syphilis, cholera, herpes, etc.” can be transmitted within some animal species and between lower animals and humans.34 Maybe not surprisingly, both internal and external parasites such as plasmodium are also noted by Darwin as shared between humans and other animals.

Darwin then addresses what he calls “the most important function, the reproduction of the species.”35 Here Darwin suggest that reproduction is “strikingly the same in all mammals.”36 He notes similarities from courtship to birth, and the nurturing that follows, and states that “Monkeys are born in almost as helpless a condition as our own infants; and in certain genera the young differ full as much in appearance from the adults as do our children from their full grown parents.”37 Darwin seems to connect humanity deeply to other animals, especially apes, in reproductive function. But he also

34 Darwin, Descent, 8.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
extends this connection to the process of embryonic development. Here he notes that the earliest stages of animal development are hardly distinguishable between species. He goes on to describe how similar the processes are through the embryonic development of other species, especially other apes quoting T. H. Huxley as saying, “It is quite in later stages of development that the young human beings presents marked differences from the young ape, while the latter departs as much from the dog in its developments as the man does.”

He then ends the discussion on development by continuing the quote from Huxley, “without question, the mode of origin, and the early stages of development of man are identical with those of the animals immediately below him in the scale: without a doubt in these respects, he is far nearer to apes than the apes are to the dog.”

Finally, Darwin offers evidence of human connectedness to other animals through rudiments, what would be referred to as vestigial structures today. For Darwin, a rudiment is an organ or structure that is “either absolutely useless… or of such slight service to their present possessors, that we can hardly suppose that they were developed under the conditions that now exist.”

He notes that the latter is not a true rudiment but is trending that way and so informative. In any event, these useless, or becoming useless, structures are remnants of evolution that have not been under enough selective pressure, that is, they do not cost the organism enough during embryonic development, growth, reproduction, etc., to have been quickly or completely lost.

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39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 10.
Among the first areas Darwin gives extended evidence of human evolutionary rudiments suggesting connection to lower animals, is the human ear. Here, Darwin recognized multiple areas of interest. First, he notes that some humans can control the muscles of the head well enough to provide motion to their ears. This trait is variable both in development and function in humans, that is not everyone can do it, and in those that can the ear moves in different ways. Darwin describes this ability to express a rudimentary form and function that is necessary in lower animals. He suggests that “the power of erecting and directing the shell of the ears to the various points of the compass, is of no doubt of the highest service to many animals, as they perceive the direction of danger.”

It is interesting that Darwin also suggests this capability in form and function to be a rudiment in [other] apes, noting that “the ears of the chimpanzee and orang are curiously like those of man, and the proper muscles are likewise but very slightly developed… these animals never move or erect their ears; so they are in the equally rudimentary condition with those of man.” But Darwin does not leave the discussion of rudiments of the ear at the movement, but then discusses the shape of the human ear. Here, from the work of a famous sculptor Thomas Woolner, he was directed to a small aberration in many humans on one or both ears, later to be termed Darwin’s tubercle.

This rudiment of form, that Darwin described to be found in chimpanzees as well, is described as “[blunt] points [which] not only project inwards towards the center of the ear, but often a little outwards from its plane, so as to be visible… from directly in front

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41 Ibid.
42 Darwin, Descent, 12. It is of note that current taxonomies place humankind within the great ape/hominid family which includes chimpanzees, gorillas, orangs.
43 Ibid.
or behind.”44 Darwin’s suggestion is that these diminishing but visible points are “vestiges of the tips of formerly erect and pointed ears.”45

From the ear Darwin moves to the eye in discussion of the phenomena of rudiments. Here he notes that the nictitating membrane, or third eyelid, which is functional and used in a number of animals such as birds, reptiles, amphibians, even sharks, remains in humans. Here he notes that while present and functional even in some lower mammals, that it exists as a rudiment in “humans, quadrumana, and most other mammals.”46 This structure is interesting in that, while functional, complete, and necessary in a number of extant species across genera, it is present in a recognizable but less useful or useless form in humans.

Darwin also pointed out elements from human development that unnecessarily extend into the adult as rudiments. Here, a classic case is the vestigial tail and the coccyx. Darwin notes that the coccyx, “though functionless as a tail, plainly represent this part in other vertebrate animals.”47 He goes on to describe the well-known embryonic stage of human development during which bones that are later fused into the coccyx extend free past the hindlimbs. He even notes human rare cases in which the tail persists into the fetal stage.48 Unknown by Darwin or at least unstated in Descent, while very rare, occasionally a human baby is born with a small vestigial tail requiring surgery to remove.

The above examples given by Darwin in Descent represent some of his characterizations of rudiments which persist to be understood as such today. Of course,

44 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 13.; “Quadrumana” is an old classification including monkeys and apes with hand-like feet.
47 Ibid., 16.
48 Ibid.
scientific discovery presses on and much has been learned since Darwin’s writing of *Descent*. This noted, a number of structures Darwin would characterize as rudiments are no longer thought of in these terms, mostly because some function has been characterized. An example of this is the caecum, which Darwin described as a “cul-de-sac” of the alimentary canal. In writing of the terminal section of the caecum that is flatten in humans, the appendix, he writes, “Not only is it useless, but it is sometimes the cause of death.” There are couple of things to note here. First, we currently understand that the caecum and possibly the appendix, which Darwin to a point seems to conflate, perform both digestive and immunological functions in humans. Secondly, the possible harmful nature of a rudiment that was so negatively impacting human health, such as Darwin expresses regarding the caecum/appendix, would be under strong negative selection. This is an interesting note to inform some of Darwin’s thoughts on the gross variability of the caecum/appendix across species which seems to suggest a reason for its diversity of conservation.

Darwin concludes his opening chapter of *Descent* citing the persuasive nature of the argument for the speciation of humanity through evolution by natural selection. This evidence he cites from human connectedness to the rest of the animal world. He notes how humanity is “constructed on the same general model,” and that they “pass through the same early stages of development,” and finally that they “retain certain rudiments in

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50 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
common.” He then suggests that to take any other position than that of humanity’s being situated within a common “community of descent… is to admit that our own structure, and that of all the animals around us, is a mere snare laid to entrap our judgement.” Just how humanity came to be situated within this “community of descent” is Darwin’s next question.

3.2.3.2 Darwin’s Process of Human Evolution by Natural Selection

To begin to answer the second [2] question as to the “manner of [human] development.” Darwin follows the logic of Origin and thus begins with the same basic set of questions. For clarity, it is important to note that while he does discuss human embryonic development within Descent, Darwin here is speaking of the development of a species, that is, what we would currently refer to as speciation. To this end, Darwin first inquires as to whether there is heritable variation in humanity that could provide the input for natural selection. This is simply the beginning of Darwin’s three principal features of natural selection as laid out by Ayala and Cela-Conde and discussed in the above section on natural selection. Darwin begins his chapter on the “development of man from some lower form” by answering this question on the availability of variation to natural selection by writing, “It is manifest that man is now subject to much variability…we may compare millions of faces and each will be distinct.” He adds that not only faces but indeed the larger body form can hold many points of observable variation. He notes, for

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53 Darwin, Descent, 18.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., v.
57 Ayala and Cela-Conde, Processes in Human Evolution, 1-2.; § “3.2.2 Natural Selection,” 40-44.
58 Darwin, Descent, 19.
instance, that “the length of the legs [are] one of the most variable parts.”\textsuperscript{59} He adds to this the diversity found in the shape of the human skull, variation in the formation of the teeth, diversity in specifics of the human musculature, even differences within the “internal viscera.”\textsuperscript{60} After noting the variability of “mental faculties” of humanity he writes in summary that,

I have elsewhere… so fully discussed the subject of inheritance, that I need here add hardly anything. A greater number of facts have been collected with respect to the transmission of the most trifling, as well as the most important characters in man, than in any of the lower animals.\textsuperscript{61}

Darwin is sure that humanity is replete with the same type of heritable variation he sees in any other species. And so, it is fascinating that almost the very next thing Darwin writes moves from the notion that he has covered all that need be said on a topic, to claim a position of ignorance on the next. Humbly, but with much intuition, he writes, “with respect to the cause of variability, we are in all cases very ignorant.”\textsuperscript{62} Realizing what he doesn’t know, he cannot say where the variation he sees in all of life comes from. But what he can say, and does, is that the variations that persist “stand in some relation to the conditions to which each species has been exposed, during several generations.”\textsuperscript{63} Without the benefit of knowing that the stuff of heredity is spontaneously mutable, even at predictable rates within species, and that these mutations would sometimes lead to variation in an organism, Darwin understood that the environment

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
Or more properly, he understood the result, that the heritable variation that helped an organism succeed tended to persist.

Again, Darwin understood that he was in the dark as to what is generating the variation. But he was willing to pontificate, to make an informed guess, as to what is happening. Unfortunately, without the specific giant’s shoulders that we have to stand on, he guessed wrongly. He misunderstood and mischaracterized the interplay between the environment or conditions and variability. In a section on “The Direct and Definite Action of Changed Conditions” he writes that “there can be no doubt that changed conditions induce an almost indefinite amount of fluctuating variability.” Of course, currently we know that conditions cannot induce variation, only add selective pressure that the variation, or even the mutations that accumulate and lead to variation, will persist. This is one of a few points of departure between modern ideas of speciation by evolution and Darwin’s schema. It is up to the reader whether these misunderstandings are understandable.

The topic of evolutionary reversion is an interesting place to illustrate the intuition of Darwin understanding phenomena [mostly] correctly, if all the while misunderstanding the process or specifics. In his consideration of reversion as manner of evolution by natural selection Darwin astutely intuits the complex relation of a return to a previous evolutionary state of an organism to be a possible evolutionary process, albeit in a different direction than the norm. Darwin asserted that these reversions occurred at the

64 Ayala and Cela-Conde, Processes in Human Evolution, 46-47
65 Of course, there are outside forces which might impinge on one’s genetic material such as environmental mutagens which would allow a condition to induce a variation. But this is outside the scope of the idea Darwin is stating.
level of the individual and during embryonic development. As this was Darwin’s guess at the locus of heritable variation, this is not totally surprising. Between the writing of *Origin* and *Descent* Darwin wrote *Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication* (*Variation*), in which he expanded his conjecture on heredity into Pangenesis, his explanation for heredity in which some atoms he called gemmules contained all the heritable information of an organism and passed them during embryonic development.

You can likely hear the language of genetics, maybe even a description of the DNA molecule, in Darwin’s musings even if some details were misconstrued. Today we recognize inheritance as a reproductive event not a developmental one. And evolutionary reversions such as one might observe in flightless birds or legless reptiles are not usually thought of as individual events but more so phenomena seen at the population level. But Darwin’s intuition was correct, reversion are evolutionary phenomena which bring back an ancestral state. Curiously enough, they may even involve developmental pathways. While Darwin is disadvantaged as to many specifics, he well makes the case that humanity is able to follow the rules of natural selection he observed in all other organisms. With not only the temporal but epistemological/scientific distance to Darwin in view, our next section adds culture.

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68 It is of note that the ancestral state of a reversion is not a genetically identical state but is often driven by epi-genetic factors such as variation in expression which turns on nascent pathways. Cabej, Nelson. *Epigenetic Principles of Evolution*, 2nd Edition. (London: Academic Press, 2018), 535, 541.
69 Ibid., 539-545.
3.2.3.3 Darwin and the Value of the So-called Races of Man

The third [3] principal Darwin cites as the impetus for his writing *Descent* is a discussion of the differences between the races of humanity.70 There is much that could be said here. Darwin’s ideas on race, even within the limited work under current consideration, primarily *Descent*, are at best complicated. There is not only temporal space between Darwin’s writing on race within *Descent*, but also a sizable scientific/epistemological and cultural gap. While a detailed discussion of Darwin’s ideas on race are well beyond the scope of this project, they are an unavoidable component of *Descent*, and require at least a brief consideration.

First, it is important to understand why Darwin included a section on “the value of the so-called races of man” in his discussion of humanity’s evolution through natural selection.71 It is clear from both the volume of work cited in this final chapter of *Descent*, as well as Darwin’s own words, that race was a ubiquitous topic of discussion in his time. He writes, “The question whether mankind consists of one or several species has of late years been much discussed by anthropologists, who are divided into the two schools of monogenists or polygenists.”72 This is not totally surprising to read in the final chapter of *Descent*, as there seems to have been some conflation or at least gray area between the usage of the terms race and species in relation to humanity in the previous chapters.

Following Darwin’s logic, the argument for classification of the races of humanity as separate species will open our discussion. As there is no value in trying to gloss,

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70 Darwin, *Descent*, v.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid., 115.
rehabilitate, or sanitize Darwin’s ideas or words, some of the hardest sections to read will be used to outline his thoughts. On the variation he notes in humanity Darwin writes:

There is, however, no doubt that the various races, when carefully compared and measured, differ much from each other,-as in the texture of the hair, the relative proportions of all parts of the body, the capacity of the lungs, the form and capacity of the skull, and even the convolutions of the brain… but it would be an endless task to specify the numerous points of difference. The races differ also in constitution, in acclimatization, and in liability to certain diseases. Their mental characteristics are likewise very distinct; chiefly as it would appear in their emotional, but partly in their intellectual faculties. Every one who has had the opportunity of comparison, must have been struck with the contrast between the taciturn, even morose, aborigines of S. America and the light-hearted talkative negroes.73

This is simply hard to read in consideration of contemporary ideas of race and how some of this language has been used to oppress.74 While many of the ideas expressed in this passage are contrary to contemporary understanding of the diversity of humankind, it is important to note that this is Darwin expressing the ideas of his time in the nomenclature of his time. How generously one reads these ideas, or interprets them, is up to the reader. What is clear from this passage, is that Darwin finds vast differences within the races of humanity.

In consideration of these ideas, and the vast and varied differences he notes within humanity, Darwin summarizes the position of the polygenist as necessarily considering

73 Ibid., 110., Parenthetical references removed for readability.
the races of humanity as different species. From the point of view of a naturalist Darwin cites the differences aforementioned, their adaptation to different conditions, along with their existence in large numbers and over many centuries as sure evidence.

But then Darwin presents the opposing point of view, that of the monogenist. And he begins this discussion with the question as to whether the differences that had been presented would remain distinct “like ordinary species” if the organisms were mingled together in large numbers in the same locale.\(^75\) He answers the question with “this was by no means the case.”\(^76\) He proceeds to then give example after example of the admixtures of variation seen in South American and African countries where races from many areas “blend in various degrees.”\(^77\) He concludes that “the races of man are not sufficiently distinct to inhabit the same country without fusion,” adding that “the absence of fusion affords the usual and best test of specific distinctness.”\(^78\)

Darwin then goes on to make the case that the very distinctions observed across the races of humanity are, in themselves, highly variable. After enumerating a few examples such as hairiness, skin color, and skull shape he offers a note from experience, that “all naturalists have learnt by dearly bought experience, how rash it is to attempt to define species by the aid of inconsistent characters.”\(^79\) Finally, as the most important of all the arguments for humanity to be characterized as a single species, is the observation that the races graduate into one another, even without interbreeding – that is, that humanity

\(^{75}\) Darwin, Descent, 113.  
\(^{76}\) Ibid.  
\(^{77}\) Ibid., 113-114.  
\(^{78}\) Ibid., 114.  
\(^{79}\) Ibid.
has the tendency to become more like than more distinct. He then makes obvious his position by stating:

Every naturalist who has had the misfortune to undertake the description of a group of highly varying organisms, has encountered cases (I speak from experience) precisely like that of man; and if of a cautious disposition, he will end by uniting all the forms which graduate into each other, under a single species; for he will say to himself that he has no right to give names to objects that he cannot define.”80

He then goes on to cement this position by noting that the similarities between the races of man far outnumber the differences. Curiously, Darwin neglects to discuss the real power of his analysis hiding in the specifics of the question that began the inquiry. He addresses the “so-called” nature of race, that is, whether “species” would be a better description of the differences between the races. One might even successfully argue that he would agree with contemporary anthropologists in claiming race even goes too far, as it imparts the notion of fundamental differences owing to more than locale, which in reality drives the difference. That said, what Darwin does not address, at least in Descent, is the “value” portion of his question Descent is intended to answer, “the value of the so-called races of man.”81 He does suggest that humanity is special among the animals, as we will investigate in the following sections.82 But he stops short of tying the degree of variability he notes within the races of humanity, to empowering evolution by natural selection to generate the very thing that makes humanity unique.

80 Ibid.
81 Darwin, Descent, v.
82 Ibid., 83, 93-94.
3.2.4 The Moral and Mental Faculties as Definitive of Humankind

Darwin spends a good bit of ink describing how humanity fits within the larger schema of evolution by natural selection, as we have noted above. But is there something that defines us? Is humanity different from other organisms, from other animals, from other apes? Even with the overwhelming points of connection between humankind and all other life, there is a unique nature to humanity that Darwin not only acknowledges but describes as residing in humankind’s moral and mental faculties. These defining characteristics of humankind, maybe not surprisingly, reside together within the human mind.

3.2.4.1 The Moral Sense as the Defining Characteristic for Humanity

For Darwin, the ultimate identifier of humanity is its conscience. In *Descent* he proclaims, “I fully subscribe to the judgement of those writers who maintain that of all the differences between man and the lower animals, the moral sense or conscience is by far the most important.”83 But, in keeping with the broad scope of his ideas, this sense of “ought” or “duty” is proposed by Darwin to exist to a degree in all social animals as social instincts.84 He describes the function of these social instincts to act in a number of ways which center around sympathy, a commonality of feeling with other members of a community, both positively and negatively.

Darwin offers a number of examples of social instincts witnessed in other social animals.85 He notes cooperation in social animals both warning each other of danger and

83 Ibid. p. 63., Darwin cites Bain, Lecky, Hodgson, and Lubbock as some of the contributors.
84 Ibid., 63-64.
85 Ibid., 65-68.
as used in hunting. He notes care witnessed in horses nibbling each other’s itchy spots, and monkeys searching each other for external parasites. He describes multiple baboons working in concert to displace a large rock under which is a shared feast of grubs. He describes the love witnessed by birds towards a brooding pair and new chicks. He notes the sympathy of dogs protecting another, or even its master form danger. Darwin suggests that these cooperative actions within social animals to be driven by satisfaction felt when engaging them and dissatisfaction when not.86

But within humanity, the social instincts are complicated by the intellect. The social instincts, as well as those turned more inward, such as the instincts of self-preservation, hunger, etc., are at one time or another, contemplated and weighed against each other. Whether at the time of action or later, “from the activity of [their] mental faculties, [humankind] cannot avoid reflection.”87 Darwin suggests that in this contemplation, and the regret felt over having acted on one instinct over another, “[humanity] differs profoundly from the lower animals.”88 He describes this as the origin of the moral sense or conscience of humanity. And further describes the evolution of this defining characteristic of humanity through natural selection as follows:

At the moment of action, man will no doubt be apt to follow the stronger impulse; and though this may occasionally prompt him to the noblest deeds, it will more commonly lead him to gratify his own desires at the expense of other men. But after their gratification when past and weaker impressions are judged by their ever-enduring social instinct, and by his deep regard for the good opinion of his fellows, retribution will surely come. He will then feel remorse, repentance, regret, or shame... He will consequently

86 Ibid., 65.
87 Darwin, Descent, 71-72.
88 Ibid., 72.
resolve more or less firmly to act differently for the future; and this is conscience; for conscience looks backwards, and serves as a guide for the future.  

Here, both the instinct acted upon and the strength of contemplation and reflection on the action taken are variations in the metal faculties of humanity that are under the same selective pressures as any other characteristic. This “moral sense,” while in the same vein as all characteristics and best understood in terms of degrees within animals, is humanity’s most important distinction.

3.2.4.2 Reasoning as The Ultimate Mental Faculty

The above discussion of humanity’s moral sense, and its characterization by Darwin and many of his time as the most important characteristic of humanity, leads to the necessity of understand its basis – human reason. The ability to reason is the mental faculty that allows humanity to be less driven by instincts and more by contemplation. As discussed in the previous section, for “animals which live permanently in a body, the social instincts are ever present and persistent,” whereas in humanity, “man cannot prevent past impressions often repassing through his mind.” Within humanity the instincts are tempered, or maybe more correctly analyzed and weighed by reason.

There are a couple of interesting points to be made here. First, Darwin does not seem to be suggesting that all animals with a degree of reason will necessarily develop a human-like ability to be driven more by contemplation and reason than instincts, or develop conscience, but more so that they could. While he does observe higher level complex emotions in non-human animals, such as jealousy in a dog when another dog

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89 Ibid., 44, 73.
90 Ibid., 72-73.
gets a treat, or the susceptibility to ridicule or sense of humor seen in non-human primates, or even the care for adopted children seen in cats and dogs as well as non-human primates, Darwin seems to suggest large gap between humanity and these other mammals.  

The preceding paragraph hints at a characteristic of that gap, as Darwin suggests that some, even higher, animals “live permanently in a body” and thus are driven more by social “instincts” than reason and contemplation. There seems to be a lack of transcendence that lives in the gap between other higher mammals and humanity for Darwin.

Of course, Darwin needs it be known that even in reason, humanity differs not in presence or absence when compared to other animals, at least closely related ones, but more so in degrees. While stating that the difference in the mental power of humanity and higher animals to be “enormous” as discussed above, he writes that there is “no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties.” Darwin enumerates some of these mental faculties such as curiosity, wonder, imitation, attention, imagination, and memory, and then describes their place within the lives of higher mammals. He goes on to suggest that while self-consciousness is likely not correctly ascribed to non-human animals, that “it is impossible to say at what point in the ascending scale animals become capable of abstractions, etc.”

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consciousness among other animals is an ongoing curiosity for Darwin. In a collection of his early notes and observations he pondered the idea of a will and of consciousness in non-human animals by asking “can willing be used without consciousness, for it is not evident what animals have consciousness?” In these same notes Darwin describes what he imagines to be a mostly passive, almost mechanical process, which results in consciousness. To this he writes, “it looks as if consciousness is effects of sufficient material organizations.” Much later, in *Descent*, Darwin seems much more careful not to overstate what he might feel but cannot justify. In *Descent* he concedes that understanding the development of the intellect is “as hopeless an inquiry as how life itself originated. These are problems for the distant future, if ever they are to be solved by man.” But yet, Darwin does not leave the possibility of higher order mental capacities of non-human animals as just a theoretical notion. Due to the fundamental sameness of humankind to other animals he ascribes many anthropomorphic characteristics to non-human animals. Reluctance to overstate notwithstanding, it is with a degree of liberty that Darwin makes this move. It is impossible to know that a human emotion correctly describes an observed reaction in another animal, or even another human for that matter. That said, there is a kinship described here that is intriguing. Darwin suggests “all animals feel wonder and many exhibit curiosity,” even if the later is often to their detriment. He follows this with the mental faculty of imitation, which he describes as a

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99 Darwin, *Descent*, 44.

100 Ibid., 47.
teaching tool. Here he notes a cat teaching its progeny to clean itself by licking its paws and then rubbing its face, and goes on to describe an instance where a dog raised with cats took on this same activity. Darwin discusses *attention*, which powers the ability to learn through imitation, as well as the ability to be successful in activities like hunting. He notes *memory*, and the ability for animals, both domesticated and wild, to recognize favored humans even after many years of separation. He then discusses *imagination*, the ability to parse memories and combine their contents into new ideas, and proposes it to be “one of the highest prerogatives of man.”\(^{101}\) But Darwin also alludes to a connection between imagination and dreams, expressing the known ability of other species such as birds and dogs to dream.\(^{102}\) Finally, Darwin approached *reason*, writing that “of all the faculties of the human mind, it will, I presume, be admitted that reason stands at the summit.”\(^{103}\) Darwin suggests that this ability to reason allows humanity to differentiate between instincts, and then choose the most appropriate.\(^{104}\) The bearing of this reasoning on the evolution of humanity within the context of social instincts and their contemplation follows.

### 3.2.5 Speciation Towards an End

In describing the relation of humanity to other species Darwin often used terminology such as position or rank. It is clear from Darwin’s choice of words that he at least implies a hierarchy within his schema of evolution (speciation) through natural selection. It is also clear that humanity occupies the ultimate rank in this schema. Here it

\(^{101}\) Darwin, *Descent*, 49.  
\(^{102}\) Ibid.  
\(^{103}\) Ibid.  
\(^{104}\) Ibid., 50, 78.
is necessary to (1) understand Darwin’s thoughts about the position that humanity holds within the vast genera of organism on earth, (2) to understand how humanity got to this rank, and finally, (3) to understand how Darwin understood human progression towards some end.

First, (1) one should expect form the position of Darwin thus far presented, that he railed against any taxonomy that made humanity too special. For instance, he noted that some of the naturalists of his time wanted to categorize organisms in three kingdoms, plants, animals, and humans, based on “the mental and spiritual powers of man.” Of course this was an overstep to Darwin. That said, humanity does receive the highest evolutionary position in Descent, as the species “who alone can with certainty be ranked as a moral being,” powered by the “enormous” difference in mental power observed within humankind. While this rank of humanity at the top of the evolutionary schema might not be surprising, there is much of interest in the discussion of how humanity rose to this position, and even more so humankind’s ultimate trajectory.

On the second point, (2) how humanity got its rank, Darwin follows the evolutionary framework laid out for the entirety of life as directly applicable to humanity. As aforementioned, he fits humanity within the ubiquitous schema of evolution by natural selection, even to the point of recognizing that both the moral sense and its empowerment from humanity’s intellect and reasoning came to their present forms through the persistence of favorable variation. Interestingly, Darwin and others of his time see a connection between the differences observed in the intellectual and physical

105 Ibid., 95.
106 Ibid., 43, 72, 83-84.
107 Ibid., 83.
characteristics of humanity and other animals, especially the closest relatives of
humankind. He cites agreement with his contemporary Alfred Wallace who “argues that
man, after he had partially acquired those intellectual and moral faculties which
distinguish him from the lower animals, would have been but little liable to bodily
modifications through natural selection or any other means.”\(^\text{108}\) Darwin explains:

> [Humanity] has great power of adapting his habits to the new
conditions of life. He invents weapons, tools, and various
stratagems to procure food and to defend himself. When he
migrates into a colder climate he uses clothes, builds sheds, and makes fires; and by the aid of fire cooks food otherwise indigestible. He aids his fellow-men in many ways, and anticipates future events.\(^\text{109}\)

Darwin notes here that the mental capabilities of humanity are in lieu of the
physical protections other animals exhibit in the struggle for life, such as speed, strength,
or natural weapons.\(^\text{110}\) But the timing of the evolution of a larger brain and the body of humanity is still a topic of discussion. Of course, this is a bit of a chicken and egg question. Indeed, even contemporary scholarship leaves the argument open as to the various connections and exactly what allowed for what. The expensive tissue hypothesis, a myriad of body size versus brain size trade-offs, even the fossil record speaks into this argument.\(^\text{111}\) While the subtleties within this discussion are fascinating, the larger assumption, that the evolution of the physical nature of humanity is connected to the

\(^{108}\) Darwin, *Descent*, 83.
\(^{109}\) Ibid.
\(^{110}\) Ibid., 42.
mental abilities of humankind, is pretty much settled as a given. Darwin suggests that
within the grand schema of evolution by natural selection that humanity is special, and
the foci of this specialness is likely within the moral sense of humanity the evolved
through empowerment by an intellectual acumen – but to what end. This question will
complete Darwin’s evolutionary anthropology.

The end, that is, the eventuality of the evolution of humanity through natural
selection, is maybe Darwin’s most interesting proposal. We have noted in previous
sections how the moral sense and humanity’s mental faculty of reason have evolved to
their present state. Darwin even suggested that humankind “owes [their] predominant
position in the world” to these two characteristics. 112 But while Darwin inherently
suggests a given directionality in evolution, which is towards greater fitness to survive,
he uses terms like perfection and advancement that suggest that evolution is moving
towards an end. 113

Certainly, one must take for granted that the action of evolution through natural
selection has moved humanity towards a greater moral sense and ability to reason than
humanity’s ancestors. But Darwin seems to be suggesting that individual characteristics
are not the end, that humanity is moving towards something more. In some sense, Darwin
is suggesting that evolution is moving towards a better moral judgement. He suggests that
“man prompted by his conscience, will through long habit acquire such perfect self-
command that his desires and passions will at last yield instantly and without struggle to
his social sympathies… the still hungry, or the still revengeful man will not think of

112 Darwin, Descent, 83.
113 Ibid.
stealing food, or of wreaking his vengeance.”¹¹⁴ Driven by the love and praise, as well as the approbation of their fellows, humanity moves towards a perfected moral reasoning that knows and moves towards and chooses good over evil. Darwin uses these words in noting “that members of the same tribe would approve of conduct which appeared to them to be for the general good, and would reprobate that which appeared evil.”¹¹⁵

It is this evolution of humanity towards the good through means of natural selection that is so striking in Darwin’s account of the trajectory of humankind. This empowers the ability of humanity to use their moral sense in terms larger than their immediate communities, empowering civilizations and the commonality of humanity across large spatial distances, indeed eventually without any concern for relatedness of locale.¹¹⁶ Indeed Darwin’s Descent suggests that the ultimate trajectory for the evolution of humanity, the ultimate good, the end of his evolutionary anthropology, lies in the “disinterested love for all living creatures.”¹¹⁷

### 3.3 Chapter Conclusion

Charles Darwin is the founder of the theory of evolution (speciation) by natural selection which describes the origins of all organisms inclusive of humanity. His work, while wanting for some mechanistic explanations which would not be available for a number of decades, is still relevant and remains important to modern evolutionary thought. As the founder of the field whose name is used almost synonymously with evolution, Darwin and his 1871 The Descent of Man (Descent) were obvious choices to

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¹¹⁴ Darwin, Descent, 74.
¹¹⁵ Ibid.
¹¹⁶ Ibid., 91, 93.
¹¹⁷ Ibid., 81, 94.
supply an authoritative evolutionary anthropology for this project.\textsuperscript{118} Within \textit{Descent} Darwin describes the origin of humanity to be from accumulation of inheritable profitable variations in traits which occur in a population of organisms, as well as the exclusion of deleterious ones, over time.\textsuperscript{119} These profitable variations accumulate in a population, sometimes leading to speciation. The human species came about through this same path, and is defined by its intellect and ability to reason, which are tied together and reflected in its form. For Darwin, it is important to note that any difference in humanity, even in reason, was by degrees with other animals, at least humankind’s closest relatives, the other extant great apes. Further, it is important to understand that for Darwin, the founder of the theory of evolution of species by natural selection, that humanity is on a long course towards an eventuality. This end is an infinitely more moral creature.

\textsuperscript{118} Darwin, \textit{Descent}.
\textsuperscript{119} See § “3.2.3 Natural Selection and Human Origins,” 42-56.
4. THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL NEXUS OF NYSSEN AND DARWIN

4.1 Points of Conflict

Given the embedded and often boisterous positions of the most distant contemporary interlocutors on the topic, it could seem almost comical to imagine a lack of contention when describing humanity in both theological and scientific terms. This was discussed in the introduction to this project.¹ But this is really nothing new. The apparent contradiction in ways of understanding oneself has been a subject of ongoing debate at least since the times of Nyssen and Darwin.² That notwithstanding, it is the impetus of this project to understand the anthropologies of both of these authors in light of each other. To that end, it will be profitable to first describe some general points of each, seeking areas of opposition at the outset. As it is the origin of humanity that defines the creature for both Nyssen and Darwin, it will be helpful to discuss both ways of understanding human origins in three aspects, (1) who/what is acting, (2) what is the action, and (3) to what end is the action undertaken.

4.1.1 Fundamentals of Human Origins for Gregory of Nyssa

To the answer of aspect one concerning Nyssen’s understanding of human origins, (1) as with all of creation, God is the sole actor in the creation of humanity. Drawing on the first biblical account of creation found within Genesis 1-2, in which God begins creating all that is or ever will be, Nyssens centers on God’s creative action of

¹ See § “1.2 Contemporary Anthropologies and Church Decline,” 3-8.
² Darwin, Descent, 18.; Nyssen, Making of Man, XXIII, 1-3.
humanity within Genesis 1:26-27.³ Here, as aforementioned, Nyssen describes God’s creation of humanity to be carried out in two parts.⁴ The first part is the creation of humanity in the mind of God, creation of a potentiality which in the understanding of Gregory of Nyssa includes the first human as well as the last.⁵ Thus, we should understand that the creation account of humanity within Genesis 1:26-27, as not pertaining to only one archetypal human, but the first step of the creation of all humanity that will ever be. The second part of this creation, the creation of each human, is already enumerated by God in the first part to take place iteratively until the eschaton. This is an important concept in understanding the ongoing role and action of God in creating each human.

With God as the sole actor in the creation of humankind, the next aspect of human origins to consider in Nyssen’s terms is (2) how the creation of humanity was/is carried out. As above, the dual nature of humanity’s creation is central to Nyssen’s understanding. And so, it must be remembered that the creation of humanity is not finished. But there is much more to this dual natured event than just an enumeration of humanity in God’s mind followed by instantiation through a procreative event as other animals.

First, there is a degree of contemplation in the mind of God that is not found elsewhere in the creation account of Genesis 1-2. Nyssen notes this by commenting that while the entirety of the rest of creation was “made offhand by the Divine power, existing

³ A discussion of God’s creative action applied to humanity appears above. § “Template and Timing Definitive of Human Creation,” 16-34.
⁴ See § “2.2.2.3 Dual Character of Creation of Humanity.” 26-34.
⁵ Ibid.
at once on His command… counsel precedes the making of man.”\(^6\) While God speaks everything into creation, inclusive of humankind, God pauses to contemplate humanity before creating. Nyssen describes this beautifully, writing, “a sun is made, and no counsel precedes; a heaven likewise; and to these no single thing in creation is equal. So great a wonder is formed by a word alone… while only to the making of man does the Maker of all draw near with circumspection.”\(^7\) This is an important distinction of human origins which Nyssen draws from the biblical text, highlighting the position of humanity within God’s creation by this preliminary contemplation.

Secondly, there is the joining of the soul to the flesh. Nyssen, as previously mentioned, makes a definitive move away from Origen on this point.\(^8\) In a section devoted to establishing that the source of both soul and body is the same, both coming from God’s creative activity, Nyssen notes, “as man is one, the being consisting of soul and body, we are to suppose that the beginning of his existence is one, common to both parts.”\(^9\) This is an important consideration as without it there might exist a tendency to misconstrue Nyssen’s dual nature of creation as adding the flesh of humanity to a preexistent soul. Key to understanding Nyssen’s creation of humanity is understanding that both body and soul are a created potentiality in the mind of God in the first step, and both body and soul are instantiated together as a unity in the second step.\(^10\)

Finally, and most importantly for Nyssen, is the third aspect, (3) the eventuality or goal in God’s creation of humankind. This is based on the template for humanity’s

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\(^6\) Nyssen, Making of Man, III. 1.
\(^7\) Ibid., III. 2.
\(^8\) Zachhuber, Human Nature in Gregory, 165.
\(^9\) Nyssen, Making of Man, XXIX. 1.
\(^10\) See § “2.2.2.3 Dual Character of Creation of Humanity,” 26-34.
creation, the *imago Dei*. Here, the template points to the end. While the *imago Dei* is corrupted in humankind at the fall, the eschatological and prelapsarian human bear the image equally for Nyssen.11 Further, the *imago Dei* allows for a participation in God’s goodness in life, through reason transforming fleshly passions into virtues, a beginning of the eternal journey of becoming more and more like God, the epektasis discussed in an earlier section points to this eternal recreating of humanity.12 For Gregory of Nyssa, the *imago Dei* describes what humanity was created to be, humanity’s current state, and humanity’s eventuality.

In summary, the theological anthropology of Gregory of Nyssa as described in *On the Making of Man (de Hominis Opificio)*, as described in Chapter 1 of this project claims:

1. Humans were/are created by God.
2. This beginning of the creation of humanity was preceded by contemplation, then carried out in a dual character as all humans ever to live were spoken into creation as a potentiality in the mind of God, then instantiated by creating each individual human, a union of soul and body through animal procreation.
3. The end of humanity is like its beginning, with a restoration of the *imago Dei* and continuation of humanity’s movement into God (epektasis), continually increasing godliness.

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12 Ibid., XVIII. 5., XVI. 9.; See discussion of epektasis in § “2.2.2.2 Form and Function in Humanity’s Bearing of the *imago Dei*,” 19-25.
4.1.2 Fundamentals of Human Origins for Charles Darwin

Given the above outline of Nyssen’s origins of humanity in terms of theological anthropology, potential places of disagreement between this and Darwin’s evolutionary anthropology are best discovered through a similar outline of human origins in these terms. To that end, the first (1) aspect to consider is who or what is acting. This presents an interesting question in the case of Darwin’s ideas around human origins, because he really did not know, and said as much. While he understood that heritable variability was ubiquitous across the species he observed, and powered natural selection that lead to speciation, he admitted he had no explanation of its origin. In *Descent* he wrote, “with respect to the causes of variability, we are in all cases very ignorant.”\(^{13}\) Of course, as noted above, Darwin was a man of his time, having no understanding of the genetics or molecular evolution of today. Thus, an answer to aspect one of Darwin’s theories of human origins, that is-who or what is acting, must be answered “heritable variability,” with a parenthetical insertion of what we now know as its own cause (random genetic mutations).

The second aspect of Darwin’s human origins to consider is (2) the action or mechanism therein. Here, Darwin was quite on track, even if lacking specific details that were not available in his time. His description of human origins is found within his theory of evolution through natural selection, which simply states that heritable variations which exist naturally in populations, under competition, will be perpetuated if beneficial to the

\(^{13}\) Darwin, *Descent*, 20.
organism, and not perpetuated when harmful, all of this acting through reproductive fitness. This is the same schema of speciation as for all species.

Last to consider is Darwin’s understanding of the ends of evolution through natural selection. Here, Darwin uses the word perfection to describe the end of humanity’s intellectual and moral faculties.14 Darwin saw humankind as continually evolving in moral qualities which would favor the good and move humanity away from doing evil.15 The eventuality of the evolution of the moral faculties of humanity being the “disinterested love for all living things, the most noble attribute of man.”16

In summary, the evolutionary anthropology of Charles Darwin as described in The Descent of Man, as described in Chapter 2 of this project claims:

(1) The human species were/are the result of sufficient heritable variability (random genetic mutations).

(2) The human species came about through evolution by natural selection in which heritable variation that helps an organism survive and procreate persists in a population when there is competition.

(3) Humanity has been and will continue to evolve towards a more moral creature that preferentially chooses good over evil.

4.1.3 Cruxes Between Nyssen’s and Darwin’s Anthropologies

When reading the above lists of fundamental aspects of human origins for Nyssen and Darwin a few things immediately stand out. Obviously, aspect one (1), who or what

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14 Ibid., 83.
15 Ibid., 85.
16 Ibid., 81, 85.
is acting, is a major point of contention. For Nyssen, God is the actor. For Darwin, heritable variation (random genetic mutation) provides the fuel for speciation. There is really no way around this difference. The only real question is to their mutual exclusivity. Here, if one holds these fundamental aspects of human origins as mutually exclusive, there is not much room for conversation between these two ways of knowing ourselves. A discussion on the necessity of mutual exclusivity between these anthropologies will begin the conclusion of this project.\(^\text{17}\)

On the second aspect (2) of knowing humanity through its origin, that is, the action or mechanism of humanity’s coming into being, there exists a little more room for discussion. In the case of Darwin, the origin of the human species is a result of evolution through natural selection, driven by heritable variability. To Nyssen God’s creative command does the work. But while there seems to be an insurmountable hurdle to finding commonality between these two ways of knowing how humanity came to be, there might be at least a small nexus between these two mechanisms of human origins. Nyssen accounts for the difference in humanity’s bearing the \textit{imago Dei} and the brokenness he observes in humanity by understanding a dual natured creation within the biblical account (Gen. 1:27). Here, the instantiation of each human that ever was or ever will be created is carried out in biological terms, at least the bodily portion sans soul.\(^\text{18}\) This seems to give a place for at least some interesting conversation if not agreement between the anthropologies of Nyssen and Darwin, as both connect the current state of human bodily reproduction to be in the manner of lower animals.

\(^{17}\) See § “5.1.1 Lack of Mutual Exclusivity,” 92-94.

\(^{18}\) See above § “2.2.2.3 Dual Character of Creation of Humanity,” 26-34.
The third aspect (3) of knowing humanity through its origin, the ultimate end or plan for humanity, is where the points of conflict begin to give way to interesting areas of agreement between the two anthropologies. Here, in the case of Nyssen’s theological anthropology, we have his beautiful idea of epektasis, humankind’s continual movement into God and godliness.\textsuperscript{19} For Darwin, the evolution of humanity is continually towards a more moral creature, one that seeks good over evil.\textsuperscript{20} Certainly, these two destinies of humanity are not equivalent as they address different scales of time with substantially different eventualities. Nevertheless, there are points of some similarity among the differences. These will be the topic of a following discussion.\textsuperscript{21}

\section*{4.2 Points of Agreement/Conversation}

While it would be easy to see a wall of impassibility between Nyssen’s and Darwin’s humankind, this does not hold humanity in the correct light, nor does it honor the depth of analysis that these seminal authors give to what makes a creature human. When one looks at the whole of their analysis, it is obvious that while one anthropology is from God, by God, and towards God, and one anthropology is sans God, there is much area of connection or agreement.

\subsection*{4.2.1 Ubiquity of Human Origin Schemas}

An obvious starting place, when seeking to investigate areas of possible agreement between Nyssen’s theological anthropology and Darwin’s evolutionary anthropology, is in their ubiquity of schemas for human origins, that is, they both have

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{19} See § “2.2.2.2 Form and Function in Humanity’s Bearing of the \textit{imago Dei},” 19-26.\\\textsuperscript{20} See § “3.2.5 Speciation towards an end,” 62-66.\\\textsuperscript{21} See § “4.2.5 Humanity moving towards an end,” 84-87.}
humanity arise in the same way as all other living things. Both Gregory of Nyssa and Charles Darwin wrote their respective anthropological investigations as continuations of earlier work describing the way all things, or in the case of Darwin all living things, came into being. For Nyssen, this was an extension of the work of his brother Basil’s *Hexaëmeron* which had, some years earlier, described the biblical creation account from Genesis 1-2, but stopped short of the creation of humankind.22 This first biblical creation account expresses the entirety of the cosmic creation, stepwise from nothing to everything. Basil’s *Hexaëmeron* is his commentary on this creation of all things in the heavens and on the earth, saving for humanity, and is expressed through nine homilies. The work of Gregory in *HO* extends this theological commentary on the biblical creation narrative to humankind. In a similar vein, the work of Darwin in *Descent* extends his thoughts of how all living things came into being in his earlier work *Origin* to include humanity. Here, he places humankind within the framework of the speciation of all living things through natural selection.

While the extension of the schema of how things came/come into being to humanity might seem like an obvious move, it is an important one. While both authors note the special nature of humanity among earth’s other creatures, there is a powerful connectedness that comes from understanding humanity’s similar origins to other life. Without this connectedness the special nature of humanity expressed in both theological and evolutionary anthropologies might lead humankind to become tyrannical towards other creatures. This is contrary to the role of humanity for both Nyssen and Darwin.

22 Saint Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaëmeron*.
Further, noticing the expansive landscape of astounding diversity of life on earth, one might be more apt to step back from rote explanations and wonder at their own coming into being.23

4.2.2 Reason as Human Distinction

Looking deeper into the anthropologies of Nyssen and Darwin, one begins to discover some points of connection much deeper than just ubiquitous frameworks. In fact, the most important distinguishing characteristic of humanity is shared between the theological and evolutionary anthropologies laid out in the previous chapters. Both Nyssen and Darwin note the human intellect, the ability to reason, as humankind’s definitive trait.

For Nyssen, the ability to reason is the primary point of connection between humanity and the *imago Dei*.24 While not located in any bodily organ such as the brain, but more so part of the human (rational) soul which innervates all parts of a person, the mind of humanity and ability to reason is definitive for Nyssen’s theological anthropology.25 As discussed in chapter one, these defining characteristics of humanity are “imparted” to humanity as “the proper adornment of [God’s] own nature.”26

Similarly for Darwin, the ability to reason is what distinguishes humanity from other animals.27 It is of note, however, that the ability to reason, or even the conscience or

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23 Further discussion of the ability of both anthropologies to connect humanity to its world follows. See § “The benefits of understanding,” 97-108.
25 See §§ 2.2.2.1 *Image Dei* as Template for Humanity; 2.2.2.2 Form and Function in Humanity’s Bearing of the *image Dei*,” 16-26.; Tripartite nature of the rational (human) soul is explained in § “Form and Function in Humanity’s bearing of the *image Dei*,” 24, fn. 46.
27 See § “3.2.4.2 Reasoning as The Ultimate Mental Faculty,” 59-62.
increased moral sense he believes to be driven my human rationality, are not unique to humanity for Darwin. The idea of connectedness that evolution by natural selection brings with it compels Darwin to preferentially note degrees of difference over ontological divisions. Especially in light of noted behaviors and characteristics of humankind’s closest relatives, Darwin notes “the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, certainly is one of degree and not of kind.”\textsuperscript{28} It is of note, however, that as mentioned in chapter 2, this seems to suggest a theoretical not empirical point for Darwin.\textsuperscript{29} While he describes some anthropomorphic mental capabilities and emotions he has observed in other mammals, he also describes the gap between these abilities and human mental faculties as “enormous.”\textsuperscript{30} It is in this enormous gap that the mental faculties Darwin mostly ascribes to humanity, such as conscience and transcendence, reside.\textsuperscript{31}

For both anthropologies, the human mind or ability to reason is definitive. It might be interesting that while reason serves as a connection in Nyssen’s theological anthropology, it is a point of distinction in Darwin’s evolutionary anthropology. This is largely due to the fact that these anthropologies are driven by fundamentally different rationales. In a theological sense, the distinction between humanity and God is impassible and concrete, thus Nyssen focuses on rationality’s ability to connect humanity to the

\textsuperscript{28} Darwin, \textit{Descent}, 81.
\textsuperscript{29} See § “3.2.4.2 Reasoning as The Ultimate Mental Faculty,” 65-69.
\textsuperscript{30} Darwin, \textit{Descent}, 41.
\textsuperscript{31} It is interesting that within a year of the publication of \textit{Descent} that Darwin seems to ascribe the mental faculty of conscience to a dog within a letter to a colleague, writing, “Since publishing \textit{Descent of Man} I have got to believe rather more than I did in dogs having what may be called a conscience.” Darwin, Charles. "A Letter Concerning Frances Power Cobbe's "Consciousness of Dogs." November 28, 1872., quoted from Cobbe, Frances Power. "The Consciousness of Dogs." Quarterly Review 133 (1872), 419-51.
divine. It is also of note that for Nyssen the rationality of humanity presents an ontological difference from other animals. Here, the human (rational) soul, is added to the vegetative soul which is seen in all living things, as well as the animal soul which adds to the nourishment of the vegetative soul a sense and perception. This is somewhat intuitive as humanity alone bears the standard of the \textit{imago Dei}, displayed in humanity through rationality. Conversely, for Darwin humanity is an animal fundamentally similar to all others. He thus uses the characteristic of reason to delineate humanity from other animals, even our most closely related non-human primates, not ontologically but in degrees as above. It is certain that in this and all characteristics of humanity, Darwin holds no fundamental difference between humankind and other animals, at least humanity’s closest relatives. Lower animals would hold similar fundamental intuitions as humanity, but not this higher rationality. This feels much the same as Nyssen’s tripartite souls that are shared in degrees among all living things. In any event, it is simply stunning that these two ways of knowing humanity, often commonly taken to stand in stark opposition, would hold agreement on the defining characteristics of humanity - the rational animal.\footnote{Nyssen, \textit{Making of Man}, VIII.8, While often thought of in context of Darwin’s description of humanity’s position among other animals, Nyssen used this term first in \textit{HO}.}

\subsection*{4.2.3 Connection Between Mind and Body}

Maybe most importantly, the human intellect or reason does not exist in a vacuum but is necessarily connected to the entirety of the creature it defines. It is maybe not surprising that both Nyssen and Darwin understand this connection of mind and body - and speak to it.
For Nyssen, as discussed in chapter one, the mind and body are intimately connected.\textsuperscript{33} It is interesting that Nyssen sees the connection of mind and body to work in both directions in humanity. He notes that “since man is a rational animal, the instrument of his body must be suitable for the use of reason.”\textsuperscript{34} Here, as previously noted, human hands are able to serve human reason by providing a way to record speech and even facilitate human speech, a communication of our intellect.\textsuperscript{35} He also notes how the senses of the body provide input to human reason through interaction of the senses with the world in a way that the mind or reason cannot accomplish on its own.\textsuperscript{36} But Nyssen also notes reason as providing a service to the human form. For example, in a similar way to Darwin, Nyssen suggests that the mind or ability to reason gives humanity an advantage over much stronger and faster animals, over whom humanity holds dominion.\textsuperscript{37}

For Darwin, the connectedness of mind and body are maybe even more pronounced, as an organism must be approached as a whole to understand its evolutionary context. Of course, Darwin situated reason and the mind within an anatomical locale, the brain. That said, this very idea of mind and body evolutionary connection has continued as a subject of discussion since the time of Darwin. For example, the expensive tissue hypothesis posits that for the metabolically costly brain to evolve to be larger, other metabolically costly tissues, such as the gut, would need to

\textsuperscript{33} See above § “2.2.2.2 Form and Function in Humanity’s Bearing of the imago Dei,” 19-26.
\textsuperscript{34} Nyssen, \textit{Making of Man}, VIII. 8.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.; See above § “2.2.2 Form and Function in Humanity’s Bearing of the imago Dei,” 19-26.
\textsuperscript{36} Nyssen, \textit{Making of Man}, X. 2-3.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., VII. 3., Darwin, \textit{Descent}, 33.
decrease in size to allow nutritional needs to be met.38 While it has been suggested that a difference in metabolic rates between primates likely account for the metabolic needs for a larger brain, the trade-off still exists, whether in metabolism or general structure.39 In reality, while the idea of a larger brain equating to gain of intelligence is mostly settled, the specifics of trade-off and timing are complicated, interrelated, and remain a point of discussion.40 What Darwin and his contemporaries knew was that human brain size was connected to body evolution.41 Maybe predictably, they also assumed that the connection of mind and body worked in both directions. Here, sounding a lot like Gregory, mental capacities allow humanity to survive and even rise to a dominant position among faster and stronger animals.42 While this is mostly seen as the ability of human reason or the human mind to provide refuge for a weak body, the interaction is powerful in the other direction as well. In this case, the intellect is served by the body as a way of expression. Again, not unlike Nyssen, the body allows the mind to act on ideas of wonder, and imagination, and beauty through its hands and use of speech.43

The connection of the human mind or reason with the human body is an interesting place of agreement between Nyssen’s and Darwin’s anthropologies which prompts much thought. Whether these two authors might simply be describing the humanity they observe in the terms that fit their anthropologies is less important. This

40 Ayala and Cela-Conde, Processes in Human Evolution, 55-57.
41 Darwin, Descent, 36-37.
42 Ibid., 35, 42.
43 Ibid., 55-60.
takes little away from the notion that mind, or human reason, the defining characteristic of humanity for both Nyssen and Darwin, is not only described to be intimately connected to the body, but in similar ways.

4.2.4 Human Origins Still Ongoing

In the context of human origins, both theological and evolutionary anthropologies share a commonality of often being misunderstood in one simple but important way, their temporal situation within human origins. Unfortunately, both anthropologies suffer from the simple misunderstanding of their actions as a single event that happened sometime in antiquity. This is a mistake. To understand humanity fully, or even correctly, one must view human origins as an ongoing event or process.

Gregory of Nyssa’s view on the creation of humankind, echoes the beginning of the creation story itself. This is a place of stark misunderstanding by many Christians on the nature of creation, driven in large part by inadequate English translations. This translation choice which dominates modern translations gets pulled through and belittles their understanding of the creation of humanity, even themselves. Some of the most popular translations render the Hebrew of Genesis 1:1 as:

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,” (NRSV)

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (NIV)

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” (KJV)

With a few minor differences, these renderings of the original Hebrew text read as if at the beginning of something, in this case time, God created these things. While mostly adequate, these common translations make the creation event seem like it was a one-off that happened some time in the deep past. There are choices made in translation
of the Hebrew perfect tense בָּרָא (to create) into English. While sentence structure and context aid the translator, there is much room left for interpretation. An alternative rendering of this first sentence of the biblical text by Everett Fox within The Five Books of Moses, situates the creation differently in time. He renders Genesis 1:1 as:

“At the beginning of God’s creating of the heavens and the earth,” (Fox)

This rendering makes all the difference in understanding the ongoing process of God’s creating. It allows for a better understanding of the specific creation of humanity within Genesis 1:26-27, which stands as the basis of Nyssen’s theological anthropology. Indeed, if creation was a single event situated in distant pre-history Nyssen’s dual natured creation must be parsed to make sense. In this case, the creation of humanity within Genesis 1:27 can only refer to the potentiality created in God’s mind, leaving each individual human creation to be akin to dominos toppling. On the other hand, in consideration of the understanding of Genesis 1:1 as found within the Fox translation, that is, God’s ongoing creative activity, Nyssen not only makes logical sense but speaks to each individual human. In this understanding of creation, each person can read God’s creative activity into the beginning of their own very lives. This not only echoes the biblical witness of God’s activity in the lives of God’s people, but depicts a closeness of the Creator to God’s human creations that grow the relationship between them.

Like Nyssen, Darwin saw the origin of humanity to be not so much a single event, but an ongoing process bearing on the entirety of humankind. In the sense of evolutionary anthropology, it is important to understand that speciation, leading to humanity or

44 Brown, Driver and Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon, 135.
45 Fox, Everett, The Five Book of Moses. (New York: Schocken Books, 1995); (Gen. 1:1)
46 Ibid.
otherwise, is a population level phenomenon.\textsuperscript{47} This understanding is in a way embedded into the common definition of what constitutes a species, the ability to interbreed, or reproductive isolation.\textsuperscript{48} This provides an interesting evolutionary unit within each species, where one might consider evolution specific to that species to be occurring, and the first reproductive isolation from other similar species to be the origination of the new.\textsuperscript{49} While a little complex, this way of understanding humanity comports well with the human origins story from the creation account, where a type of creature has an origin followed by individual instantiations of that creature. This complexity notwithstanding, the connection of the theological and evolutionary anthropologies outlined by Nyssen and Darwin is undeniable in the ongoing nature of their origins.

\textbf{4.2.5 Humanity Moving Towards an End}

With the creation of humanity understood as ongoing, and the evolution of humanity understood as ongoing, the logical next question is to what end. What is the eventuality for a created or evolved human? Interestingly, the end of the human trajectory provides both an unexpected and enriching point of connection between these two ways of knowing humankind.

For Nyssen, recalling our summations from the beginning of this chapter as well as chapter one, we understand the ending of his theological anthropology to be like the beginning.\textsuperscript{50} Here, Nyssen’s idea of epektasis describes the eternal movement of humanity towards the God whose image humanity bears. This is both an earthly and

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{50} See above § “2.2.2.2 Form and Function in Humanity’s Bearing of the imago Dei,” 19-26.
eternal progression towards God’s goodness, a perpetual movement of the soul into God.\textsuperscript{51}

For Darwin, one might expect that no end, that is, no target or trajectory, would exist for his evolutionary anthropology. Since he had no understanding of the source of the heritable variation that he posited to power natural selection, what we now know to be random genetic mutations, it would seem that no prediction of the final result of his evolutionary schema would be possible for humankind, or any other organism. But Darwin thought differently. In observation of the evolution of humanity up to his time, he suggested that there had been a move from the barbaric to the moral.\textsuperscript{52} He believed this to be the ultimate trajectory of humanity. He posited, as discussed in chapter two, that humankind would eventually evolve to most perfect morality and conscience. This is an evolution towards an ability of humanity to possess and exercise disinterested love for all living things.\textsuperscript{53} This is love that has no direct benefit to the lover, and no connection between lover and object.

As remarked previously, while the scales of these two eventualities differ, as one addresses eternity and one only addresses the earthly existence of humanity, the connection is unmistakable. Nyssen’s epektasis describes the perpetual movement of humanity towards God, who is all good. While he does not use God as the template for this good, Darwin’s eventuality for humanity is also a perpetual evolution towards all good. It is quite remarkable to realize that both of these anthropologies, coming from

\textsuperscript{52} Darwin, Descent, 83-85.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 81, 85, 94.
what many would hold as irreconcilable points of view, describe an ultimate eventuality of humankind as perpetual movement towards a loving creature that participates in and seeks the good. It is of note that while Darwin’s idea of humanity continually evolving towards a more moral creature is limited in scale to the bounds of an earthly life, the amount of change humanity might undergo is infinite. This comports well with Nyssen’s epektasis which suggests an infinite movement of humanity into an infinite God.

Even more striking is the way the intellect of humanity functions as the driver in this continual movement towards the good for both the theological anthropology of Gregory of Nyssa and the evolutionary anthropology of Charles Darwin. In the latter case, As discussed in chapter 2, Darwin notes reasoning to be humanity’s ultimate mental faculty. In fact, it is this mental capability that makes possible the abstract thinking and contemplation of outcomes which allows humankind to move from acting solely on social instincts to developing a true moral sense.54 It is this moral sense, ever becoming more attuned, ever becoming more able to guide the actions of humanity towards the moral good, all empowered by the human intellect, which defines the terminus of human evolution for Darwin.

In the case of Nyssen’s theological anthropology, as discussed in Chapter 1, the main point of connection between humanity and the imago Dei which humanity bears, is the intellect. This human intellect, Smith notes, is the characteristic which powers humanity’s ultimate progression into the divine.55 He writes, “the intellect’s recognition of the gap between our knowledge of God through revelation and the totality of God’s

54 Darwin, Descent, 72-73.
Being is, for Gregory, the source of human *eros* for God.”\(^{56}\) This provides not only a beautiful description of humanity’s pursuit of the divine and reminder of the impetus of Christian praxis, but a remarkable connection between the forces that drive the eventuality for humanity in both of these theological and evolutionary anthropologies – reason, rationality, the human intellect.

**4.3 Chapter Conclusion**

In consideration of the points of contention and agreement stated above, and the broader discussion of the theological and evolutionary anthropologies set out in chapters one and two, one might make a critical observation. This discovery is simply that Nyssen and Darwin might not so much be saying contrarian things in their anthropologies, but more so just different things, or even similar things from different angles. While one would be naïve to discount an air of apologetic within each authors’ work, as it is meant to sway a reader to understand and apply their way of knowing, their anthropologies stand on their own.

**4.3.1 Authors’ Perspectives**

Gregory of Nyssa, as a theologian and bishop of the church, has an expected frame of reference for the understanding of humanity discussed within *HO*. Indeed, for Nyssen, using what he knows of God to guide his assessment of humanity is somewhat of a trademark. Smith notes this important point, commenting “[Nyssen] reasons not from the human experience to the divine, but from the divine to the human.”\(^{57}\) Nyssen simply

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\(^{56}\) J. Warren Smith, “*Nous* and the God Beyond Thought in Gregory of Nyssa,” (unpublished manuscript, February 19, 2023), Microsoft Word file., quoting from “Commentarius in Canticum Canticorum” 15, GNO VI, 439.

knows and describes humanity within a divine context. To him God, as Creator, made/makes everything.

To Nyssen, the following points would be likely necessities of his anthropology:

1. The One God of Israel, with whom Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are One, is the Creator God of all humanity.

2. The Creator God of (1) created/creates everything.

3. The creation of everything is inclusive of humanity and individual humans through a dual natured schema where every human being is created first as a potentiality in God’s mind, then instantiated through animal reproduction.

4. The second step of creation not only refers to the physical body of humanity but the human (rational) soul which is imparted by God with each human instantiation.

5. Humankind bears the imago Dei (bears the image of God).

6. Humankind is continually moving forward towards God, increasing in participation in God and God’s infinite goodness.

Charles Darwin’s frame of reference is similarly overt. As somewhat of a native naturalist, soon to become an evolutionary anthropologist, even if such a thing did not exist during his time, he sees humanity in these terms. A naturalist/scientist/anthropologist sees humanity within the context of an observable nature/world. This is Darwin’s perspective in describing humanity in Descent. Of course, these observations about humankind are formulated within the context of the ideas Darwin expressed in Origin. An important note here is that Darwin does not speak to the
presence or absence of God in his anthropology. As a matter of fact, he references belief in God in *Descent.*

To Darwin, the following points would be likely necessities of his anthropology:

1. The origin (speciation) of humanity took place through evolution by natural selection acting over time by accumulation of heritable variable traits favorable to reproductive fitness.
2. Evolution by natural selection is powered by the presence of large amounts of heritable variation, understood contemporarily as random genetic mutations, within a population.
3. The evolution by natural selection in (1) describes the origin (speciation) of all organisms.
4. Humans reproduce as other animals and share many qualities with them, especially apparent in close evolutionary relatives (other apes).
5. Human evolution is ongoing and observable over large expanses of time.
6. Humans are evolving towards a more moral creature who seeks the good not only for itself but all creatures.

### 4.3.2 Introduction of a Nuanced Theological Anthropology for the Contemporary Church

A nuanced theological anthropology should encompass as many of the aforementioned necessities as possible. While a Creationist might ascribe to a literal interpretation of the biblical text which Nyssen did not, and a stark naturalist might demand that nothing exists outside of what they can observe, which Darwin did not, in between these views live the majority of contemporary people. A quick look for points of exclusivity between the necessities above finds little points of concern, especially for a
Methodist such as your author, who revel in the mysteries of the Christian faith. Again, the approaches of these two anthropologies seem more to be saying different things from different perspectives, than saying exclusive things.

In fact, if one can agree with the following, all points of the anthropological necessities listed above can be accepted.

1. A literal interpretation of the biblical text is not the only valid one.
   (Certainly, this is not a requirement for Nyssen.)

2. Belief in God as the Creator of humanity and all other living things does not require a belief that every living species was created as adult perfect forms.
   (Nyssen excludes this as well as the instantiation of each individual human will result in a baby, not an adult.)

3. Belief in God as Creator does not require that God be the only actor or acting force in the origins of all living things.
   (As in the rationale following (2) above, animal procreation is used in human creation).

4. Not every action or reaction in the cosmos is carried out by God.
   (Free will discounts this idea.)

5. Accepting evolution by natural selection as the process responsible for human origins in no way excludes belief in God as Creator of humanity.

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58 The United Methodist Church through which your author serves as full time clergy, is quite willing to leave some of the inexplicable things of the Christian faith as just that, unexplained. For instance, the way in which Jesus is present within the elements of communion is taken as a “holy mystery,” The United Methodist Book of Worship. Edited by Thomas Anderson Langford III, Hoyt L Hickman and Diana Sanchez, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2014), 39.

59 In actuality, Nyssen would likely ascribe to a more zygotic definition of creation, as this is the point in human development that the entirety of what is required to make an adult human in complete.
(These ideas say different not exclusive things.)

Acceptance of these points might lead one to a theological anthropology such as:

Humanity was and is created by the One God of Israel who Christians understand to be triune, inclusive of the Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and Spirit. The role of evolution of species by natural selection in this process is affirmed, while the specific interactions with creation are a mystery. Humanity bears the image of God which gives humanity the ability to follow a call to ever greater participation in God and God’s goodness, from the present to eternity.
5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The Benefits of Understanding

5.1.1 The Lack of Mutual Exclusivity

The theological and evolutionary anthropologies described and compared in the chapters above represent authoritative and rich ways of knowing humanity. These two anthropologies, which are often perceived to hold mutual exclusivity due to superficial understanding, are not at their cores, mutually exclusive. This is despite very vocal voices proclaiming otherwise.\(^1\) Darwin speaks loudly into the misconceptions here when he writes, “ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge.”\(^2\) The mutual exclusivity of theological and evolutionary anthropologies, especially in the authoritative examples described in the project, is just not there. As Nyssen holds a Creator God as the source of Humanity and Darwin suggests natural selection to be the way humans came into being, it is clear that these two ideas are not so much saying contrary things but simply different things. They are describing the origin of the human species through two distinct epistemologies which do not negate each other. In fact, Nyssen, as any of his day, knew nothing of evolution and so can not exclude it, nor does Darwin exclude the possibility of the existence of a Creator God. In fact, most contemporary evolutionary anthropologists would not demand that there not be a god, just that one is not necessary for evolution by natural selection. Interestingly, Darwin

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\(^1\) For examples of loudly communicated creationist and evolutionist ideologies see § “1.2 Contemporary Anthropologies and Church Decline,” 4-8.

\(^2\) Darwin, *Descent*, vi.
leaves open the door for God to play a part in the evolution of humankind by noting that the continual movement of humanity towards a more moral creature to be guided not only by “the approbation of our fellow men” but guided “in later times by deeply religious feelings.”³ Here, Darwin is giving religiosity the ability to further the evolution of high order reason. Higher order reasoning is the very thing that moves humanity towards a more moral creature. So maybe this is not surprising. He also suggests that the evolution of reason within humanity gives humankind the ability to contemplate God, writing:

The feeling of religious devotion is a highly complex one, consisting of love, complete submission to an exalted and mysterious superior, a strong sense of dependence, fear, reverence, gratitude, hope for the future, and perhaps other elements. No being could experience so complex an emotion until advanced in his intellectual and moral faculties to at least a moderately high level.⁴

Darwin seems to, at the very least, allow for a degree of acquaintance with the divine which would function as sort of a self-enforcing feedback loop, where evolved reason within humanity provides a glimpse of God, which then reenforces the evolution of more reason to contemplate God more fully.⁵

From the theological side this is by no means excluded. Nyssen leaves a door open for evolution to have a place in the origins of humanity by noting that the second step of the dual nature of humankind’s creation is like other animals. While ancients would have no way of describing the origins of species through natural selection, this

³ Darwin, Descent, 86.
⁴ Ibid., 62.
⁵ See above § “4.2.5 Humanity moving towards an end,” 89-92.
leaves space for evolution to at least coexist if not play a part. These two writers are simply describing what they see from their individual perspectives. In fact, there exist many points of contact between these anthropologies that go far in enriching both ways of knowing.

5.1.2 Better Evolutionary Anthropology Through Understanding Theological Anthropology

It is of some note that the evolutionary anthropology as proposed by Charles Darwin in *Descent* has a tendency to be misconstrued in such a way that the individual can become somewhat lost. While it is true that the mechanisms of evolution/speciation by natural selection works through individuals, the phenomenon describes the effects at the level of a population, and even then across deep time. With this scale of time largely outside of human conceptions, evolutionary anthropology can lead to a crux in knowing oneself only through this lens. Determinism by genetics can result, in which one has a feeling of being trapped in one’s genetics, used by this population level deep time process over which an individual has no control. This is not actually the case, as various environmental contributions, from the molecular to the organismal levels, have impacts on both the timing and degree of expression of genetic material. This is made obvious by the realization that the chimpanzee, humankind’s closest extant non-human ape relative, only differs from humans by about 4% on genetic terms. But these statistics have a hard

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6 For comments on the evolutionary timing of the creation of humanity see § “5.3.1 Timing of human origins,” 111-112.
time countering the feeling that in obvious areas like genetic predispositions to disease, or the heredity of intelligence, or familial addiction, or even in more benign things like male pattern baldness, one’s genetics are in control.

While some faith traditions, such as those who adopt a doctrine of predestination, are often accused of a similar determinism, Gregory of Nyssa helps center an anthropology on the individual by the characteristic of reason that connects humanity to God through the *imago Dei*. Here, the free will or sovereignty of humanity, especially noted in humanity’s ruling status in relation to other creatures, is due to the participation of humanity in God through the rational nature imparted by God to humankind. This is a pivotal point around which the greater good that is pursued within both theological and evolutionary anthropologies can be brought to the level of the individual as a course of betterment for themselves as well as a betterment of humanity.

Beyond easing the discomfort of genetic determinism that too often accompanies an evolutionary anthropology if held singly and in a wooden way, a glaring point at which a theological anthropology can inform an evolutionary anthropology is in addressing what might be referred to as the Peggy Lee effect. In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor uses a song by this popular Jazz singer, “Is that all there is?” to describes a common feeling of contemporary people who often feel trapped in the finite nature and emptiness of what they see. He describes a malaise of immanence in which a lack of feeling of significance and meaning are dominant features of living within this immanent
It is interesting but maybe not surprising, that the same humanity that would define itself in evolutionary terms, with actions working in deep time at the level of populations, would turn to definitions of truth which only can originate from this immanent domain, a self-centered, self-sufficient, enclosed space sans transcendence. It is as if humanity lost a sense of its position within the cosmos, and so turned decidedly inward to find it.

Curiously, in a similar way in which a theological anthropology can mediate the loss of self that can result from a stringent evolutionary anthropology, it can also serve as a vehicle to move out from a self-centeredness and inward focus of existing within what Taylor calls an immanent frame. Nyssen provides the ability to answer Peggy Lee’s musical question in emphatic terms, informing anyone interested enough to ask, that in contemplation of the divine one might spend an eternity being astounded at how much more there is.

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9 Ibid., 539. The idea of an immanent frame being something that is inherent to secular humanism might strike some Christians as strange, especially within United Methodist denominations the idea the God is with us as opposed to across a transcendent divide is fundamental – Emmanuel, “God is with us.” (Matthew 1:23).
5.1.3 Better Theological Anthropology Through Understanding Evolutionary Anthropology

The strongest statement in favor of adopting a theological anthropology that allows for other ways of knowing, exemplified here in the area of evolutionary anthropology, is that it allows for a more holistic view of one’s faith. As discussed in the introduction to this project, a parsed worldview in which one keeps their theological answers and scientific answers, or historical answers, or whatever might not comport, in different drawers of their mind, is uncomfortable at best.11 In the worst case, which according to the numbers of PEW Research we read in the introduction is the reality, the theological drawer space usually diminishes continually until the drawer is cleaned out and replaced with more modern data points.12 This possible ultimate eventuality of a parsed worldview is not the only danger, however. The intermediate state, which too often will lead to a loss of faith, is a compartmentalization of faith in such a way that it is only allowed to be drawn upon as a way of knowing or living at specific times. Here, maybe church attendance will seem appropriate, or an occasional wedding or funeral, maybe even a minute or so for a rote prayer before a meal. These programmed interactions with one’s faith compartment of worldviews neuters one’s faith to the point of having almost no influence on one’s life. The converse of this, that is, a holistic integration of worldviews where all ways of knowing inform all a person is and thinks and does, sounds much more like what is called for throughout the Christian witness

11 See § “1.2 Contemporary Anthropologies and Church Decline,” 4-8.
12 Ibid.
written within the prophets, the psalms, and the gospels.\textsuperscript{13} Note here that this is more than allowing other ways of knowing to inform a theological anthropology, it is paving the way for a theological anthropology to inform all other ways of knowing. This gives a contemporary person the ability to take any point, from what they might spend on coffee per day, to how they treat their neighbor, to views on war, even to things like how one learns or contemplates, to be informed by all ways of knowing, inclusive of the theological. This decompartmentalization of worldviews helps to bring the divine down from a place of transcendent ether, far apart from humanity, to a more meaningful and impactful position of being with humanity, in humankind as humankind is in God.\textsuperscript{14} Not only is a parsed worldview uncomfortable, it oversimplifies and diminishes the impacts of important ways of knowing oneself.

5.1.4 Stronger Sense of Connectedness to All Living Things

Both theological and evolutionary anthropologies tie humanity deeply to all living things. Interestingly, both of these ways of knowing ourselves do so at some level by describing the connection of an exalted humanity to lesser animals/organisms. For Nyssen, this is part of humanity’s bearing of the \textit{imago Dei}. Here, humanity exercises sovereignty and rule over creation and over those lower creatures who are driven more by instincts than reason. In this theological anthropology, the timing of creation, making of a

\textsuperscript{13} Of note here is Abraham Heschel’s \textit{The Prophets}, especially his chapter on Hosea in which the prophet necessarily lets God into every part of his life.; Abraham Joshua Heschel, \textit{The Prophets}, (Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers, 2017), 39-60.

\textsuperscript{14} (1 John 4)
world suitable for humanity to then inhabit and govern displays some of this connection.\textsuperscript{15} For Darwin, it was more about dominance coming directly from the intellect of humankind. Here, he notes that humanity has “spread more widely than any other highly organized form.”\textsuperscript{16} Darwin goes on to describe how humanity has “invented and is able to use weapons, tool, traps… has made rafts or canoes for fishing or crossing over to neighboring fertile islands. He has discovered the art of making fire.”\textsuperscript{17} Through these abilities stemming from reason, humanity has become pre-eminence in the world. Held rightly, neither of these anthropologies should lead to either misuse of other creatures or oppression of humanity. Of course, in both cases this has not proved so true.

This is where less wooden theological and evolutionary anthropologies, that is, those which allow for other ways of knowing ourselves as well as our world, can help us orient ourselves more correctly towards other creatures with whom we share a finite space. While both theological and evolutionary anthropologies hold humanity as something quite special among other creatures, the connectedness goes much further than one of monarch and subject. It is in realizing these deeper connections that each anthropology has the capability of tempering an overreach, either by its own anthropology or another. For Nyssen, the sovereignty of humanity, humankind’s “dominion over the fish of the sea, and the beasts of the earth, and the fowls of the heaven, and the cattle, and all the earth,” is not only a statement of rule and dominion but

\textsuperscript{15} Nyssen, \textit{Making of Man}, II. 2., IV. 1.
\textsuperscript{16} Darwin, \textit{Descent}, 33.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
care and responsibility. It can be none other than this given the archetype, Christ, of the *imago Dei* humanity is created to bear. It would be a deep misconstrual of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to ascribe to Him this type of oppressive rule. More so, this same life, death, and resurrection holds a perfect demonstration of how humanity is intended to treat all creatures over which they rule.

Darwin makes a similar point but from a different angle. To him, the major thrust of his project describing the evolution of humanity by natural selection is to show the connectedness of humanity to all other living things. In *Descent* Darwin sets out to answer whether his summations from *Origin* apply to humanity, and he concludes that they do. He even notes that in the most definitive characteristic of humanity, the intellect or ability to reason, that the “difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, certainly is one of degrees not of kind.”¹⁸ Long before *Origin* or *Descent*, in his notebook of 1837 he writes “Animals our fellow brethren in pain, disease, death and suffering, and famine… our companion in our amusements, they may partake, from our origin in one common ancestor we may be netted together.”¹⁹ It is hard to imagine a closer relationship with non-human animals than those expressed in Darwin’s evolutionary anthropology. Along with Nyssen’s theological anthropology and the disposition that it suggests for humanity towards creation, these anthropologies offer

¹⁸ Darwin, *Descent*, 81.
corrective position to those who might abuse the life with which humanity shares living space.

5.1.5 Statement of Human Equality

The connection to all life found within the anthropologies of Nyssen and Darwin necessarily extends to humanity. It is here that these anthropologists speak in definitively anti-slavery terms on the equality of humanity. For Nyssen, a stance of human equality and anti-slavery flows naturally and maybe predictably from his anthropology. Hans Boersma says of Gregory, “No other church father is as unequivocally and passionately opposed to slavery as Gregory.”20 It is his connection of humanity to the divine that disallows the oppression of one human by another. Boersma notes that for Nyssen the bearing of the image Dei “implies… a radical ‘sameness’ and equality of human beings.”21 Here, the question for any Christian is that if one truly holds as true the belief that humanity bears the imago Dei, how can it be possible to oppress and enslave the bearer? He goes on to highlight the notion that Nyssen’s anthropology is eschatological in nature, and that the strong anti-slavery stance of Nyssen thus comes from the “eschatological unity of all human beings in Christ.”22 Along these same lines, speaking not only to the basic equality of humanity but specifically against slavery itself, Ilaria Ramelli notes that in Nyssen’s Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes, Gregory declares the

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21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 155.
notion that one human could own another to be an “outlandish presumption” fundamentally “against God.” Here Ramelli notes that despite within “an ancient economy based on slavery” Nyssen stood out in unique full condemnation of slavery of any kind, that is, “both de jure and de facto.”

For Darwin, while the language of his day as reflected in Descent can certainly be uncomfortable to a contemporary reader, he came down strongly on the equality of humanity and against slavery. Alive during the American and English debates surrounding slavery, and continually troubled by this ability of humanity to oppress humanity, there is some evidence that Darwin’s idea of a continually evolving more moral humanity is driven by an abolitionist viewpoint. Indeed, the introduction to Descent suggests a motive in equality. Darwin writes that “during the many years I collected notes on the origin or descent of man… [it was] with the intention not to publish.” He later then listed as an impetus of the publication “the value of the differences of the so-called races of man.” Within a section of Descent centering a discussion of humanity’s continual evolution towards a an ever increasing moral good, Darwin solidifies his anti-slavery position, writing that “Slavery, although in some ways

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24 Ibid., 87.
25 See § “3.2.3.3 Darwin and the Value of the So-called Races of Humanity,” 57-62
27 Darwin, Descent, v.
28 Ibid.
beneficial during ancient times, is a great crime; yet it was not so regarded until quite recently, even by the most civilized nations.”  

29 James Moore speaks to Darwin’s overarching mindset for humanity by noting that “[Darwin’s] vision of natural-history, for all its haphazardness, was direction, meliorative, and hopeful.”  

30 To Moore, this mindset is driven at least in part by Darwin’s deep abolitionist stance. Interestingly, Moore describes the depth of Darwin’s conviction by noting that “after the Beagle voyage Darwin became a follower of the most extreme moral-force abolitionist of his day… the founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society, William Lloyd Garrison.”  

31 While the degree to which Darwin’s anti-slavery views influenced his ideas on humankind’s evolution towards an increased morality remains unsettled, Darwin’s staunch abolitionist views are clear.

5.2 Necessity of a Nuanced Theological Anthropology for the Mission of the Contemporary Church

As discussed in the introduction, Charles Taylor describes the contemporary American (Western) landscape to be one in which religious belief or faith in God is one of many options in ways of defining both ourselves and our world.  

32 Too often though, this is taken to mean that to get numbers up in a given church or denomination, the Christian message needs to morph into a market friendly stripped down feel good speech

29 Darwin, Descent, 75.
31 Ibid., 575.
that will sell. This seems to suggest that the Gospel message is no longer Good News. Another option, is that the Gospel is still Good News, but nobody needs the message in our contemporary context. A final possibility, is that the Gospel is still Good News, and people still need to hear it, but there is some sort of barrier keeping the message from reaching its target rightly.

It is the position of your author and this project, that this last possibility is what is currently underpinning the decline in American churches. While there are assuredly ample opportunities for those outside of Christianity to build their own barriers to belief, that is mostly outside of the purview of the church, both at the level of leadership and parishioners. At most levels of engagement, contemporary marketing notwithstanding, it is hard to control what someone else thinks. What the church can control, however, is its own witness. As mentioned above, the loudest voices in the contemporary American context are too often creationist in nature. This allows dominant Christian witness to appear outside of what can be taken as a rational choice for a growing number of Americans. The bottom line is that if it is necessary to believe that the earth is four thousand years old, or that the evidence of speciation by natural selection is a lie, or that humans lived with dinosaurs, to be allowed to believe in a God that loves them from everlasting to everlasting, most contemporary Americans will seek love elsewhere. The contemporary church in America, if it is to provide a cogent witness of the Gospel, must uncouple these ideas in the public sphere.

Unfortunately, the church either seems to have no interest in doing this, or what is more likely, cannot imagine how to do so. This latter view is where this project can help.
For example, the United Methodist Church, within which your author serves full time as a pastor, professes to allow for different ways of knowing to speak to their own areas of expertise. This was mentioned in the introduction to this project.33 That said, few leaders seem to be interested or able to communicate this idea, even though it is expressed in the governing document of the United Methodist Church. For instance, congregations continue to be encouraged by church and conference leadership to visit sites of overt creationist propaganda, with no explanation as to why this might need to be reconsidered, or even better discussed. This is likely driven by a simple lack of understanding and any effort to do so. It is hard, however, to fault the pastorate for this, as the day of a pastor is generally quite overfilled to the point daily choices have to be made as to what to not engage. This is an area where church leadership simply must make this sort of work and education a priority if the church is to fulfill its role of making disciples. This project consolidates some of the views and positions in play and endeavors to make this more plausible work.

5.3 Closing Thoughts and Speculations

5.3.1 Timing of Human Origins

With a good measure of careful reluctance, it is not possible to gloss over the timing of creation suggested in the evolution/speciation by natural selection outlined in the thoughts of Darwin above, especially given some further possible interactions with Nyssen’s theological anthropology. In the beginning of this section Darwin’s own words

33 See § “1. Introduction,” 1.
seemed to open this door. On the highest advancement of reason/intellect within humanity he writes, “The feeling of religious devotion is a highly complex one… No being could experience so complex an emotion until advanced in his intellectual and moral faculties to at least a moderately high level.” Here, Darwin is suggesting that the contemplation of the divine requires an evolved intellect and the ability to reason which is responsible for humanity’s moral sense. Here it is important to remember that for Darwin humans are separated from other animals, especially our closest relatives, by degrees not ontology. A quick glance to the creation story of Genesis 1, with its description of life emerging first from water, and ending in the creation of humankind, might lead to speculation as to where or when Darwin’s readiness to contemplate the divine might fit. The words of Nyssen add to this pontification by suggesting that God created humanity last, “so as to prepare beforehand for him material for his formation.” Nyssen’s tripartite nature of the soul of humanity provides further points for contemplation, as the vegetative soul of all living things, and the animal soul of lower animals, are complimented by the place of intellect and reason, the human soul, in creation of each person. While reluctant to make the mistake of overreaching common to this type of endeavor, it is disingenuous to not acknowledge that the above connections suggest an evolutionary timing for the creation account of humanity described in the Genesis 1 account of human origins. Here, if the ability to reason was limiting for the

34 Darwin, Descent, 62.
35 Nyssen, Making of Man, III. 2.
bearing of the *imago Dei*, one might time the creation of humanity with evidence of the first human. This would place God’s creation of the first human, assuming *homo sapiens* to be the first hominin with the level of intellect and reason to rightly bear the *imago Dei*, to have been around 200,000 years ago on the continent of Africa.\(^{36}\) While purely a mental exercise, this timing and the locale it brings along with it might have far reaching implications in both theological and evolutionary ways of knowing oneself.

### 5.3.2 Closing Summary Remarks

The theological and evolutionary anthropologies laid out in the chapters above are intended to be fair and true representations of the work of these two authoritative seminal authors in their fields. If in any area this has failed, it has been in ignorance and not due to any intention to obfuscate or misinterpret the author’s intent. *On the Making of Man (de Hominis Opificio)* and *The Descent of Man* persist as beautiful and deep descriptions of how humanity might know or come to know itself. In the above analysis these two sets of ideas, and indeed these two men, are put into a loose conversation with the intention of negating the necessity for a winner or loser. This conversation has supplied unexpected junctures where interesting areas of agreement give much space for contemplation. These areas highlight the lack of mutual exclusivity between these two anthropologies and offer intellectual space to ponder both movement into God and the greater good. This is your author’s hope.

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Biography

William J Nielsen became interested in scientific research through a student research opportunity in the microbial pathogenesis lab of Robert Moore at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In his senior year of a microbiology major, with experience in protein science and an award for outstanding undergraduate research, he left Tennessee to join an x-ray crystallography lab at the Harvard Institutes of Medicine in Boston. This was 1998. After a year’s experience he joined a mid-sized genomics company (Genome Therapeutics, Waltham MA) that was partnered with the Human Genome Project. Following the publication of the draft sequence of the human genome, he joined the molecular evolution lab of Greg Wray at Duke University (2003). With an eye towards pursuing a masters in information systems, he completed his bachelor’s degree in 2013 with a dual major of biology and information systems from Liberty University. After over a decade of Molecular evolution research at Duke a call to ministry became impossible to ignore. In 2014 William began a Masters of Divinity program at Duke Divinity School, where he became a fellow in the Thriving Rural Congregations program. He began pastoring a small church in 2016 and graduated Duke Divinity School with an Masters of Divinity in 2018. A strong need to reconcile the misunderstood relationship between creation and evolution spurred the project before you, with William entering the Doctor of Ministry program at Duke Divinity School in 2019. This thesis is the culmination of that program.
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