

Theological Anthropology Table

Participants: Harold Netland (moderator), Paul Copan, Jim Stump, Bradley Gundlach, Farlana Rana, Vicki Campbell, John Hill, Todd Saur (secretary)

Summary: The participants focused on the correspondence of humanity with the rest of creation (particularly with animal life) while maintaining the uniqueness of humanity within creation.

Questions:

In what sense(s) are humans unique?

Agreement/Consensus:

- A growing minority of anthropologists are arguing persuasively for human qualitative exceptionalism (in terms of cognitive recognition and utilization of symbolism [including abstract thought/religion], theory of mind, etc...).
- Humans are unique because human beings are the sole species identified as persons and recognized as having second-level, evaluative desires about our desires and relationships (though the nature and implications of personhood do need to be carefully considered and potentially qualified).
- Given contemporary developments and perspectives, the distinctions that need to be assessed have become increasingly complicated (i.e. distinctions not only between human and animal life but also between human and technological intelligence).

Ongoing Conversation:

- Granted personhood as the basis for relationality, what is personhood and what is entailed in understanding humans as persons? Are humans absolutely unique in possessing certain faculties or relatively unique in the functional level of those faculties? For example, do animals have souls? And, if so, are those animal souls antecedent likenesses to human personhood?
- Are animals purely instinctual or do animals experience genuine relationships of intentionality and decision?

If we accept evolution (even for discussion), what are we to make of the imago dei?

Agreement/Consensus:

- Given common associations of evolution with atheism, the term “evolution” needs to be specifically clarified (i.e. as an indication of process rather than of independent brute ancestry – a distinction recognized by the Princetonians as well) and carefully utilized within evangelical discussion (i.e. in reference to general theory, the designation “evolutionary creation” may be preferable over “theistic evolution”).

- In speaking of the miraculous (and specifically of creation as miraculous), distinction should be recognized between soft miracles or mediate creation (those that have identifiable natural processes involved) and hard miracles or immediate creation (those that are entirely unexplainable by natural means of mechanism – not simply timing).
- Whether the imago dei is in reference to biological hardware, to an emergence from biology/software, or to an infusion of capacity, these capacities are necessary (i.e. morality, etc...) but not sufficient for us to image God without the interaction of relationship with God. The capacity for unique, intentional relationship with God is the essence of the imago dei within humanity.

Ongoing Conversation:

- Similar to the first question, in what ways is the capacity for relationship with God unique to humanity? In other words, given Romans 1, how do human beings image God uniquely within a created world that reflects the eternal power and divine nature of God?
- What is the role of the miraculous in theological and scientific understanding? And how is the miraculous to be identified, understood, and evaluated?

Are suffering and death a natural part of the created order or are they a result of the fall?

Agreement/Consensus:

- Mortality was built into creation as creation, while not yet fallen, was incomplete (not yet glorified).
- While physical death may be debated as either natural and/or consequential, relational death clearly resulted from the fall.
- Animal pain and suffering is under-determined in our understanding of the levels of animal consciousness and deliberation – both of physical and of relational pain.

Ongoing Conversation:

- While the relational consequences of sin are emphasized, the reality and/or means of inherited depravity (specifically in view of Romans 5) remain a point for discussion. What are the means and consequences of human sinfulness throughout human history?
- On what level do animals experience and comprehend pain?

Is a historical first pair of progenitors required by orthodox theology or is a representative first couple good enough?

Agreement/Consensus:

- The language may be literal or representative but both Paul and Jesus do reference at least an analogical representation in innocence and then in sin.

- Population studies raise questions regarding the viability of Adam and Eve as historical progenitors.

Ongoing Conversation:

- What role should scientific incredulity be allowed in theological faith and exegesis?
- Did the references by Paul and by Jesus refer to singular persons and events or to representative communities and processes?