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Article

Evangelicals and the Creationist God: An Examination of Brazilian Creationism as an Educational and Political Problem

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Abstract

Creationism is not only a pseudoscience present in Brazil but also a political problem. In reality, creationism as a pseudoscience and as a political issue are entangled in this Latin American country. Thus, this article has a double objective: to show how Brazilian creationism arises as a danger to both education/science and democracy in Brazil, and to discuss how its epistemological misconceptions and its dependence on Evidentialism portray a divinity that stands in contrast with the Christian understanding of the Trinitarian God. The first section will address how creationism is present in the Brazilian political arena, with special attention to its presence during Jair Bolsonaro's government and how it constitutes an ongoing danger to Brazil's education system and democracy due to the rapid growth of the number of Evangelicals in the country and of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front of the National Congress. The second will discuss examples of creationist arguments presented by the two major proponents of the movement in Brazil, the Presbyterians Adauto Lourenço and Marcos Eberlin, that show their standard procedure in dealing with scientific data and drawing religious conclusions from it. The third will analyze how Creationism relies on Evidentialism and portrays a divinity which diverges from the Trinitarian Christian God. I argue that creationism is not based on or an expression of a Christian understanding of the relationship between God, creation, and creatures, but is instead based on epistemological misconceptions, manipulation of data, and religious conclusions drawn from it.

Keywords: Brazilian creationism; evangelical politics; Evidentialism; Trinitarian Theology; Pascal

1. Introduction

Four decades ago, in 1983, the US paleontologist Stephen J. Gould (1941–2002) expressed his astonishment at having to deal with creationism in his own time, pointing out that one of his scientist friends, a Christian one, had confronted the same anti-evolution movement almost six decades earlier. In his own words:

Kirtley Mather, who died last year at age ninety, was a pillar of both science and Christian religion in America and one of my dearest friends. The difference of a half-century in our ages evaporated before our common interests. The most curious thing we shared was a battle we each fought at the same age. For Kirtley had gone to Tennessee with Clarence Darrow to testify for evolution at the Scopes trial of 1925. When I think that we are enmeshed again in the same struggle for one of the best documented, most compelling and exciting concepts in all of science, I don't know whether to laugh or cry (Gould 1983, p. 253).

Again, in the twenty-first century—the century following the labors of Mather and Gould—we are confronted by a pronounced resurgence of creationism across the globe. In the Brazilian context, two figures are particularly prominent: the young-Earth episodic creationist Adauto Lourenço (1958–2024) and the Intelligent Design (ID) advocate Marcos Eberlin (born 1959). These two have emerged as the principal exponents of creationism in Brazil, attracting also followers from Pentecostal and charismatic traditions that espouse creationist views. Brazilian creationism, however, mirrors the

situation in the United States in that it constitutes a political as well as an educational and scientific issue.

The first section of this article will address how creationism is present in the Brazilian political arena, with special attention to its presence during Jair Bolsonaro's government and how it constitutes an ongoing danger to Brazil's education system and democracy due to the rapid growth of the number of Evangelicals in the country and of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front of the National Congress. The second will discuss two examples of creationist arguments presented by the two major proponents of the movement in Brazil, the Presbyterians Adauto Lourenço and Marcos Eberlin, that show their standard procedure in dealing with scientific data and drawing religious conclusions from it. The third will ponder how Creationism relies on Evidentialism and portrays a divinity which diverges from the Trinitarian Christian God.

2. Brazilian Creationism in the Public Arena: An Educational/Scientific and Political Problem

This section will examine the presence of Brazilian Creationism in the public sphere as both an educational/scientific and a political challenge. First, however, it is necessary to define what is meant by creationism. There is a difference between the doctrine of creation and creationism. As defined by Keith Ward, with the concept of a creative deity present in various religions, "creation" means the idea that a personal deity, an active God who is beyond the universe, brings it into being and sustains it (Ward 2003, p. 184). He sums up the creation tenet shared by the three main Abrahamic religious traditions: "that the universe is the creation of one supreme and perfect God. This is usually said to be a free, nonnecessitated act of bringing into being things other than God" (Ward 2003, pp. 185–186). Broadly speaking, creation is the belief, or axiom of faith, that the universe was brought into existence by God—a God who still sustains Their creation.

Creationism previously meant that one soul is created by God for each person at birth, in opposition to Traducianism, where it is transmitted similarly to biological transmission, as well as in contrast to the belief in the pre-existence of souls in relation to their bodies (see Van Till 2003, p. 187; McFarland 2011, p. 123; Villas Boas 2022, pp. 183–188).

Howard Van Till distinguishes between *theological creationism*, which is simply the belief, shared by many religious communities, that the universe is a creation and not self-existent. The will of the Creator not only brings creation into being but also sustains it. Here, "the universe has being only because a self-existent creator-God gives it being" (Van Till 2003, p. 188). In other words, in this case, "creationism" is synonymous with belief in creation.

However, this is not the primary usage of the term today, which is, as Ian A. McFarland points out, a particular interpretation of the doctrine of creation "that all species were created immediately by God rather than arising through evolution from pre-existing species, as taught by the scientific theory of natural selection" (McFarland 2011, pp. 122–123). Van Till classifies this type of conception as *episodic creationism*. Beyond the basic belief of theological creationism, the episodic view comprises, firstly, the conviction that the creation narrated in the Bible affirms that, at the beginning of time, the Creator brought into existence from nothing the fundamental materials of the heavens and the Earth; and, secondly, that he "conferred specific forms on that basic material in the course of time through occasional episodes of divine intervention" (Van Till 2003, p. 188). The choice of the term, as distinct from theological creationism, is due to "its strong emphasis on the need for several episodes of form-conferring supernatural action" (Van Till 2003, p. 188).

Van Till also emphasizes that this view is often referred to as special creationism, owing to the belief that each creature was given a specific form and created in a manner especially suited to its environment. He further draws attention to the considerable diversity within episodic creationism, with various conceptions concerning both the form and the timing of the particular interventions by the Creator in which he molded and fashioned the creation (Van Till 2003, p. 188).

In general, the meaning of creationism today is precisely what Van Till classifies as episodic creationism, a term he employs to refer more specifically to the commonly understood sense, thereby

distinguishing it from other meanings. I adopt his distinction. However, it must be expanded, for theological creationism, before the *spirit of the Scientific Revolution* (By the spirit of the Scientific Revolution I mean not only the advances initiated in the sixteenth century but also Darwin's theory of evolution. I am not referring merely to a single historical event but to the revolutionary spirit embodied in those landmark scientific developments.), was predominantly episodic. This is because, prior to that event, belief in creation commonly held that it had occurred through temporal episodes. Yet this form of episodic creationism differs from the contemporary version, chiefly because (1) its proponents did not possess the scientific data that are available to us today, and therefore (2) did not develop denialist theories concerning such data, and (3) were not advocates of a movement characterized by its opposition to the theory of evolution and to the Big Bang theory. It is therefore necessary to subdivide episodic creationism into (1) pre-scientific or religious episodic creationism and (2) contemporary post-scientific or pseudoscientific episodic creationism. When the term creationism is used henceforth without adjectives, it refers to the post-scientific or pseudoscientific episodic creationism, which is also known as neo-creationism.

After all, "creationism is a religious worldview characterized by denialism of biological and cosmological evolution and its modern form has developed as a reaction to evolutionary science and astronomy" (Nieminen et al. 2014, p. 260). Here, it is common claims such as Lourenço's that "creation, according to the biblical report, is a sequence of supernatural acts in a short range of time, in the course of which, from nothing (*ex nihilo*), all the nature were brought to the existence through the divine intervention (Psalm 8:3–8)" (Lourenço 2018, p. 48).

Creationism was already present in Brazil. In 1972, the *Sociedade Criacionista Brasileira* was established, employing materials translated from the Creation Research Society (CRS), which adopts a literal interpretation of the Bible and advocates Young Earth Creationism. Subsequently, in 1979 the *Associação Brasileira de Pesquisa da Criação* was founded. From 1980 until 1999 the term "creationism" began to circulate in the mainstream media, a trend that was further amplified at the turn of the century (Pasternak and Orsi 2021, p. 54).

The origins of creationism in Latin America were slow, but by the late 1990s there was exponential growth, running parallel to the rise of evangelicalism. Within South America, it is in Brazil that creationism, imported from the United States, has the widest reach (Numbers 2009, p. 221). It is not, then, a new phenomenon in Brazil. Yet, it remains a significant problem in the country. Ronald Numbers (1942–2023) observes that

nowhere in South America did anti-evolutionists make deeper inroads than in Brazil, where, according to a survey in 2004, 31 percent of the population believed that "the first humans were created no more than 10,000 years ago" and the overwhelming majority favoured teaching creationism (Numbers 2009, p. 221).

On this subject, Tiago Garros refers to a survey carried out in 2004 in the state of Rio de Janeiro, in which one in three people believed that human beings were created at most ten thousand years ago, rather than having appeared around two hundred and fifty thousand years ago, as science holds. The same survey reported that 89 per cent of the Brazilian population supported the teaching of creationism in public schools, and 79 per cent maintained that it ought to replace evolution. In 2004, the evangelical governor of Rio de Janeiro enacted a law stipulating that, provided a teacher shared this belief, creationism could be taught in public school classrooms (Garros 2018, pp. 245–246). A more recent survey indicated that 25 per cent of Brazilians believed in Young Earth Creationism (Schwartzman 2010). Although creationism is widespread in Brazil and the United States, it is a global problem, since it can be found in many countries. Even in Western Europe and the Scandinavian nations: "Sweden (68%), Germany (65%), and Belgium (61%) ranked among the highest concerning the acceptance of human evolution, with only 8–12% creationist" (Blancke et al. 2013, p. 1007). It is true that, compared with its prevalence elsewhere, the figure is small. Nevertheless, 8–12 per cent still constitutes a significant proportion of those populations.

Creationism constitutes a genuine political problem, as evidenced by the administration of then-President Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2022), during which individuals who advocate teaching this religious

belief in public schools as an alternative to evolution were appointed to lead federal ministries—such as the Ministry of Education (MEC) and the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights. I am referring to Milton Ribeiro and Damares Alves. Additionally, Benedito Aguiar Neto was assigned as president of CAPES, the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education, a branch of the Ministry of Education, responsible for the postgraduate studies in national level. He was not only a proponent of creationism but had also publicly asserted that creationism should be taught in Brazilian schools as an alternative to evolution (Pasternak and Orsi 2021, p. 33–55; Saldaña 2020).

In 2014, the deputy and pastor Marco Feliciano had already attempted to make the teaching of creationism in schools compulsory. The bill was shelved before it could even be put to vote. However, during the government of Jair Bolsonaro, the then Minister Damares Alves lamented the teaching of evolution in public schools (Pasternak and Orsi 2021, p. 52–54). Moreover, Ribeiro went so far in 2021 as to appoint a creationism advocate, Sandra Ramos, professor at the Centre for Education Sciences (CCE) of the Federal University of Piauí (UFPI), as general coordinator of school textbooks at MEC (see Prazeres 2021).

In Brazil, Intelligent Design was introduced in 2005 with the founding of the *Núcleo Brasileiro do Design Inteligente* by Enézio Almeida Filho. According to Eberlin, it was later launched at the national level through the *Primeiro Simpósio Internacional Darwinismo Hoje*, which took place in 2008 at *Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie*. The event was led by Augustus Nicodemus, who was the university's chancellor at the time. Eberlin was one of the speakers on that occasion (See Eberlin 2022a, pp. 75, 431–434).

Natalia Pasternak and Carlos Orsi place the turning point of creationism in Brazil in the 2017 partnership between *Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie* and the Discovery Institute, a staunch advocate of Intelligent Design in the United States (Pasternak and Orsi 2021, p. 54). In 2017, Mackenzie in São Paulo inaugurated what was classified as a “center for science, faith and society”, named the *Núcleo Discovery-Mackenzie* in recognition of its partnership with the Discovery Institute. The purpose of the center was to undertake research into the concept of ID, and its US partner had already attempted, through legal action, to mandate its teaching in the country's public schools—only to suffer judicial defeats. US courts determined that its proposals were actually akin to biblical creationism, constituting a religious belief. Moreover, the establishment of the center at Mackenzie was met with sorrow by the Brazilian scientific community (Lopes 2017).

The already mentioned Aguiar Neto, who assumed the position of president of CAPES at the beginning of 2020, had been rector of the Mackenzie since 2011. Pasternak and Orsi refer to his appointment by Bolsonaro as the crowning achievement of the success of ID creationism in the country (Pasternak and Orsi 2021, p. 54). In the year prior to his appointment, Aguiar Neto had suggested that creationism should be taught in public schools (Saldaña 2020). Aguiar Neto was, however, dismissed from the position of CAPES president in April 2021. Eberlin is close to him and, on the occasion when Aguiar Neto was still rector, thanked him for embracing the idea of his book *Fomos Planejados*, as well as for being one of those responsible for the creation of the *Núcleo Discovery-Mackenzie* in 2017 (Eberlin 2022a, p. 15). Eberlin also expresses his gratitude to him in another of his books, *Antevidência* (Eberlin 2020, p. 197).

On the occasion of a conference on ID at Mackenzie, Aguiar Neto claimed: “we want to establish a counterpoint to theory of evolution and spread the idea of the existence of an intelligent design can be present from basic education, in a way that we can, with scientific arguments, discuss creationism” (Comunicação—Marketing Mackenzie 2019).

Here, I consider it important to highlight what is, after all, Intelligent Design. The term is modern, emerging with the British theologian William Paley (1743–1805) See his Paley 2006, who may be considered a forerunner of contemporary DI. However, I hold that Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802) does not belong to post-scientific or pseudoscientific creationism, as it predates the spirit of the Scientific Revolution—regarding evolution.

In 1987, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the claim to teach creation science was unconstitutional. However, the same court had left open the possibility, provided it was for secular reasons, of voluntarily teaching alternatives to evolution. In order to take advantage of this loophole, creationists brought Intelligent Design onto the stage. They began to refer to themselves as proponents of design rather than creationists, and the creationist notion of creation [particularly the so-called creation science] came to be referred to as Intelligent Design (Ruse 2009, p. 207).

With the aim of dressing creationism as science, its proponents began to give—or attempt to give—a guise of falsifiable hypotheses, albeit superficial, to their creationist dogmas, seeking to pass the test of hypothesis falsifiability which, according to the Austrian-British philosopher Karl Popper (1902–1994), is a necessary characteristic of the sciences. They also began to claim, mistakenly, that evolution was not science, since it was allegedly not falsifiable. Thus, the first anti-evolution work of this new form of creationism was launched by an organization based in Texas: *Of Pandas and People: The Central Question of Biological Origins* (1989), written by creationists who had originally intended to produce a book titled *Biology and Creation* for use in public schools (Ruse 2009, p. 207; Pasternak and Orsi 2021, p. 46–47).

The origin of ID's rivalry with evolution lies at the very beginning of the movement. Its own founders stated that the

Darwinian evolution locates the origin of new organisms in material causes, the accumulation of individual traits. That is akin to saying the origin of a palace is in the bits of marble added to the tool shed. Intelligent design, by contrast, locates the origin of new organisms in an immaterial cause: in a blueprint, a plan, a pattern, devised by an intelligent agent (Davis et al. 2004, p. 14).

ID movement hence emerged with clear religious intentions. One of the co-authors of the book, Percival Davis, admitted in an interview for the Wall Street Journal that his motivation for writing it was religious: “Of course my motives were religious. There’s no question about it.” I was unable to consult Erik Larson’s original article directly. Larson’s piece, Darwinian Struggle: Instead of Evolution, a Textbook Proposes “Intelligent Design” – Who Did the Designing It Doesn’t Say; Critics See Disguised Creationism – “Agent” Who Hath No Name,” appeared in The Wall Street Journal, 14 November 1994 (A1). I am here relying on Peter Irons’s quotation of Larson (Irons 2007, p. 77). Walter Bradley, a collaborator in the movement and critical reviewer of *Of Pandas and People* (Davis et al. 2004, p. iii), even stated privately that the ID is a “politically correct way to refer to God” (Ruse 2009, p. 207; Pennock 1999, p. 276). To this must be added the fact, brought to light during the Dover trial, that the early drafts of the book contained numerous references to creationism, which the authors later removed and replaced with the emerging term, *intelligent design* (Attie et al. 2006, p. 1134–1135).

But what, after all, does ID defend? It holds that only an intelligence can explain the irreducible complexity found in life, something that cannot be accounted for by Darwinism or any other “blind” law, but only by the intervention of an intelligence (Ruse 2009, p. 206–207). Lourenço succinctly presents the ID: “only an *intelligent design* can explain something that displays a great complexity (containing a great quantity of information) (Lourenço 2007, p. 52).

As Mark J Pallen and Nicholas J Matzke noted, biology is seen as central to ID: “At the heart of the ID argument is the supposition that some biological systems are so complex that they can only function when all of their components are present, so that the system could not have evolved from a simpler assemblage that did not contain the full machinery” (Pallen and Matzke 2006, p. 784).

Generally speaking, the reasoning behind ID is simple: from the alleged complexity, improbability, and rarity of something having occurred, one jumps to the conclusion of design. From the fact that the Universe and the Earth possess all the characteristics needed to sustain life’s complexity, it is inferred that there must have been a *design* caused by a *designer*—and that, otherwise, life would not have emerged (see Lourenço 2007, pp. 99–100).

The creationism issue could become even more pronounced in the future as the number of evangelical Christians in the country grows, since the evangelical caucus may expand in parallel and, in due course, attempt to impose creationism in the public schools of the country. In the current

legislative term (2023–2026) of the National Congress, the Evangelical Parliamentary Front comprises 228 members, of whom 202 are federal deputies and 26 are senators; 119 are Bolsonaro supporters, including 104 deputies and 15 senators (Buss 2024).

Since the Chamber of Deputies comprises 513 members, the 202 deputies of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front represent almost 39.4%, and the 26 senators of the Front account for 32.1% of the 81 members of the Federal Senate. The Front could thus attain a majority in future legislatures, with the result that the Brazilian legislature might evolve into a theocratic parliamentarism. It would not be surprising if, under such a scenario, creationism was imposed on national education.

Reporting the recently published results related to religion from the Brazilian census conducted in 2022, BBC News Brasil journalist Vitor Tavares highlights that the rate of Evangelical growth in the country slowed down: “the progression of 5.2 percentage points [between 2010 and 2022], below the 6.5-point growth recorded between the 2000 and 2010 censuses, is the first deceleration in the [Evangelical] upward trend since the 1960s” (Tavares 2025). In dialogue with Tavares (2025), Brazilian demographer and sociologist José Eustáquio Diniz Alves, who, based on the 2010 census, projected that the Evangelicals would be the majority in Brazil by 2032, now claims it might happen in 2049, if the new rate remains the same in the coming years.

With the new results, scholarship now needs to better analyze the relation between this retardation phenomenon with the growth of Evangelicals “desigrejados” (unchurched), of the “people with no religion who hold beliefs” (see Ritz 2023), and of the right-wing radicalization practiced by many Evangelicals leaders and churches. Yet, with us Evangelicals becoming the majority of the Brazilian population—or a large section of it—, and if most of our peers continue to elect representatives with a fundamentalist mindset, the danger remains of the emergence of a parliamentary “evangelicocracy” in Brazil, should the Evangelical faction become the majority—or a large section—in the National Congress. Among other problems, if this becomes reality, the imposition of creationism looms. Thus, there is a necessity of an adequate theological education that demonstrates the inauthenticity of current creationism in relation to the Christian faith.

3. Adauto Lourenço and Marcos Eberlin’s Creationism

Adauto Lourenço (1958–2024) completed his education in physics in the United States during the 1990s, graduating from Bob Jones University in 1990 and obtaining his master’s degree from Clemson University in 1994. Both institutions are located in the US state of South Carolina. He was a member and elder of the *Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil*. His three works on creationism—*Como Tudo Começou* (2007), *Gênesis 1 e 2* (2011), and *A Igreja e o Criacionismo* (2018)—were published by Editora Fiel, which is associated with the Brazilian Reformed—or Neo-Reformed—tradition.

According to Lourenço, a basic claim of his proposal is that “if something cannot take place naturally, it is because it was created. The argument is simple and straightforward” (Lourenço 2007, p. 125). It is evident that his claim is an axiom, not an argument. Within this framework, in order to defend the idea that the universe was created, Lourenço’s approach is to deny that it could have arisen naturally. This is, quite clearly, an argument from incredulity—an appeal to the God of the gaps. Thomas Dixon asserts that the concept of the God of the gaps was introduced in 1893 by Henry Drummond (1851–1897) during a series of lectures he delivered in Boston. Drummond saw miracles not as sudden events but as processes. In this sense, the miraculous was the slow process of evolution, and especially its ultimate outcome: love. It is in this process that he perceived the action of God. In the same lecture, he criticised those who sought gaps in nature and in science in order to fill them with God, treating him as though he resided in holes. “God, he said, should be sought in human knowledge, not in human ignorance. He pointed out that if God is only to be found in special and occasional acts, then he must be supposed to be absent from the world the majority of the time. He asked whether the nobler conception was of a God present in everything or one present in occasional miracles. Drummond concluded that ‘the idea of an immanent God, which is the God of Evolution, is infinitely grander than the occasional wonder-worker, who is the God of an old theology’” (Dixon 2008, pp. 44-45). In Drummond’s view of God and evolution, there are moral and theological issues.

However, it was precisely this view that allowed the theologian to recognise the use of God as a stopgap. Although the concept is attributed to Drummond, a decade earlier Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) had already articulated a similar idea in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In *On Priests*, he writes: “The spirit of these redeemers consisted of gaps; but into every gap they had plugged a delusion, their stopgap, whom they named God. [...] Thus spoke Zarathustra (Nietzsche 2006, p. 71). In a letter he wrote from prison in 1944, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) also addressed the issue. In it, he recounts that a physics book by Weizsäcker helped him to realise “how wrong it is to use God as a stop-gap for the incompleteness of our knowledge. For the frontiers of knowledge are inevitably being pushed back further and further, which means that you only think of God as a stop-gap. He also is being pushed back further and further, and is in more or less continuous retreat. [...] Once more, God cannot be used as a stop-gap” (Bonhoeffer 1959, pp. 142-143. Letter of May 25th 1944). This type of reasoning is also known as the argument from incredulity, or argument from ignorance. Mark Isaak points out that it is implicit in numerous creationist claims, including all assertions made by ID as well as objections raised against abiogenesis: “Really, the claim is ‘I can’t conceive that (fill in the blank).’ Others might be able to find a natural explanation; in many cases, they already have. Nobody knows everything, so it is unreasonable to conclude that something is impossible just because you do not know it” (Isaak 2005, p. 11. CA100).

The first aspect of Lourenço’s creationist thought that must be understood is his view of the Bible, his hermeneutics, since it is essential to grasp how he conceives of the Scriptures in order to understand his Young Earth Creationist doctrine. On this point, he states that the literal hermeneutic is the only correct and coherent one, the only one that does not compromise the Bible and its texts:

There is just one correct and solid interpretation, not only for the account in Genesis 1 and 2, but for the whole Bible. And this interpretation is the literal interpretation of the text. Any other interpretation will compromise either the truthfulness of the Genesis account, the teaching of Scriptures, or both (Lourenço 2011, p. 184).

For Lourenço, the Bible is not only full of scientific statements, but it contains no scientific errors and is therefore entirely compatible and harmonious with scientific discoveries. In his opinion, the same cannot be said of scientific theories, which, according to him, are not fully in harmony with scientific findings (Lourenço 2018, p. 46; Lourenço 2011, p. 63). In this regard, he laments that “when there is no harmony between the biblical proposal and certain scientific theory, many people, unfortunately, distrust the Bible or its literal interpretation, rather than distrust the science” (Lourenço 2011, p. 63). According to his reasoning, if the Bible contains no scientific errors, it is fully compatible with correct scientific discoveries and should be preferred, in scientific terms, over scientific theories, as it is more scientific than those theories. In other words, the Bible is, for Lourenço, an inerrant scientific book, containing inerrant scientific information.

In inerrancy, the Bible—besides being a book of faith and a guide for lived practice—is also regarded as “an inerrant source of information on any topic that it addresses” (Van Till 2003, p. 188). Insightfully, Van Till explains that, in order to understand the forms of episodic creationism, it is important to grasp how creationists regard the Bible, both in terms of its nature and its authority (Van Till 2003, p. 188). This notion of biblical inerrancy stems from the belief, held by adherents of this doctrine, that the Bible is inspired by the divine Word—an outcome of revealed information and guidance from the divine throughout its composition. As such, it is not merely the product of human knowledge and experience; being divine revelation and inspiration, its content is considered free from all errors and must be credited as truth. Inerrancy, tied to a simplistic reading and interpretation, forms the basis of the literalist approach to biblical texts, unless there is some internal reason within the Bible that calls for a more figurative or artistic interpretation (Van Till 2003, p. 188).

The application of this belief to the first three chapters of Genesis has led a large proportion of the Christian community (at least in the past century) to treat the creation narratives of Genesis 1–3 as literature that is more like a documentary photograph than an artistic portrait. Consequently, Genesis 1–3 is taken to be a chronicle of God’s acts of creation—a concise account of what happened and when during the first week of time. Young-earth

episodic creationists read Genesis 1 as a divine revelation that God not only brought the universe into being at the beginning of time but also performed a series of form-conferring interventions over the next six days (Van Till 2003, p. 188).

Lourenço claims that *in all areas*, including historical accounts, “the biblical teaching is truth, coherent and precise [...] to such a degree that we can affirm that science took thousands of years to discover what the Bible already has been teaching for a long time” (Lourenço 2011, p. 30. my italics). He adds that “the Bible is reliable for being correct in all its proposals it does and not only in its theological proposals, as some people think” (Lourenço 2011, p. 30). In Lourenço, we find something anticipated by Van Till regarding inerrancy: if biblical hermeneutics is to be simple and literal, and if it is also inerrant and contains scientific content, then we should expect to find empirical evidence that supports the conclusions drawn from literal readings.

In regard to biblical narratives of creation, he defends it does have “scientific elements” (Lourenço 2011, p. 93, n. 5) and that, “although the biblical account was not written with the purpose of being empirically tested by Science, its statements can be evaluated by means of scientific observation” (Lourenço 2018, p. 49). Similarly, Lourenço recognizes that “the Bible was not written with the purpose of teaching science, but it cannot be scientifically incorrect in any of its scientific assertions. If it was the case, its theological statements would be compromised” (Lourenço 2018, p. 45). One of the examples given by him is that of the number π . He asserts that, in the Bible, “we find mathematical constants such as the number π , which when calculated on the basis of the biblical information (1 Kings 7:23–26) it gets the value of 3,14” (Lourenço 2018, p. 46).

Here, one of the limits of creationism, embodied by Lourenço, becomes clear. It is his idea of creationist inerrancy: the belief that the Bible, although not intended to teach science, must be entirely accurate in all its scientific information. As the number π , which, according to him, the Bible rightly presents, the limited scientific knowledge found in the Bible regarding the number does not provide its exact value, 3.14.... In fact, 1 Kings 7:23—similarly to its parallel in 2 Chronicles 4:2—states: “Then he made the molten sea; it was round, ten cubits from brim to brim, and five cubits high. A line of thirty cubits would encircle it completely” (NRSV). There is no exactitude here, but rather an approximation: “the circumference was, thus, three times the diameter. This means that the ancient Hebrews were content to assign the value of 3 to π . This value was, most likely, obtained through measurement” (Wendpap et al. 2008, p. 99).

Thereby, an immediate challenge arises to Lourenço’s proposition. In his view, the Bible’s scientific assertions cannot be incorrect. Accordingly, the value of π presented in the Bible must be precise and exact, not merely approximate. For him, after all, any scientific error would compromise biblical theology (Lourenço 2018, p. 45). Consequently, since the scientific datum concerning π in that passage is imprecise and therefore incorrect, the Bible and its theological claims would, by Lourenço’s own axiom, be compromised.

Petteri Nieminen, Anne-Mari Mustonen and Esko Ryökäs clarifies that “in many YEC [Young Earth Creationism] texts, one potential error in the Bible would cause the loss of reliability and certainty in the infallibility of Scripture as a whole” (Nieminen et al. 2014, p. 261). That is, the belief held by Lourenço in inerrancy is commonplace within the creationist group of which he is a member. However, such a belief renders the entire system vulnerable, since an analysis of it according to its own criteria reveals that the belief in the Bible under the doctrine of inerrancy turns it into a fallible, unreliable, and uncertain book.

Lourenço, convinced that, “contrary to the evolutionist scientific proposal, the knowledge of our origins revealed in the Sacred Scriptures is both authentic and true” (Lourenço 2011, p. 211), sets himself against evolution and the Big Bang, asserting that both are incompatible with the biblical account. He states that in Genesis

plants are said to have emerged before the Sun and before animal life. The sequence of events differs from that proposed by evolution. In this case, in order to achieve harmonization, the biblical author would have to be regarded as someone who erred when writing the biblical text (Lourenço 2018, p. 61).

If the sun was created before the Earth, as the naturalist theory asserts, then the sequence of Genesis 1 would be wrong. In the case the Sun was created after the Earth, it is the naturalistic theory (the Big Bang theory) that would be wrong (Lourenço 2011, p. 111).

the Big Bang theory is incompatible with the biblical account. [...] To claim that the Big Bang theory harmonizes with the biblical account is untrue. Those who holds otherwise generally do not accept that the days of creation were literal days, but rather it was long periods of time (Lourenço 2011, p. 143).

In his rhetoric, Lourenço establishes only two possibilities: either certain scientific theories, such as evolution and the Big Bang, are correct and the biblical text is erroneous, or the biblical text is correct, and those theories are false or mistaken. He immediately dismisses a third option, namely that Genesis 1 and 2 are of the mythical genre:

A third possibility [...] would hold that chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis are mythological. This would be problematic, for Jesus quoted Genesis 1 and 2 as descriptive, and not mythological (Matthew 19:4-5; Mark 10:6). The apostle Paul also used Genesis 1 literally in his argumentation in Athens (Acts 17:26). The entire argument in Romans 5:12 (1 Corinthians 15:21) about the entrance of sin into the world and human sinfulness is also based on the literalness of Genesis. Therefore, if this [mythological] interpretation were correct, both the Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul would obviously have been completely mistaken (Lourenço 2018, p. 61).

For Lourenço, the Bible is the exact, authentic and true account of history, written by an omniscient God who cannot lie and, by virtue of this divine authorship, is not merely a history book but the definitive reference for all historical narratives, for it—supposedly—does not have any distortion of events (Lourenço 2011, pp. 23, 25–26, 44). As history, “the history narrated by the Bible is different. Its author already existed even before any historical event came to take place” (Lourenço 2011, p. 44). Thus, for him, all the accounts found in the Bible can only be historically true: “Everything that it records happened in time and space: at a specific hour on a specific day in a specific month of a specific year, in a specific place” (Lourenço 2011, p. 26). Every story and account found in the Bible, Lourenço maintains, “it is exactly what happened” (Lourenço 2011, p. 23).

Biblical scholarship, nevertheless, has long identified and demonstrated the diverse nature of the biblical texts, especially with regard to their literary genres. Thus, creationism fails to appreciate the richness of the Bible in its great literary diversity and the meanings of its plural texts. As the Argentine biblical scholar José Severino Croatto (1930–2004) asserts, “the variations of literary genre have to do with *what* the text wants to communicate” (Croatto 1996, p. 22).

Brazilian biblical scholar Jacir Faria (born 1962) emphasizes the importance of understanding the manner in which the biblical text reveals itself. Its forms and literary genres are diverse, just like the ways in which individuals and human groups express themselves. Indeed, peoples employ genres to transmit their cultures. Within the Bible’s diversity, the narrative literary genre appears in forms such as “myth, tale, saga, legend, allegory, simile, ellipsis, hyperbole, litotes, metaphor, metonymy, parable, anecdote, fable, novella, theophany, dream and miracle” (Faria 2015, pp. 11–12). Furthermore, these forms may interrelate, and the distinction and transition between them are not always clear, as they are subtle (Faria 2015, p. 12).

Even if Lourenço refuses to acknowledge it, Faria is right in saying that Genesis 1–11 occupies a special place in which we encounter the mythical dimension of Israel, a collection of texts made up of myths and counter-myths, stories whose literary genre is narrative, and which arise from this people’s experience of God. According to Faria, this form enables these texts to be eternalized in time and human culture, and to answer existential questions (Faria 2015, pp. 9–10, 15).

As a people who experienced interculturalization and exile among cultures such as the Mesopotamian and Babylonian, the Canaanite and the Egyptian, the people of Israel were also familiar with the myths of these civilizations, which influenced their own myths. In the Bible, we find mythical narratives that reinforced Israel’s societal imagination regarding its origin in God. However,

they managed to transform these myths—for example, by moving from the polytheism typical of myth to monotheism (Faria 2015, p. 14).

As Faria points out, most of these texts were written during the Babylonian exile (587–536 BCE) and afterwards, in the post-exilic period. The term *counter-myth* refers to the resistance and opposition present in the nature of the myths in Genesis 1–11 to the myths, worldview, and culture of the Babylonians, who oppressed those living in exile. It is highly likely that Genesis 1:1–2:4a was composed during or shortly after the exile by the Priestly source (P). The text contains mythical elements, such as the primordial state of chaos and the act of creation unfolding over seven days. Faria argues that it is a counter-myth to the *Enûma Eliš*, the Babylonian creation myth, having been written in opposition to it (Faria 2015, pp. 14–15, 20, 43)—which is a plausible claim. Even if it is not a direct counter-myth to the *Enûma Eliš*, it is unquestionably a counter-myth to the broader Babylonian mythology present in the empire where the Israelites were held captive. Thus, Lourenço is mistaken in claiming that “the primary objective of the book of Genesis [is] to provide a faithful and truthful historical narrative” (Lourenço 2011, p. 53).

Therefore, Brazilian Young Earth Creationism does not withstand even minimal scrutiny. But what about Brazilian Intelligent Design? Let us now explore that.

Marcos Eberlin (born 1959) holds a bachelor’s degree (1982), a master’s degree (1984), and a PhD (1988) in Chemistry from the *Universidade Estadual de Campinas* (UNICAMP). He became a chemistry professor at the same institution, serving in the role for 35 years until his retirement in 2018. He has been a member of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences (ABC) since 2004. He was considered a specialist in mass spectrometry but is now known as a proponent and promoter of Intelligent Design (ID). During the COVID-19 pandemic, he returned to the spotlight for making statements against vaccines. This prompted statements condemning his remarks from various Brazilian bodies and institutions, including the *Academia Brasileira de Ciências* (ABC), *Universidade Estadual de Campinas* (UNICAMP), the *Associação Brasileira de Química*, the *Academia de Ciências do Estado de São Paulo*, the *Conselho Federal de Química*, and the *Sociedade Brasileira de Química* (see UNICAMP 2021a; UNICAMP 2021b; Academia Brasileira de Ciências 2021a; Academia Brasileira de Ciências 2021b; Conselho de Federal de Química 2021). Like Lourenço, Eberlin is a Presbyterian. There is no doubt that Eberlin is the foremost proponent of Intelligent Design (ID) in Brazil and one of the country’s most influential creationists.

Pasternak and Orsi highlight that some ID proponents are recognized scientists, which is the case for Behe and Eberlin. The latter, after UNICAMP, became affiliated with Mackenzie as the coordinator of the *Núcleo Discovery-Mackenzie*, the aforementioned Brazilian branch of the US Discovery Institute. Frequently, and unabashedly, he uses his scientific credentials to lend scientific legitimacy to ID. Moreover, he is not merely a promoter of ID but also believes in Young Earth Creationism (Pasternak and Orsi 2021, pp. 54–55). I have been told the Núcleo no longer exists. Indeed, the last webpage that mentions it was published in 2022 (see Beloni 2022). Nevertheless, the link between Eberlin and ID at the *Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie* is still in effect, as the university hosted the 6th *Congresso da Sociedade Brasileira do Design Inteligente*, which took place between 18–20 July 2025 (Sociedade Brasileira do Design Inteligente 2025). Similarly to Lourenço’s creationism, it is not possible to develop an extensive analysis of Eberlin’s ID creationism here. It suffices, however, to outline succinctly the idea of irreducible complexity, the principal tenet of ID.

Eberlin regards evolution as antagonistic to his purported compendium of “solid data and facts about [...] our origins” (Eberlin 2022a, p. 21). He explains that the single, central thesis of the ID movement can be summarized as: “considering the two possible causes and by confront them with the data, today the best scientific inference as the cause of the Universe and of life is an intelligent action” (Eberlin 2022a, p. 90). In this way, Eberlin defends that “evolution is, therefore, a major scientific myth” (Eberlin 2022a, p. 439).

Michael Ruse clarifies that “however it may be qualified, the point of the ID movement is to promote the intellectual respectability of interventions outside the natural order of things by including them under the rubric ‘science’” (Ruse 2009, p. 210). It is interesting to note that, although they maintain that ID is not creationism, its proposal is virtually identical to Lourenço’s creationism,

albeit under a different terminological guise: “if something cannot take place naturally, it is because it was created. The argument is simple and straightforward” (Lourenço 2007, p. 125).

Complexity, information and foresight According to Eberling, foresight ultimately testifies against the theory of evolution in all its forms. He explains it is “the ability to look to the future, predict the incidence of issues with the potential to be deadly in a project, and solve them beforehand” (Eberlin 2020, p. 188). are presented by Eberlin as the pillars of ID, which, he argues, underpin and legitimize ID as a scientific theory, and which also constitute the characteristics by which “Science” can detect the action of a *designer*, of an intelligent mind (Eberlin 2022a, pp. 62–63). He presents them:

1. *Irreducible complexity* [his examples are the 14-bis, a mousetrap, and a clothespin].
2. *Arbitrary information*. [...] Life requires arbitrary information and in a very high quantity, which only intelligent agents can generate. This is an unquestionable scientific truth that is demonstrated by information law. And there are no arguments against laws. [...] Only intelligent agents feature as a known, necessary, and sufficient cause of the highest quality information of life. Information is, therefore, one of intelligent design theory’s most solid pillars.
3. *Brilliant foresight*: only intelligent agents can anticipate future obstacles, the so-called dead ends, sill in the initial phase of their project, and, through intelligent actions, project its system to overcome it. [...] Life and the Universe are filled with countless examples dead ends that were anticipated by foresight (prediction) [that is] beyond brilliant (Eberlin 2022a, pp. 63–67).

Eberlin also presents in his works various purported cases of design. After presenting them, he always asks rhetorically whether they were caused by “chance or design?” or “design or chance?” (Eberlin 2022a, pp. 158, 160–161, 184, 202, 219, 271, 293, 296, 303, 310–311, 319, 322, 330, 334, 337). I do not have the space to address and evaluate them all. I will merely exemplify a case of what irreducible complexity would be.

One example put forward by ID is the bacterial flagellar motor. “The flagellum is the main organelle for motility in bacteria. Despite bearing the same name, bacterial flagella are distinct in form, function and evolution from both archaeal and eukaryotic flagella. The archetypal bacterial flagellum from *Salmonella enterica* serovar Typhimurium (*Salmonella typhimurium*) consists of a basal body, embedded in the cell wall, and two axial structures, the hook and filament, which are joined at the hook–filament junction [...] Rotation of bacterial flagella is powered by a proton—or sodium—motive force. The flagellar motor converts electrochemical energy into torque through an interaction between two components: the stator and the rotor” (Pallen and Matzke 2006, p. 785). The flagellum is of particular importance to the ID movement, as demonstrated by its prominence in the Kitzmiller v Dover trial held in Pennsylvania. There, Judge John E. Jones III, having heard testimony from numerous scientists, concluded that teaching ID in US public schools is unconstitutional, since it could not be disentangled from creationism and, therefore, from religion. The bacterial flagellum was cited so frequently—over three hundred times—that the trial became known as the “bacterial flagellum trial” (Pallen and Matzke 2006, p. 784).

This flagellum is regarded by Eberlin and Behe as the mascot of the ID movement and one of the strongest examples of irreducible complexity. Eberlin calls it “a ‘supersonic nano-submarine’, with a turbocharged super engine and with constant supply of energy.” He also regards it as a sophisticated, high-tech motor—perfect, intelligent, spectacular and efficient. There is in its composition, he says, “millions of bits of information and dozens of macromolecules with thousands and thousands of atoms in each one of them, all finely adjusted”, and so on. It is so sophisticated, in his opinion, that he goes so far as to say that “his self-assembly [is] something to envy even by the *transformers*.” According to him, the architecture of its structure and its extremely fine tuning even carry a profound philosophical and theological implication, since its similarity to motors subsequently created by human beings, in what he terms plagiarism, implies that “men created engines ‘in the image and likeness’ of whom created the nanomotor of the bacterial flagellum.” In short, its design and foresight,

for ID, evoke a supernatural superpower that created and configured this motor with mastery and purpose, with its components perfectly synchronized as required (Eberlin 2022a, pp. 322–327).

The reasoning of ID follows the pattern pointed out by Pasternack and Orsi:

Some of the bacteria have flagella—a kind of “tail”—that allow a fast mobility, as an outboard motor. A flagellum is composed of 42 proteins that, according to Behe, should have been selected, one by one, each one providing, individually, some advantage for the bacteria, otherwise they could not be there. If only one of these proteins were removed, the flagellum would not work. And it looks like these proteins do have another function than to compose the flagellum. Thinking of a gradual evolution, what would justify that each one of them have been selected for, at the end, together with others, to form the flagellum? It does not make sense, right? Moreover, the number of necessary mutations to generate each one of these parts and to gather them in one flagellum is astronomic. Thus, it is a system of irreducible complexity; the parts cannot be reduced to steps that fulfill the requirements of natural selection. Therefore, the theory of evolution is ruled out! (Pasternak and Orsi 2021, p. 49).

By virtue of its profound complexity and their inability to conceive of and/or accept its evolutionary origins, proponents of ID deny that it could be a product of evolution. As Pasternak and Orsi emphasize, creationists ignore explanations of the flagellum that do not invoke a deity (Pasternak and Orsi 2021, p. 177). Eberlin simply asserts that evolutionary deep time could not have provided for the emergence of its motor and says that biologists’ proposals regarding its evolution are part of “a persuasion strategy that, unfortunately, pervade many of the ‘pseudoscientific’ explanations presented in favor of evolution” (Eberlin 2022a, p. 327).

For his part, Dawkins considers the bacterial flagellar motor as a poor one example of ID. Indeed, he says that “by engineering standards—and unusually for a biological mechanism—it is a spectacularly inefficient one” (Dawkins 2006, pp. 130–131). Moreover, Dawkins clarifies that biologists can identify parts that function independently of the whole in examples of supposed irreducible complexity, including the flagellum. For a part that functions through the evolution of a given organism can be co-opted to operate in a different manner from that which it originally performed (Dawkins 2006, pp. 131–132). For the evolution of the bacterial flagellum, see Pallen and Matzke 2006.

In a study on the bacterial flagellum, microbiologist Mark Pallen and biologist Nicholas Matzke conclude that, “like Darwin, we have found that careful attention to homology, analogy and diversity yields substantial insights into the origin of even the most complex systems” (Pallen and Matzke 2006, p. 789). In other words, the ID claim concerning the bacterial flagellum does not stand up when examined alongside other bacterial flagella and similar systems.

Moreover, there is not just one bacterial flagellum but thousands, exhibiting a variety of forms and functions, each with differences in their systems. For example, the standard model from *Salmonella typhimurium* comprises around 40 flagellins (the proteins that make up the bacterial flagellum). Yet only about half of these are universally essential. Vestigial systems, completely lacking any function, are even found in some bacteria. This is explained by descent from a common ancestor and by natural selection, in line with Darwin’s observation that nature is poor in innovation but rich in variation. Shattering Occam’s razor, such diversity, in the ID line of reasoning, would suggest thousands or even millions of separate creations (Pallen and Matzke 2006, pp. 784–785).

All flagellins share homology with one another, that is, similarities that indicate common ancestry. But this is not only true among themselves; they also share homology with other components of the flagellum and even with systems outside the flagellum, including some that are not used for mobility, such as the NF-T3SS (the non-flagellar type III secretion system). There is even ongoing debate about whether one is ancestral to the other or whether both derive from a common ancestor: a simpler secretion system. “Regardless of the conclusion of this debate, the existence of NF T3SSs is ‘proof of concept’ that a flagellar subsystem can function for purposes other than motility” (Pallen and Matzke 2006, pp. 785–786).

Eberlin would respond:

I—the “pseudo-scientist denialist little me”— will never believe that the most complex, sophisticated and efficient motor of this Universe was formed by “recycling” through a process of “gather, adjust, and assemble.” This supernatural copy-paste sort of “molecular patchwork quilt” does not hold up. It is too much irrational faith and “too much religion, too few saints,” which I do not like (Eberlin 2022a, p. 328).

His statement is an instance of an argument from incredulity, a recurrence to the God-of-the-gaps, which ID names as the *Designer*. Moreover, it fails to take into account that all of Eberlin’s creationist–designerist literature is underpinned by religious motivations, foundations and purposes. Eberlin himself admits this. In *Fomos Planejados [We Were Designed]*, his principal book on ID, Eberlin argues that the book “is still singular, one between a few, for it seeks to debate openly about our origins in the exclusive light of Science, but without fear, preconceptions or ‘passionate commitment’” (Eberlin 2022a, p. 23). Similarly, he states that will be discussed there “intriguing and exciting [topics] through an approach taken with the rigor of science and its methodology and philosophy” (Eberlin 2022a, p. 30).

However, these two assertions stand in stark contrast to what he maintained in a debate, in which he declared that he conducts science on the basis of the Bible: “I have been a scientist for a long time. I think the Word directs my interpretation of science; it is not my science that directs my interpretation [of the Bible]. It is the Bible that interprets the science. [...] I use the Word to interpret my science” (Eberlin 2022b). Now, we can see clearly that Eberlin’s book and his ideas on ID are part of a passionate religious commitment, from which he operates with preconceptions and a theistic criterion of “scientific” methodology and interpretation. Contradicting himself, he thus reveals that he does not discuss origins solely and exclusively by the light of science, without fear or bias. Rather, he demonstrates that he has a creationist, apologetic—and perhaps ideological—agenda. Indeed, in his book it is also evident that this impartiality is not genuine, as he both implies—and even states explicitly—that he will present a committed and impassioned defense (see Eberlin 2022a, pp. 25–27).

Eberlin’s ID is, therefore, a hoax. It is nothing but simple creationism. Similarly, even whilst asserting that ID and creationism are distinct, Lourenço argues, in his creationist argumentation, that only a supremely wise God could have conceived the sophisticated process of photosynthesis, deeming it a design (Lourenço 2011, pp. 163–164). Thus, both strands of Brazilian creationism are essentially the same, differing only in appearance—wearing different clothes, so to speak—much like Young Earth Creationism and Intelligent Design creationism outside Brazil. Moreover, in their creationist argumentation, they share a common foundation and mindset and produces the same deity: a creationist god. It is to this topic that I now turn.

4. Creationism, Evidentialism and the Creationist God

But if horses or oxen or lions had hands or could draw with their hands and accomplish such works as men, horses would draw the figures of the gods as similar to horses, and the oxen as similar to oxen, and they would make the bodies of the sort which each of them had (Xenophanes of Colophon 2001, p. 25, fragment 15).

The two fundamental problems of creationism are its strong adherence to evidentialism and, as a consequence, its epistemological chaos between the natural sciences and religious belief. Let us consider what evidentialism is and how it has become ingrained in contemporary thought, including within creationism.

The classic formulation of evidentialism appears in the concluding passage of an English mathematician named William K. Clifford’s essay, *The Ethics of Belief* (1877). He argues:

We may believe what goes beyond our experience, only when it is inferred from that experience by the assumption that what we do not know is like what we know. We may believe the statement of another person, when there is reasonable ground for supposing that he knows the matter of which he speaks, and that he is speaking the truth so far as he

knows it. It is wrong in all cases to believe on insufficient evidence; and where it is presumption to doubt and to investigate, there it is worse than presumption to believe (Clifford 1877, p. 309).

Evidentialism is the view that one ought to believe only that for which one possesses sufficient evidence to justify the belief. Episodic creationism—whether in its Young Earth or Intelligent Design form—is evidentialist for it seeks out evidence to justify belief in a Creator/Designer. Classical evidentialism, of course, does not appeal to a primordial cause in order to vindicate reality. Creationism, however, embraces evidentialism in a reversed fashion, for its proponents commence from a personal conviction and then embark on a quest for clues and evidence to substantiate their creationist beliefs. In this way, creationism serves essentially as a vassal to evidentialism.

The same holds for a form of naturalism insofar as natural phenomena and empirical evidence are taken to explain everything that can be known of reality. It is indeed the case that creationists allege this to be the flaw of contemporary science and the scientific community, which, they argue, embrace naturalism as an ideology that prevents them from recognizing the creationist response as the only plausible and adequate explanation of reality. Nevertheless, creationism submits to this naturalistic rule, since it seeks out natural traces and evidence of a supernatural cause.

This subservience to evidentialism and naturalism, however, is not unique to creationism. After all, both are so deeply ingrained in contemporary thought that they have become what James D. G. Dunn (1939–2020) calls *default setting* (see Dunn 2005, pp. 79–82): an idea so rooted in everyday mentality that contemplating an alternative is staggering, if it is even considered.

An example of the permeation of evidentialism and naturalism in contemporary thought can be found in the encounter that the great English physicist Stephen Hawking (1942–2018) had in 1981 with the Pope of the time, which bears on the theme of creation. He recounts:

Throughout the 1970s I had been mainly studying black holes, but in 1981 my interest in questions about the origin and fate of the universe was reawakened when I attended a conference on cosmology organized by the Jesuits in the Vatican. The Catholic Church had made a bad mistake with Galileo when it tried to lay down the law on a question of science, declaring that the sun went round the earth. Now, centuries later, it had decided to invite a number of experts to advise it on cosmology. At the end of the conference the participants were granted an audience with the pope. He told us that it was all right to study the evolution of the universe after the big bang, but we should not inquire into the big bang itself because that was the moment of Creation and therefore the work of God (Hawking 1988, pp. 115–116).

This ecclesiastical stance is nothing more than an argument from incredulity—a resort to the God-of-the-gaps. But aside from the Pope’s statement posing an epistemological problem, his words implicitly submit to evidentialism and naturalism. The Big Bang was already so firmly rooted in his religious thinking that he instructed not to question the primordial singularity, for he saw it implying divine intervention. Putting his perspective in other words, the Big Bang was seen as natural evidence for the beginning of space–time, of time itself, and of the world, and that would entail creation and the existence of a Creator.

I emphasize that, without any doubt, Clifford’s evidentialist criterion is fundamental to our engagement with natural matters, and that each human being is responsible for their actions and beliefs. However, this evidentialist criterion, in its empirical sense, does not pertain to theology—unless the criterion is translated into theology’s own epistemological framework. Theology, by its very nature, as the science of faith, as the art of faith, does not submit to evidentialism, for evidentialist standards neither belong to its epistemological structure nor constitute one of its sources. In this light, creationism cannot be considered theology. Likewise, as it lacks the necessary criteria to be qualified as any form of science—let alone natural science—what remains for contemporary episodic creationism, in its post-scientific or pseudoscientific form, is simply its classification as a belief system and a pseudoscience. Pre-scientific or religious episodic creationism, however, is not pseudoscientific, particularly insofar as it does not adopt a negationist or fraudulent

posture, which the contemporary form bears inherently. Rather, it is a kind of archaic and anachronistic science.

On the other hand, evidentialism and naturalism can also be viewed as the flip side of the creationist coin: scientism. This is present in both its more combative form—embodied by the New Atheism of figures such as the British biologist Richard Dawkins (born 1941) and the US neuroscientist Sam Harris (born 1967)—and its milder, less confrontational guise, in which, alongside Hawking, we find the eminent US astrophysicist Carl Sagan (1934–1996). A critical survey of the literature produced by these proponents of scientism would demand more space than I have. I note, however, that scientism is evident, among other works by these authors, in Dawkins's *The God Delusion* (2006)—which is philosophically and theologically poor—and *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design* (1986)—a solid introduction to evolution but somewhat shallow on theological issues; in Harris's *Letter to a Christian Nation* (2006) and the rather Islamophobic *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (2004); in Hawking's sophisticated *A Brief History of Time* (1988); and in Sagan's engaging *The Varieties of Scientific Experience: A Personal View of the Search for God* (2006).

During his lifetime, Sagan maintained that he was agnostic, arguing that neither theists nor atheists possess sufficient or reasonable evidence to justify their theism or atheism, or to prove or disprove the existence of God (see his interview with Wakin 2006, pp. 69–75). He states:

I know of no such compelling evidence [against the existence of God]. Because God can be relegated to remote times and places and to ultimate causes, we would have to know a great deal more about the universe than we do now to be sure that no such God exists. To be certain of the existence of God and to be certain of the nonexistence of God seem to me to be the confident extremes in a subject so riddled with doubt and uncertainty as to inspire very little confidence indeed. A wide range of intermediate positions seems admissible (Wakin 2006, p. 70).

In *The Varieties of Scientific Experience*, Sagan sets out what might be regarded as justifiable scientific facts, proofs and evidence for the existence of God. I consider his response the clearest example of scientism, as well as of his adherence to evidentialism and naturalism. The astrophysicist argues that “it is perfectly possible to imagine that God, not an omnipotent or an omniscient god, just a reasonably competent god, could have made absolutely clearcut evidence of His existence.” (Sagan 2006, p. 156). He then presents which type of proofs, in his view, a reasonably competent god would be expected to produce. Although lengthy, it is well worth quoting part of his words:

Imagine that there is a set of holy books in all cultures in which there are a few enigmatic phrases that God or the gods tell our ancestors are to be passed on to the future with no change. Very important to get it exactly right. Now, so far that's not very different from the actual circumstances of alleged holy books. But suppose that the phrases in question were phrases that we would recognize today that could not have been recognized then. Simple example: The Sun is a star. Now, nobody knew that, let's say, in the sixth century B.C., when the Jews were in the Babylonian exile and picked up the Babylonian cosmology from the principal astronomers of the time. Ancient Babylonian science is the cosmology that is still enshrined in the book of Genesis. Suppose instead the story was “Don't forget, the Sun is a star.” [...]

Or, “A body in motion tends to remain in motion. Don't think that bodies have to be moved to keep going. It's just the opposite, really. So later on you'll understand that if you didn't have friction, a moving object would just keep moving.” Now, we can imagine the patriarchs scratching their heads in bewilderment, but after all it's God telling them. So they would copy it down dutifully, and this would be one of the many mysteries in holy books that would then go on to the future until we could recognize the truth, realize that no one back then could possibly have figured it out, and therefore deduce the existence of God. There are many cases that you can imagine like this. [...]

This business of proofs of God, had God wished to give us some, need not be restricted to this somewhat questionable method of making enigmatic statements to ancient sages and hoping they would survive. God could have engraved the Ten Commandments on the Moon. Large. Ten kilometers across per commandment. And nobody could see it from the Earth but then one day large telescopes would be invented or spacecraft would approach the Moon, and there it would be, engraved on the lunar surface. People would say, “How could that have gotten there?” And then there would be various hypotheses, most of which would be extremely interesting. Or why not a hundred-kilometer crucifix in Earth orbit? God could certainly do that. Right? Certainly, create the universe? A simple thing like putting a crucifix in Earth orbit? Perfectly possible. Why didn’t God do things of that sort? Or, put another way, why should God be so clear in the Bible and so obscure in the world? I think this is a serious issue. If we believe, as most of the great theologians hold, that religious truth occurs only when there is a convergence between our knowledge of the natural world and revelation, why is it that this convergence is so feeble when it could easily have been so robust? (Sagan 2006, pp. 165–168).

His words clearly express scientism and his quest for natural evidence and empirical proof. Conversely, creationists, especially proponents of Intelligent Design, make analogous claims. They, too, believe that a minimally competent deity would have left signs and evidence of its existence in the universe, at both macro and micro levels. For them, however, those proofs and indications could not only have been left by such a god had it existed but, in reality, were given by it.

One example is the claim made by ID proponents regarding what they consider to be God’s signature in DNA. In a report on the Brazilian television program *Domingo Espetacular*, broadcast on *Record TV* at the time of the inauguration of the aforementioned *Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie’s Núcleo Discovery-Mackenzie*, these proponents showcased what they believe to be instances of design, what would imply intelligence and, by extension, a Designer. Eberlin, in fact, is one of the interviewees in this piece. They point to the presence of the Fibonacci sequence in almost everything and to the golden ratio, both of which they argue to display the perfection of intentional design. They then go on to contend that God left a signature in human DNA (Domingo Espetacular 2017). To quote the report:

In the United States, a group of researchers claims to have identified a sequence of numbers that always repeats in human DNA. It would be a kind of God’s signature [...]. When considering the charges of the chemical elements in DNA, the researchers are said to have identified the following numerical pattern: 10 5 6 5. Then, they started trying to decipher this code and had the idea of substituting the numbers with Hebrew letters. [...] The numerical sequence was transcribed into the respective Hebrew letters: ם ה ו ה. See the result: the sequence corresponds to the word “Yahweh,” or “God”, in Hebrew (DOMINGO ESPETACULAR 2017, 7min58–9min43).

I must emphasize that I have found no scientific work that refers to such a numerical pattern in DNA. But even if this legend Legends about supposed divine writings in human DNA are not new. An early report claiming that scientists had found a divine message in DNA—allegedly as proof of God’s existence—can be traced back to the satirical newspaper *The Daily Currant*, in a satire published in early 2013 (see Lopes 2015). were true, it would carry no theological significance, nor would it prove the existence of God. In any case, it amounts to a supposed empirical proof for the existence of the empirical god of the creationists, one that fits within Sagan’s criteria and which they are so eager to verify in their evidentialist and naturalist pursuit.

It is also important to highlight that the epistemological distinction between science and religion, and more specifically between science and the theological science, has emerged in a seminal way throughout the history of Christianity. John Calvin, for example, argued that the biblical authors were primarily concerned with matters relating to our salvation (that is, theological questions) rather than with astrological issues. This contrasts with the way in which the neo-Reformed, in particular Lourenço and his publishing house (supposedly heirs to the Calvinist tradition), engage with the

subject. I am grateful to the Brazilian theologian and pastor Enéas Alixandrino for bringing this contradiction to my attention. See Calvin 1948, pp. 60, 85–87; Calvin 1949a, pp. 315–316; Calvin 1949b, pp. 184–185; Zwart 2009; Earnshaw 2020. Lourenço’s creationism finds no endorsement in the great precursor, father of his tradition.

Just as Blaise Pascal described René Descartes, it is fair to say that creationists and apologists such as Lourenço and Eberlin, among others, are *inutile et incertain* (see Pascal 1951, p. 94, §78, my italics). Above all, insofar as they act as pseudoscientists. Isaak aligns with this perspective, asserting that “creationism is neither theory nor fact; it is, at best, only an opinion. Since it explains nothing, it is useless” (Isaak 2005, p. 18. CA201). Moreover, both they and their influences from the United States do a disservice to education, to Brazilian, US—and indeed global—culture and society, by propagating misinformation masquerading as information and pseudoscience clothed in the guise of science. Yet, it is not merely because they fail to explain anything, being neither a theory nor a fact, that creationism and Intelligent Design creationism are useless and uncertain. Following Pascal, I classify them as useless and sterile on theological grounds, for they construct their knowledge without the presence of Jesus Christ, grounding and centering it on supposed proofs of God’s existence drawn from natural phenomena and human reason.

Et c’est pourquoi je n’entreprendrai pas ici de prouver par des raisons naturelles, ou l’existence de Dieu, ou la Trinité, ou l’immortalité de l’âme, ni aucune des choses de cette nature; non seulement parce que je ne me sentirais pas assez fort pour trouver dans la nature de quoi convaincre des athées endurcis, mais encore parce que cette connaissance, sans Jésus-Christ, est inutile et stérile (Pascal 1951, p. 217, §556).

Not only is Jesus Christ absent from creationism and its contents, but so are the Holy Spirit and the Father. They probably forget the Trinity unconsciously, as they focus on what matters most to them: constructing a god in their own image and likeness. As Ward emphasizes,

In the Western Christian tradition, the element of design has been so strongly emphasized that sometimes the universe has been seen as a quasi-machine, with the creator as a cosmic clockmaker. However, some contemporary theologians, like Arthur Peacocke, have preferred to picture God as an artist, expressing the divine being in creation (Ward 2003, p. 187).

Lourenço and Eberlin fit perfectly within this framework. In their scientism, the deity they describe—and the creation attributed to it—are frequently and excessively portrayed in technological, mechanical, and scientific language. By way of example, Eberlin not only classifies the bacterial flagellum as a machine, but also asserts that this flagellum is “a wonder of nanomolecular automation that appears to reflect the image and likeness of the one who designed and executed it. [...] Humans created engines ‘in the image and likeness’ of the one who created the nanomotor of the bacterial flagellum” (Eberlin 2022a, pp. 322–327).

In addition to explicitly expressing his religious conviction in this text, he displays the attributes of a deity: the *designer* in whom he believes. It is like a nano-molecular automaton empirically operative within the universe. The creationist god is therefore a theological aberration. Eberlin and Lourenço, like their creationist predecessors, profess faith in a god fashioned in their own image: a divinity that is a would-be scientist, a would-be machine, and, by its very nature, uncertain and useless, as the natural sciences obviate any need for such a *designer*.

Contrasting this and, to conclude the paper, an important figure to explore is Pascal, whom Lourenço and Eberlin have labeled, among others, a creationist and/or an advocate of ID (see Lourenço 2007, pp. 21, 238–240; Eberlin 2022a, p. 98), as part of a strategy to demonstrate the antiquity of their beliefs. Francis Kaplan (1927–2018) does maintain that Pascal regarded the creation narratives—creation which supposedly would have occurred around 5,400 years ago—as historical texts; likewise, he believed the Book of Daniel to have been composed in Daniel’s own time and that its prophecies concerning the succession of empires had been fulfilled (Kaplan 1989, p. 435). That was to be expected, given the exegetical limitations of his time. He therefore had faith in episodic

creationism, but he was not a proponent of its contemporary version—the post-scientific or pseudo-scientific one.

Nevertheless, as Kaplan notes, there is a rather striking paradox in Pascal. It is precisely at the moment when true atheists and agnostics begin to appear that Pascal rejects the rational demonstration of divine existence (Kaplan 1989, p. 431). Apologetics is not a matter of demonstration—or, if it is, it is only at a secondary level (Kaplan 1989, p. 425). Any and all proofs or rational arguments in defense of God's existence are insufficient—including any proof based on the idea of truth that may be found in his thought (Kaplan 1989, pp. 428–429).

The existence of God is incomprehensible to Christians—an incognoscibility that does not imply that he does not exist (Kaplan 1989, p. 429)—and therefore, if Christians were to have or present proofs of their religion, they would be devoid of sense:

Qui blâmera donc les chrétiens de ne pouvoir rendre raison de leur créance, eux qui professent une religion dont ils ne peuvent rendre raison ? Ils déclarent, en l'exposant au monde, que c'est une sottise, *stultitiam* ; et puis, vous vous plaignez de ce qu'ils ne la prouvent pas ! S'ils la prouvaient, ils ne tiendraient pas parole ; c'est en manquant de preuves qu'ils ne manquent pas des sens (Pascal 1951, p. 134, §233).

It is noteworthy that his form of apologetics is markedly distinct from others. In Pascal's thought, "le problème religieux est un problème existentiel ; il convient donc de le traiter comme tel" (Kaplan 1989, p. 426). Primarily, his apologetic is existential (Kaplan 1989, p. 427). It is an anthropological apology, not a theological one. He does not demonstrate certainty in God's existence, nor does he seek to develop a metaphysical and/or philosophical reflection to prove it. Rather, his proposal is anthropological, regarding the choice and decision to live with and accept either the existence or the non-existence of God (Marins 2008, pp. 75–83).

For Pascal, faith is not a gift of reason—that is, it does not come from the exercise of reason—but a gift of God; by contrast, proofs are human, whereas faith is a divine gift. In his work *Pensées* (1670), he asserts that "la foi est un don de Dieu; ne croyez pas que nous disions que c'est un don de raisonnement" (Pascal 1951, p. 147, §279) and that "la foi est différent de la preuve : l'une est humaine, l'autre est un don de Dieu" (Pascal 1951, p. 141–142, §248). Even the prophecies, which he regarded as Christianity's great proofs, are not entirely compelling. Only those who receive God's grace believe in God (Pascal 1951, p. 220, §564; Elster 2003, p. 62).

As Nicholas Hammond notes,

much of his discourse consists of a strong opposition to the attempt by rationalist philosophers, most notably Descartes (who is witheringly dismissed by Pascal as "useless and uncertain"; L 887/S 445), to prove the existence of God through purely rational means. By relying exclusively on the dominance of reason, so Pascal argues, such philosophers place too much emphasis on human strength, thereby raising the human to quasi-divine status. Instead, Pascal tries to prove the inherent flaws of reason (which, he states elsewhere, "is always deceived by the inconstancy of appearances"; L 199/S 230) and its ultimate inadequacy when considering questions such as religious faith (Hammond 2003, p. 247). In the edition of the *Pensées* that I use, Hammond's direct quotations appear, respectively, in Pascal 1951, p. 94, §78, and Pascal 1951, p. 91, §72.

Pascal rightly states:

Le Dieu des chrétiens ne consiste pas en un Dieu simplement auteur des vérités géométriques et de l'ordre des éléments; c'est la part des païens et des épicuriens. Il ne consiste pas seulement en un Dieu qui exerce sa providence sur la vie et sur les biens des hommes, pour donner une heureuse suite d'années à ceux qui l'adorent; c'est la portion des Juifs. Mais le Dieu d'Abraham, le Dieu d'Isaac, le Dieu de Jacob, le Dieu des chrétiens, est un Dieu d'amour et de consolation; c'est un Dieu qui remplit l'âme et le cœur qu'il possède; c'est un Dieu qui leur fait sentir intérieurement leur misère, et sa miséricorde infinie; de joie, de confiance, d'amour; qui les rend incapables d'autre fin que de lui-même. Tous ceux

qui cherchent Dieu hors de Jésus-Christ, et qui s'arrêtent dans la nature, ou ils ne trouvent aucune lumière que les satisfasse, ou ils arrivent à se former un moyen de connaître Dieu et de le servir sans médiateur, et par là ils tombent ou dans l'athéisme ou dans le déisme, qui sont deux choses que la religion chrétienne abhorre presque également. [...] Ce qui y paraît ne marque ni une exclusion totale, ni une présence manifeste de divinité, mais la présence d'un Dieu qui se cache (Pascal 1951, p. 218, §556).

Pascal is someone who chooses to wager on the existence of God and, by extension, on the Creator and creation. Indeed, here Pascal speaks of a God who is author and creator, but he does not present that as primary. What is primary is the love of God, the revelation in Jesus Christ. To declare that Pascal was simply a "creationist," in the usual sense of the term, is far too simplistic. Within the limits of his time, he might even be considered a creationist. However, in contrast to contemporary creationism—such as Young Earth creationism and Intelligent Design, which have the explicit or implicit apologetic aim of proving God's existence—Pascal stands apart. We may speculate that he would reject modern creationism, as we do, with its god who has a necessity for proofs, just as he rejected the god of the philosophers.

Pascal distinguished between the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I distinguish between God the Father of Jesus, the Son himself, and the Holy Spirit and the god of the creationists; between the image of God upheld by the apologists of creationist scientism, with its own divinity, and the Holy Trinity.

As a Pentecostal theologian, I conclude that there is an urgency of teaching to Brazilian Evangelicals—and conservative Catholics—that creationism is not based on or an expression of a Christian understanding of the relationship between God, creation, and creatures, but is instead grounded on epistemological misconceptions, manipulation of data, and religious conclusions drawn from it. Religious and theological education, as well as health theologies of creation, are, therefore, the best paths for overcoming the educational and political problem that is creationism in Brazil

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