

This presentation covers Chapters 14 and 15 of the book *The Sacred Chain* by Jim Stump. The book has 26 chapters divided into 5 parts:

Part I: Bible

Part II: Time

Part III: Species

Part IV: Soul

Part V: Pain

Chapter 14: Degrees and Kinds in the Caves

and

Chapter 15: Finding Deeper Faith among the Redwoods

are the last two chapters in Part III.

2

Chapter 14: Degrees and Kinds in the Caves

“The changes we could observe from one generation to the next in the stack of baseball cards are almost imperceptible. Does that mean we differ from Neanderthals or chimpanzees only by degrees? Or can we legitimately say we humans differ in kind from everything else?” Darwin, in *On the Origin of Species* did not explicitly address this question. He was worried about people’s reactions to being told they were related to beasts. Twelve years later in *The Descent of Man* he laid it all out – all animals, including humans, have common ancestors in the past. The differences are simply differences in degree.

3

“There can be no doubt that the difference between the mind of the lowest man and that of the highest animal is immense. . . . Nevertheless, the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, certainly is one of degree and not of kind. We have seen that the senses and intuitions, the various emotions and faculties, such as love, memory, attention, curiosity, imitation, reason, etc., of which man boasts, may be found in an incipient, or even sometimes in a well-developed condition, in the lower animals.”

4

G. K. Chesterton, in 1925, reflecting on recently discovered cave paintings, argued they were the work of people like us, and the capacity to create art puts us in a different class than all other animals.

“It must seem at least odd that [one] could not find any trace of the beginning of any arts among any animals. That is the simplest lesson to learn in the cavern of the coloured pictures; only it is too simple to be learnt. It is the simple truth that man does differ from the brutes in kind and not in degree; and the proof of it is here; that it sounds like a truism to say that the most primitive man drew a picture of a monkey and that it sounds like a joke to say that the most intelligent monkey drew a picture of a man. Something of division and disproportion has appeared; and it is unique.”

5

Stump went to Bordeaux, France, to see for himself. He toured the Rouffignac Cave. It was known for centuries, but it was in 1956 that the cave art deep inside was rediscovered. There was a large chamber about 3/5 mile down in the back of the cave. There were at least 255 figures, mostly mammoths, drawn in the cave. They think they were drawn around 13,000 years ago.



Why did they do that?

There was no survival advantage.

It was probably a risky journey.

But it left a definite impression on Stump.

“They were like us.”

6

He decided to travel to the more famous cave painting site of Lascaux.

The original site is closed to the public, but replicas have been built.

Lascaux IV is an almost perfect reproduction of the original.

The tour through the cave displayed “amazing artistic portrayals of animals” in technicolor.

Stump believed he had “stepped into a prehistoric world and seen the humanity of the artists.”

He agreed with Chesterton: “Something of division and disproportion has appeared; and it is unique.”

7

But Stump couldn't accept that something "magical" had happened to give the humans the abilities they had.

"Darwin's point—and what his successors have plausibly shown—is that those abilities really can be achieved by a series of adaptations."

The question of whether we deal with whether we differ in kind or only by degree seems to have a "both/and" answer.

Stump found his answer among the trees.

8

Chapter 10: Finding Deeper Faith among the Redwoods

Stump and his wife visited the Muir Woods National Monument a few miles north of the Golden Gate Bridge.

It is one of the few places where old-growth coastal redwoods are still standing.

For Stump, descending into the valley where the park is located was like visiting Rivendell or Lothlorien (Lord of the Rings).

Many of the trees were over a thousand years old.

One section of the park was called Cathedral Grove.

It was a spiritual experience.

"It was almost like they were a different kind of thing than the maple trees from my hometown."

9

A guest (Jeff Schloss) on a podcast about what it means to be human gave this analogy:

“Imagine all the plants in the world are the size of rose bushes, and then you come across a giant redwood tree. Wouldn’t most people think that the redwoods are a completely different kind of thing?”

Some evolutionary biologists call humans “spectacular outliers”.

10

Stump likens the debate over degree vs kind to the debate over Christ being fully human vs fully divine.

Stump believes there is room for middle ground instead of resorting to the extremes of “only a different degree” vs “human exceptionalism”, and these should be held in tension.

Stump finishes this chapter with quotes from researchers in various fields who conclude the difference between humans and others is more than just in degree. An example by biologist Kevin N. Laland:

“A hundred years of intensive research has established beyond reasonable doubt what most human beings have intuited all along; the gap is real. In a number of key dimensions, particularly the social realm, human cognition vastly outstrips that of even the cleverest nonhuman primates.”

11