

The Limits of Natural Science and Theology



By Fr. Michael Chaberek O.P., S.T.D.

Part I

The Three Levels of Human Knowledge

Part II

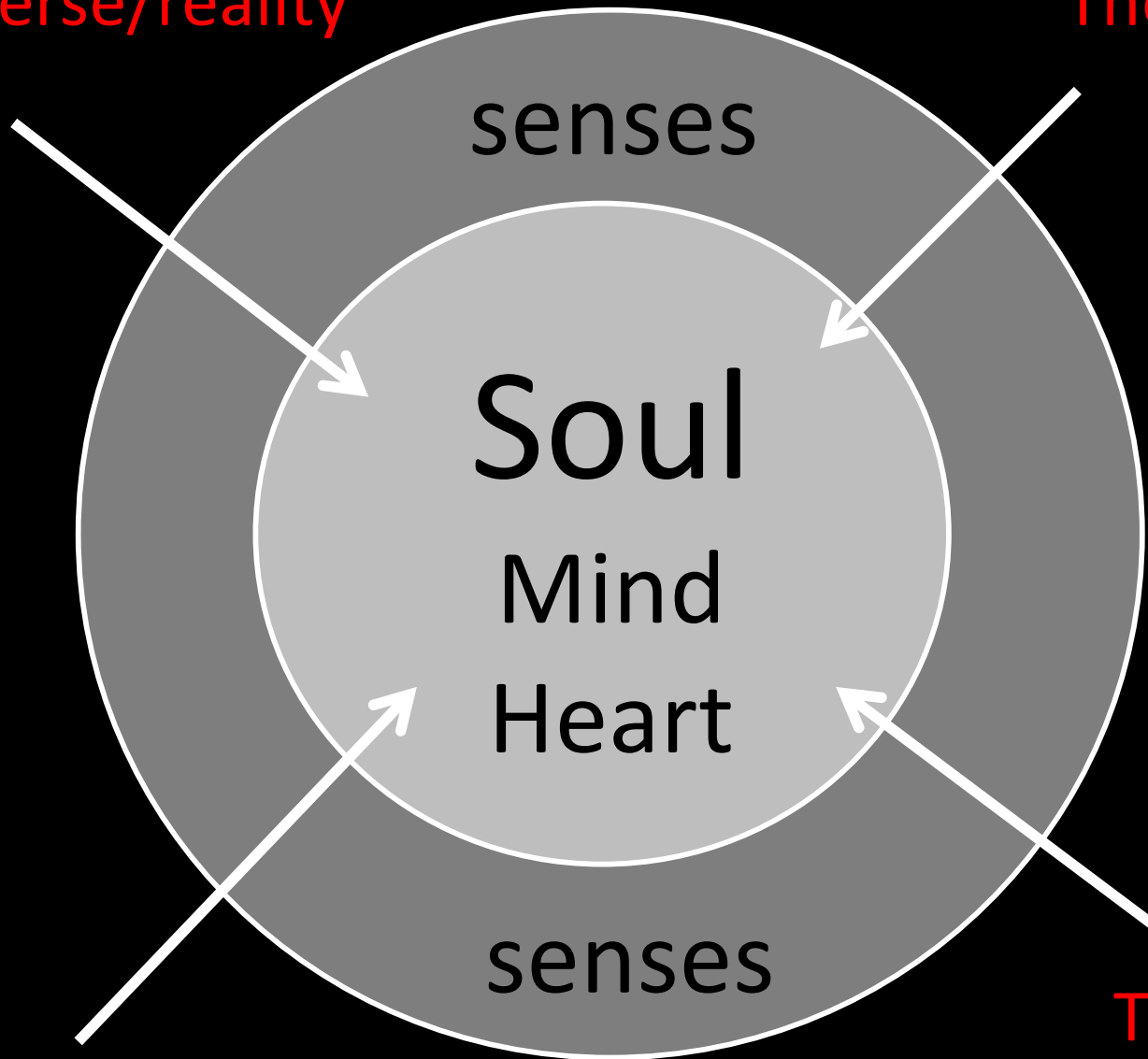
Some tensions between
Science and Faith in the past

Part III

The limits of Science and Theology

The Universe/reality

The Universe



senses

Soul

Mind

Heart

senses

The Universe

The Universe

Visible reality → Senses → Knowledge



Invisible reality → ??? → Knowledge

NATURALISM – Science (natural science) can know everything; all human knowledge comes from science or natural experience.

MATERIALISM – All phenomena can be explained by reference to material causes (changes in material beings)

CHRISTIANITY – some part of human knowledge comes from science which studies the material universe, but some comes from the supernatural revelation



SCIENCE

The search for:

- particular causes of a particular type of phenomena**
- focused entirely on the efficient and the material cause**
- uses methods such as observation, and experiment (repetitive)**

PHILOSOPHY



Search for:

-ARCHE – one unifying principle of all reality

-speaks about the entire being: visible and invisible, material and non-material, real and ideal

-uses natural reason alone (no revelation)

THEOLOGY



Search for:

-an ultimate explanation of all reality and its fulfilment

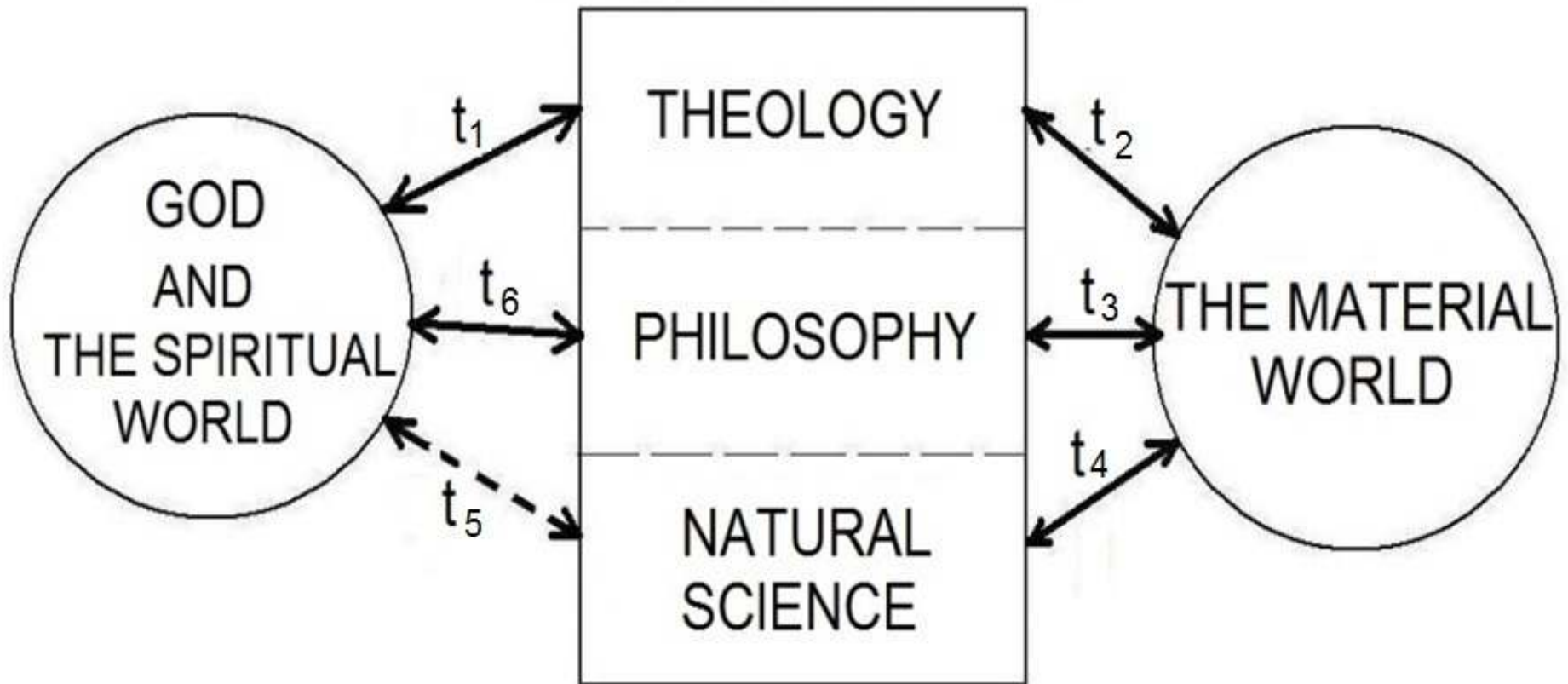
-speaks about the historical supernatural events

-uses natural reason and supernatural revelation

Definitions

- **Theology** **supernatural** knowledge about God or the universe
- **Philosophy** **natural** knowledge about God or the universe
- **Science** **natural** knowledge about the universe

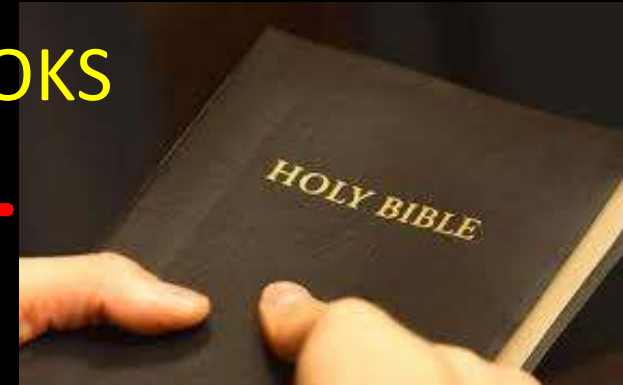
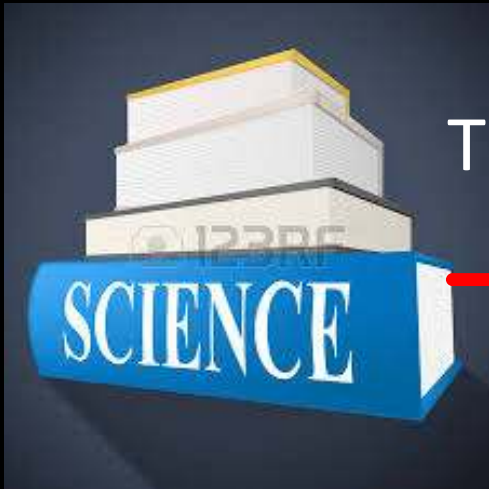
HUMAN KNOWLEDGE



t - truth

Catholic Position

The Concept of the **TWO BOOKS**



“Since **truth cannot contradict truth**, we define that every statement contrary to the enlightened truth of the faith is totally false and we strictly forbid teaching otherwise to be permitted”.

- Fifth Lateran Council, Session 8, Dec 19, 1513,
- Leo XIII, Providentissimus Deus 1893,
- John Paul II, 1996

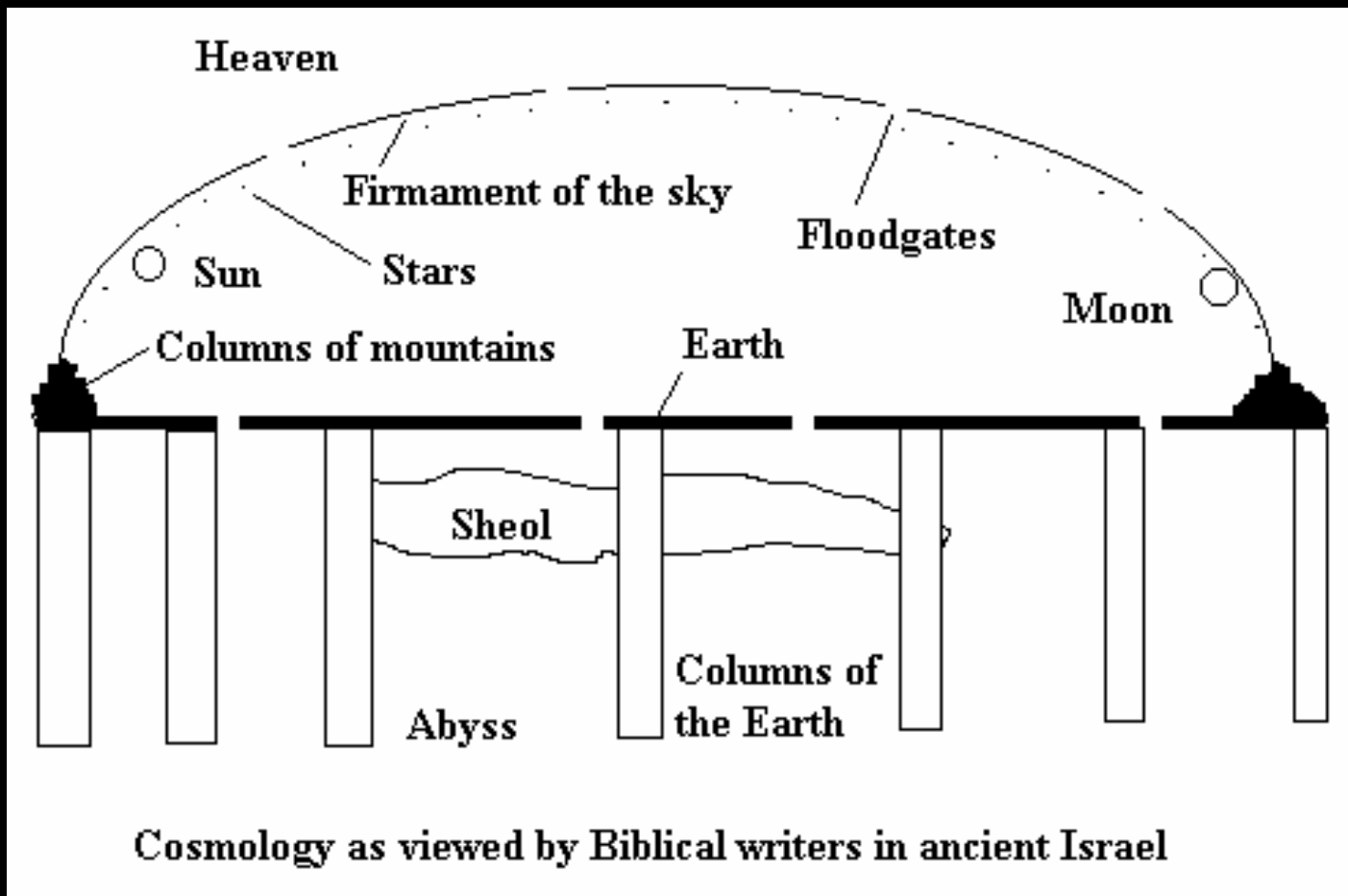
Part II

How Science Challenged Common Opinions in the Past?



The shape of the Earth





Isaiah 40:22 It is he who sits **above the circle of the earth**, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in.

Circle is not the same as Sphere or a Globe

The Bible is compatible with both a **flat Earth** and a **spherical Earth**

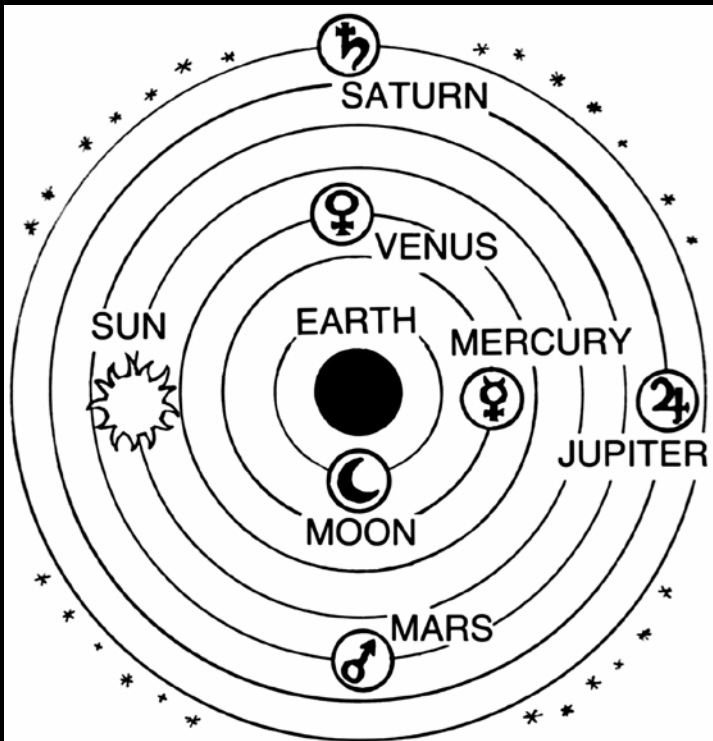
The Solar System (geocentrism vs. heliocentrism)



Ptolemy
2 c. AD

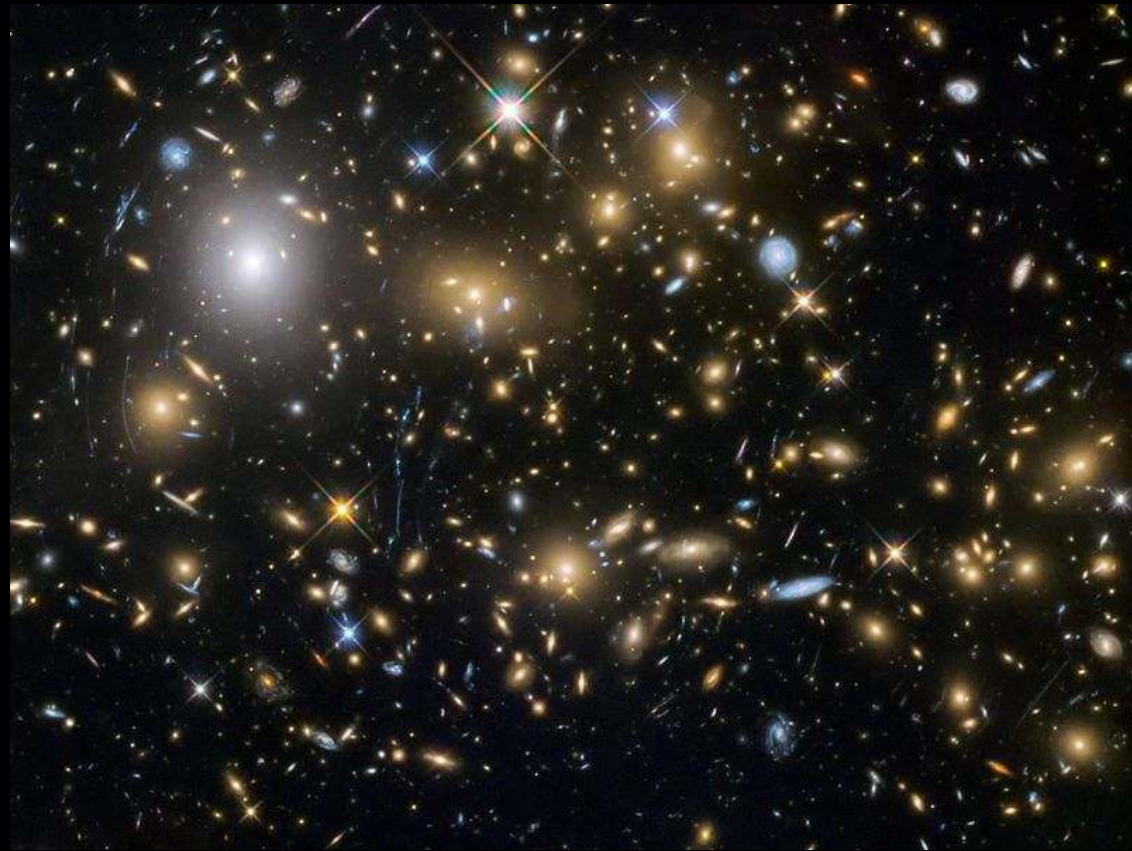
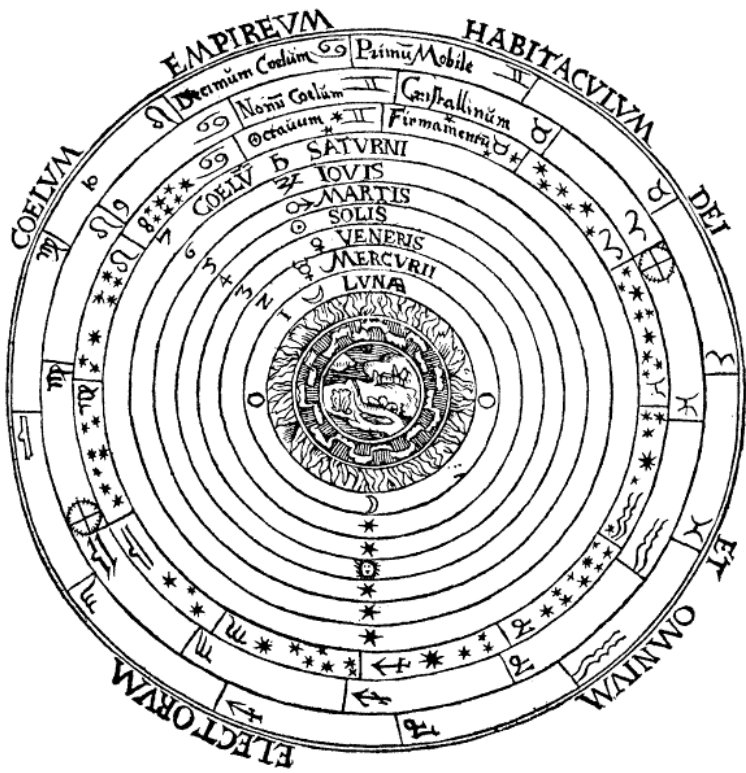


Copernicus
16 c. AD



Celestial spheres (fixed stars) vs. Galaxies

Schema huius præmissæ diuisionis Sphærarum .



Proverbs 8:27-29 When **he established the heavens**, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when **he made firm the skies above**, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth,

Static universe vs. Expanding universe



Georges Lemaître , 1927



Edwin Hubble, 1929



The Age of the Universe

6-10 thousand years vs. „deep time” (13.7 bln)

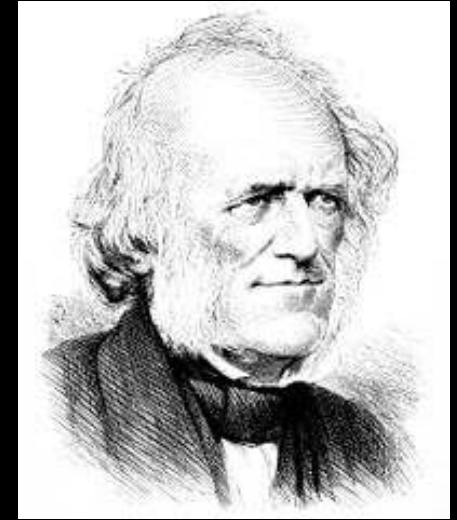


James Ussher, 17c

„The Earth was created around
6 pm on October 22, 4004 BC”



James Hutton, 18c



Charles Lyell

The Principles of Geology

1830-1833

The Challenge of Darwin

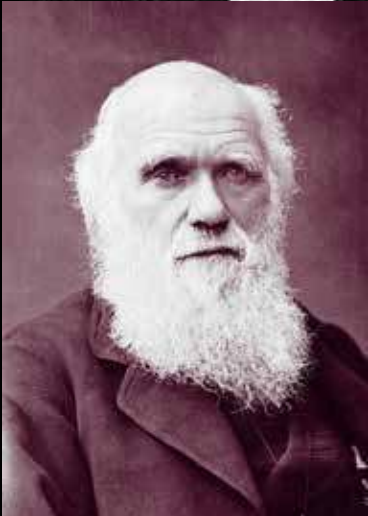


Erasmus Darwin
Zoonomia, 1794



“[H]ow can we suppose that the august Being who brought all these countless worlds into form by the simple establishment of a natural principle flowing from his mind, **was to interfere personally and specially on every occasion** when a new shell-fish or reptile was to be ushered into existence on one of these worlds? **Surely this idea is too ridiculous to be for a moment entertained**”

Robert Chambers, 1844,
Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation



Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 1859

Popular solution:

God used Evolution

Evolution + Creation =
„Theistic Evolution”

„God used evolution as an instrumental cause
of the production of new species”

The Challenge of Darwin

How theistic evolution modifies Christianity

Creation:

- Direct act of God
- Ended once and for all with the creation of man
- Not a process, but a „simple emanation of being”

Theistic Evolution:

- God’s act mediated through „laws given to matter”
- Keep on going continuously (*creatio continua*)
- Is a process in which God participates as the main cause

Is biological macroevolution one of the scientific theories that modified our understanding of the Universe?

- The shape of the Earth
 - The Solar System (geocentrism vs. heliocentrism)
 - 6-10 thousand years vs. „deep time“
 - Celestial spheres (fixed stars) vs. Galaxies
 - Static universe vs. Expanding universe
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- Special creation vs. Biological macroevolution
 - Fine tuning vs. multiverse

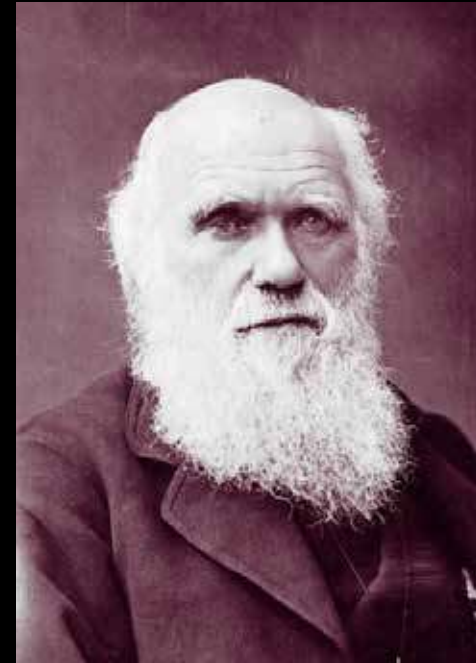
Part III: Conclusion

The limits of Science, the limits of Theology

NO ANALOGY



On the Revolutions of the
Heavenly Bodies (1543)



On the **Origin** of Species (1859)

Genesis = Origin

Two types of questions:

- **How** the universe works?

SCIENCE

- **Where** the universe (and its essential elements) came from?

RELIGION

The limits of science, the limits of theology

- **Bible is not a science textbook**, it does not explain how the universe operates (the laws of nature), how it is built or how old it is. Theology explains the origins and the ultimate destination of nature, but not how it operates.
- **Science is not a „Book of Genesis“**: It does not explain where the universe comes from, how different species and the human being began to exist. Science explains the operations of nature, but not the origin of nature.