

**Doubt: Dark Side of Faith**  
***In the Beginning***  
**August 5, 2012**

**PRELUDE – Happy Day**

**Worship Songs – Great God Who Saves /  
Just As I Am**

**Drama – “Evolving Thoughts”  
Feature – “If I Ever Lose My Faith in You” /**

Good morning everyone. Let's pray.

God, thank you for the opportunity to come together and to spend time worshipping You, but also, to be able to consider questions like this. We're thankful that You are not offended when we wonder about such things. I pray that that would be the spirit that's among us

this morning and that we would be drawn closer to You because of this question we're considering. So, we put this in Your hands. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're continuing in our *Doubt: Dark Side of Faith* series and as you've ascertained from the drama, we're going to look at one of the major issues that causes people of faith to question their faith ... and that is the issue of "origins" – *how did everything that exists come to exist?*

I remember the first time I was confronted with this issue ... in Mr. Smouse's 10<sup>th</sup> grade biology class. Mr. Smouse was an atheist and when it came to the evolution part of the class,

he didn't hesitate to let everyone know exactly what he thought of the creation account in the first two chapters of Genesis. Unfortunately for him, I had recently become a believer in Jesus and I was quite outspoken about my faith at that time. And let's just say that Mr. Smouse and I had a few words that semester. I didn't like him very much and I don't think he liked me very much. In my mind, and probably in his, you either believed in the Bible or you believed in evolution. There was no middle ground.

And I think a lot of people feel the same way. You either trust science or you have faith. You either believe in "godless evolution" or you believe in Jesus.

However, as with most controversial issues, reality is not quite so black and white. Reality is that there are actually *several* options when it comes to this issue of origins.

## **Creation Options**

And I want to take a few minutes to present a few of those options to you as best I can knowing that, in the time we have and with the knowledge that I have, I will not do any of them justice. However, Google is your friend, and if you want to know more, just type in these phrases and you'll discover a wealth of information, if you're so inclined.

So, here we go.

**1. The first option is what I ran into in Mr. Smouse's class, which I'll call "atheistic evolution."**

It's what most of us encounter in high school or college. It's the idea that each life form on earth is the result of a long history of unsupervised, impersonal, unpredictable small changes or mutations and the environmental factors favoring certain mutations and selecting against others; "survival of the fittest" without any intervention from God or any outside supernatural force.

Obviously, I think you can see this position is not compatible with Christianity. You really can't be a Christian and believe in something that

says there is no God. In addition, the Bible is clear that in however creation happened, Jesus was a part of it.

*In him (referring to Jesus) all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things (spiritual and non-spiritual) have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him (Jesus) all things hold together. Colossians 1:15-17 (NIV)*

It's kind of hard to be a Christian and let that go at the same time. So, atheistic evolution is really not an

option.

## **2. The second option is what is known as “young earth creationism.”**

This is the position that most people would identify as “the traditional biblical view.” It takes very literally the story we read in Genesis chapters 1 and 2: “In the beginning God created ... and the evening and the morning were the first day ... and then God created again, and the evening and the morning were the second day ... and the third day and so on ... until finally, the Bible says ...

*God created humankind  
in his image, in the image  
of God he created them;  
male and female he*

*created them... God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. —Genesis 1:27, 31*

Young earth creationists hold that the days in this account were literal 24-hour days (6 days) and if you go back through the genealogies and other calculations you might make off of the biblical story of Genesis, the earth could be no more than 10,000 years old (which is why this philosophy is called “young earth” creationism).

For people in this camp, I think it’s important to note, what’s at stake is the credibility of the Bible. “If we don’t hold



to a literal interpretation of this creation account," they argue, "we risk communicating to people that the Bible is wrong from the very first sentence and its first two chapters. So, if that's true, why would people trust anything that follows?"

Now, obviously, options one and two that I just presented are diametrically opposed. Think of them as being at opposite ends of a spectrum. But there are other options in the middle.

### **3. One of those, the third one, is "theistic evolution."**

This option holds that science and the Bible are kind of like two sides of the same coin. The Bible tells us who did it -

God did it. Science – evolutionary theory in particular – tells us how God did it. So, theistic evolution says that God created *through* the process of evolution.

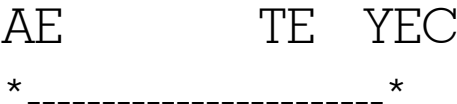
One of the points in favor of this view is that the theory of evolution in its root, its origin, is not anti-Christian. In fact, Charles Darwin – the father of evolutionary theory – was not a proponent of the atheistic view. In fact, not long after he wrote *Origin of the Species*, the question arose as to whether or not his theory was trying to dispense with God. In response, he wrote “It seems to me absurd to doubt that a man may be a bold and ardent theist (believing in God) and an evolutionist.”<sup>i</sup> In his mind, belief in God

and belief in evolution were not mutually exclusive propositions. I don't think many people know that.

For theistic evolutionists, what's at stake for them is credibility in the real world.

"If Christians continue to insist that the creation account is literal in the face of overwhelming evidence in support of the process of evolution," they wonder, "then don't we appear to be out of touch with reality? And, if so, who in the world would ever want to follow Christ?"

Now, if you were to put theistic evolution on the spectrum, you might put it here:



But there's another option, one which would go in the slot between atheistic and theistic evolution ...

#### **4. And that's what is known as "Intelligent Design."**

In its purest form, Intelligent Design has no intention of making a theological argument. It's not trying (at least, not intentionally) to support anything related to the existence of biblical God.

However, at the same time, it also disagrees with the fundamental premise of atheistic evolution which says that everything is here because of random chance, it's unsupervised. To quote one ID researcher ...

In recent years, biologists have discovered an exquisite world of nanotechnology within living cells - complex circuits, sliding clamps, energy-generating turbines and miniature machines. For example, bacterial cells are propelled by rotary engines called flagellar motors that rotate at 100,000rpm.

(I guess that's why we feel so bad when we have a bacterial infection.)

These engines look like they were designed by engineers, with many distinct mechanical parts (made of proteins), including rotors, stators, O-rings, bushings, U-joints and drive shafts.

Incredible all that is going on!

Based on our uniform experience, we know of only one type of cause that produces these kinds of irreducibly complex systems – and that cause is intelligence. Wherever we encounter complex systems - whether integrated circuits or internal combustion engines - we know how they arose, invariably a designing intelligence played a role.<sup>ii</sup>

## **What I Believe**

**So, here's the final spectrum, at least of the opinions we're looking at this morning.**

AE ID TE YEC

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Now, those are four very basic options when it comes to answering the question of origins. And, I know I've grossly oversimplified in the interest of time and lack of expertise on my part.

But, I also know that at least some of you are wondering, "OK, Rick, which one do you believe?"

I would, but I'd have to kill you. ☺ Nah. Just kidding.

For most of my life, actually, all of my life, I would be classified as a young earth creationist. That was the belief of the church where I became a Christian

as a teenager. It was the belief of most of the Christian friends I had. And, because of that, it was the belief that I put the most energy into studying when I first went into vocational ministry. In fact, if you look back through the archives of our services over 18 years at North Heartland, you would see that I've preached more than a few messages advocating this particular position.

And, I suppose, if I had to give a definitive answer as to where I stand today, I'd say that of all the choices available on the spectrum, I'm still most comfortable with that one. However, I should add, my attitude about that is very different than what it was in high school; it's even different from what it



was 10 years ago because I've come to realize that even more important than what I believe about creation is *what I believe about my beliefs about creation*. Let me say that again - I've come to realize that even more important than what I believe about creation is *what I believe about my beliefs about creation*. I want to share four convictions I've come to about those beliefs, for me personally and quite likely for you, as well.

**Conviction #1. All of the available options (non-atheistic ones!) have problems.**

None of them entirely fit the data that we have available from both science and the Bible.

- For example, those of us who hold to Young Earth Creationism have to deny the overwhelming accepted scientific evidence that the earth is billions of years old. We are put into the position of explaining the data in some another way (eg. "God created the earth to look old, even though it really wasn't") or we're put in the position that we have to question the very foundations of science itself. Those kinds of things bother me a lot more than they used to.
- At the same time, those who hold to Theistic Evolution have to somehow reconcile the fact that death entered the world *before* Adam

sinned (because survival of the species – which implies death – is the fundamental mechanism of evolution and has to happen before Adam is born). They also have to postulate that at some point, God intervened and selected one hominid to become a human being with a soul. They have to prove, on top of that, that Genesis was not meant to be a historically literal account. Frankly, I'm not very comfortable with any of those ideas, as well.

- And the Intelligent Design camp is by definition forced to leave open the possibility that the Intelligence behind the universe is merely some impersonal force rather than the

personal God we meet in the pages of the Scripture. Obviously, I *don't* leave that possibility open so, I'm not entirely comfortable with this option, either.

And I could go on and on listing the problems with each position because none of them fit the data entirely. That's the first conviction I've come to. And the second follows directly from it.

**Conviction #2. Whatever you believe about creation – wherever you are on that spectrum - is already wrong in some way, so hold your position loosely and with humility.**

Whether you're a young-earthier or a theistic evolutionist, hold that conviction loosely because at some point, some

aspect of it *is going to* change as more data – whether biblical or scientific – becomes available.

For example, everyone has heard the story of how Galileo was forced by the Catholic Church to recant his teaching that the earth is not the center of the universe; that it rotates around the sun and not vice-versa. But later, when it became obvious that Galileo (and Copernicus before him) was correct, the church was put into the position of having to recant. But not without first doing great damage. When Christians declared to the world that geo-centrism was clearly and definitely taught in Scripture, all they did was convince those who had carefully studied the evidence that Scripture must therefore

be in error. They created a false dilemma.<sup>iii</sup>

But the church isn't alone in being forced to change and recant with new data. Science has walked down that road more times than can be counted. But that's not a bad thing because part of what science does is to test hypotheses. Good science says "this appears to be true ... it seems to be true, but it might not be true. So, let's keep pushing on this assumption and see where it takes us."

The most recent example of this is what's been happening at the Large Hadron Collider over in Europe. Maybe you heard about this. I'm grossly oversimplifying again because of my

ignorance, but as I understand it, less than a year ago, scientists there were able to clock subatomic particles traveling faster than light. Because of that, Einstein's Theory of Relativity – which says that nothing travels faster than light and on which much of traditional physics has been based – is now being revisited.<sup>iv</sup> They're not saying Einstein was 100% wrong – just that he probably wasn't 100% right. There's something that has to be changed about his theory.

No one is ever 100% right. Ever. So hold your position on these kinds of things loosely. That's a conviction I've come to.

And, if you claim to be a follower of Jesus, *for God's sake and for the sake of*

*people who don't know Him, please hold it with humility!* As I prepared for this message, I read a bunch of things written by sincere Christians whose beliefs about the issue of origins fall at various points on this spectrum. And I have to tell you how disheartening much of it was because of the sniping and condescending criticism aimed at sincere Christians *who are at other points on the spectrum*. Or, at other Christians who used to be at one point but had moved to another point on the spectrum.

And as I read, I wondered "have these people not read what the Bible tells us about how to treat other believers who hold differing opinions on these kinds of things?" The reality of Christians having



different perspectives on matters which aren't totally clear in the Bible isn't something new. In the first-century church at Rome, Christians had come to various convictions about how to observe the Sabbath, or whether or not it was OK to eat meat that had been offered to an idol. The Apostle Paul addressed it in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of his letter to them.

*One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.*

*Whoever regards one day as special does so to the*

*Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.*

*For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.*

*For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.*

*You, then, why do you judge your brother or*

*sister? Or why do you  
treat them with contempt?  
(They're doing this to be  
pleasing to God.)*

*Romans 14:5-9 (NIV)*

It's fine to be sincere and it's fine to be firmly convinced about what you believe. But to look at a theological issue that has been debated by brilliant minds (people smarter than me and you) for decades or even centuries without resolution and suggest that "it's impossible for any thinking, rational, biblically sincere person to arrive at any position on this matter other than the one I hold" is the height of arrogance. And it's unbiblical and unchristian. And, quite frankly, I've been guilty of it, and I'm sure you have been, too.

Here's the third conviction I've come to in recent years which has affected what I believe about this issue (and others like it).

**Conviction #3. A sign of spiritual maturity is the ability to live with the tension of unanswered questions.**

One famous conservative, evangelical, Reformed preacher, whose name some of you would recognize, recently made this statement at a conference:

When people ask me how old the earth is I tell them "I don't know," because I don't. And I'll tell you why I don't. In the first place, the Bible does not give us the date of creation. Now it gives us hints and

inclinations that would indicate in many cases a young earth. But, at the same time, you get all this expanding universe and all this astronomical dating, and triangulation and all that stuff coming from outside the church and that makes me wonder.<sup>v</sup>

For saying that, he was lit up. Because he was not dogmatic, he was accused of being wishy-washy and a “waffler.” But that’s just wrong. Saying “I don’t know” on the kinds of questions we’ve been talking about is more often than not a sign of spiritual maturity.

For example, last week we looked at the story of Job. Remember, Job had all these terrible things happen to him.

And we saw that through the whole story, even though God shows up and He has a conversation with him, He never reveals why all these bad things happen to him. Job never knew why a God who was good and loving and powerful would allow so many bad things to happen to him. God never told him. Yet, in spite of his unanswered questions, he chose to love God anyway. His faith went from "I'll love you for *what you do* for me" to "I'll love you for *who you are* to me, even if you don't always make sense." You tell me, which of those is more spiritually mature?

And I think this is important to consider when it comes to creation. *What if we never know the answer* – at least, not in

this life? I mean, what if you listen to all the arguments for young earth creation, all the arguments for theistic evolution and all the arguments for intelligent design and then you listen to all the arguments *against* each of them and you say, “wow. I’m not sure what I believe” ... is that a sign of immaturity? Does that mean you must not really be a Christian?

I think the answer is clearly no. And I say that because of what we’ve come back to again and again in this series. What is the heart of the Christian faith? What was the key proclamation of the apostles in the first century?

- It wasn’t “hey everyone, we’ve got this book here that the Jews wrote

many years ago and you really need to believe the first two chapters of Genesis as literal history and you will be saved.”

- It wasn't “now, you all know that the ancient Israelites were really big into symbolism and allegory and the first two chapters of Genesis aren't meant to be literal, so you'll just have to wait til Darwin comes along to explain it all and then you can be saved.” (Or something silly like that). No, that's not what they said.

The heart of Christianity; the key proclamation was – and is – God took on human flesh and became a man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And he lived the kind of loving and obedient life



you and I are supposed to live (but don't). And then he died the death each of us should die as sinners and made atonement for all of our sins so that we don't have to. And then on the third day, the Father raised him up physically, literally, as the firstborn of a new creation who is going to take over the world some day.

**And, as the Apostle Paul put it:**

*The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim:*

*If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that*

*God raised him from the  
dead, you will be saved.  
Romans 10:8-11 (NIV)*

See, the proclamation was: Jesus was dead, Jesus was raised. He is Savior. He is Lord. Receive it, believe it, declare it, live it. That's the core of the Christian faith.

And that leads to the fourth and final conviction I've come to concerning what I believe about this issue of creation.

**Conviction #4. Christianity does not rise and fall on the Genesis creation account; it rises and falls on the resurrection of Jesus.**

Paul didn't say, "If Genesis is not literal

then your faith is in vain." He didn't say, "If you can't figure out how theistic evolution (however that gets defined) and death and sin are related, then your faith is in vain."

**He said:**

*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 1 Corinthians 15:17 (NIV)*

**He said:**

*No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11 (NIV)*

Christianity is about Christ. Creation is

a sub-issue. It's not the core. It's not the foundation.

**It's one of those outer rings of faith to use the analogy of a couple weeks ago.**

It's kind of like the song the band did earlier, "if I ever lose my faith in you," in the core – *that's* the issue. Now, please don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that if you're a scientist, you shouldn't study and research the scientific data. I'm not saying if you're a serious Christian, you shouldn't study and research the biblical data. Do it, please, because maybe you'll be the one that discovers another piece of the puzzle that ties it all together in a way we do not yet understand.

## What about The Story?

But until that happens, until we all come to understand completely how this all fits together, it's ok to have doubts about this issue because it is not the core of the Christian faith. As long as you hold your position loosely and with humility, you are free to land anywhere except for the left edge of the spectrum. And you're free to change your mind about that, as well, and you're free to change it again, if you become so convinced.

The only caveat in all of this is that you must take seriously the biblical texts dealing with creation. In other words, you can't just say, "well, that Genesis

stuff is not literal. It's symbolic so I don't need to pay attention to what that says." Look, if it's symbolic, if that's what you believe, you have to consider "what does it symbolize?" In the same way if you say, "that's literal," you have to ask "what am I supposed to learn from this?"

That's the ironic part about this whole debate. No matter where you are on that spectrum, the takeaway ought to be the same.

The takeaway ought to be something like this:

*The heavens are telling  
the glory of God; and the  
firmament proclaims his*

*handiwork. Day to day  
pours forth speech, and  
night to night declares  
knowledge. (There is a  
God. This place was  
created.) Psalm 19:1-2  
(NIV)*

So, what do we learn from "in the beginning God created?" What do we learn from the story of Adam and Eve whether they were the first people or whether they were hominids who received the breath of life from God? (I mean, if God could plant a seed in the womb of a virgin and bring forth Jesus ... could he not also have done something similar to some hominid at some point in the evolutionary chain?) So, what do you learn?

What we learn from the story of creation are some very important and amazing things; things we take for granted because we've grown up in a post-Christian culture, but we have a biblical basis. We've heard the story; we've heard the criticism of the story. We understand Genesis 1 & 2, and we take it for granted. But these are things that would have been *astounding* to the Israelites who first heard them from Moses to whom they were revealed. They would have been astounding because they flew in the face of the prevailing creation stories of the time – those of the Egyptians and Babylonians.

In those stories, earth and humanity was the result of a fight between the gods; a body of a goddess had been



torn apart and out of that the earth was formed. People were created to be slaves of gods who could without warning throw the world into chaos. In fact, chaos was the default mode of the world in that thinking.

And yet, in the middle of all that, God's revelation of creation turns all of that on its head.

- It tells us that the world is ordered. There is a design and a plan, not chaos. (In fact, the worldwide spread of Christianity and this single observation of order is what led to the explosive development and advancement of the scientific method. Most people don't realize that; science came out of this

belief.)

- It tells us that the world is good. It's not the body of someone torn apart. Matter is good and not evil. The world is not to be escaped from but to be entered into.
- The creation story tells us that we are not meant to be slaves to God or to anyone. Instead, we are made in God's image. We have value and worth just because. We are someone significant before we do anything significant.
- The creation story tells us that we are at the top of the created order and we are responsible for what happens to this planet. We're

stewards and we're accountable to God.

- The creation story tells us that we were not designed to live alone. We're meant to live in community with one another and with God. We have a unique need among all living beings.

Finally, whether or not Adam and Eve were "real people" (and just for the record, I believe they were) or whether they are allegorical people, Genesis Chapter three is the story of the human race lived out again and again and again. (In fact, I told this story when we started this series, about that guy on the 12<sup>th</sup> tee box at The Outlaw up in Smithville a few months ago. When he

found out I was a pastor, he asked me point blank, "tell me, are Adam and Eve literal?" And I'm ready to tee off and it's like, okay, let's have a theology discussion). And this is what I told him: Genesis three, whether you believe this is literal or not, is a story you and I live every day.

- We know what's right and we know what's wrong.
- And we fail to live up to that standard. The Bible calls that "sin" which simply means falling short of the mark.
- And there's a payoff that comes whenever we sin. It brings destruction and death sometimes literally and sometimes figuratively

in terms of our relationships and our self-esteem and our sense of purpose. We get kicked out of the garden, so to speak.

- And Genesis Chapt. 3 reminds us that we really do need a savior.

And because God loves us so much, he became a man and he became that savior. And because of that, the creation story like everything else in the Bible points us to Christ. He's the foundation. He's the center. He's the core. Let's hang on to that.

Let's pray.

God, thank you so much for the opportunity, again, to think about these things, to wrestle with these

things. God, I know that this morning some of us came in here with questions about these kinds of things. Some of us are very skeptical. Some of us came in very, very convinced that we're right and this preacher is going to say something that's really going to tick us off, and God, I pray that we would have the spirit of humility and grace. I pray that I would have the spirit of humility and grace about these things and that it would be characteristic of our church, that this is the kind of people we are. We're not afraid to ask questions because, this is not the core issue. God, help us to focus on the core issue.

For some of us today, that's really where we are. We just need to say, "I need a savior. I have screwed my life up. I live Genesis 3; I'm in the middle of it right now." And, Jesus, you are our savior and I pray that some of us in this moment would say, "Jesus, come fill this hole in our heart; fill this hole in our life."

God, some of us, we've already made that decision but we walk on our own and we forget that You are our strength and our shield, and You are all these things to us and we were made for community with You and with one another and we've kind of neglected that. So, God, we pray for You to do that

same thing for us – to come fill this hole in our hearts. Help us to understand the meaning of the story and not just the details of the story. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Feature – “God Shaped Hole”**

And if you're on the City here at NHCC, you got a post/email this week from me, and if you didn't get that, you need to be on the City because we have some very exciting news to share this morning. Actually, I'd like to show you a couple of pictures to give you a hint ...

**Rick**

**Kitti**



## **Mica**

### **Staff/etc**

Those pictures are from last Thursday afternoon. I had my turn, and Kitti had her turn, and a couple of other people got into the act ... when we officially began our remodel project. We've been talking about this for months now and many of us have been sacrificially giving to make this happen. We are finally (thank you Lord!) starting the work – I'm so excited! We had the best day on Thursday. Knocking stuff down was really cool, too.

Now, there are two things you need to know at this point of the process.

1. We, as a church, as volunteer labor, are responsible for demolishing some of the existing structure (and you can see that it has already begun – the ceiling tiles have been removed. The whole hallway needs to be gutted; the conference room needs to be gutted; the doorways out here need to be gutted. I could go on and on about things that need to happen) I know this is short notice, but it's got to happen quick ...

**Next Saturday from 8am-5pm, we need the largest one-day turnout of volunteers in NHCC history.**

- We need carpenters; tradesmen "you understand what a saws-all is"
- We need people who can carry

and haul and sweep and put food out. If you show up we'll have a job for you.

- Sign up - pull card from seat, what trade. Write your name & phone # on that card and give it to an usher on your way out. We will contact you.
- This is for people 18 and over (something our insurance people told us); no childcare.

2. Here's the second thing you need to know. We have at most only a few more Sundays in this space before it, too, needs to be gutted. Most likely, that means we'll begin holding services in the dining hall and that's going to last until Thanksgiving. And

because it's much smaller, it is also highly likely that we'll be doing three services every Sunday. We're thinking the Children's program will be during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> service, and there will be an early service that may have limited childcare. We'll know for sure on that this week but I wanted you to be aware of what's coming.

Whenever it happens, we're going to make the most of it; we're going to have fun with it. It's going to be a time we'll all remember for years to come! It will be a great experience this fall. And then in December, we'll open this place up to the community and invite tons more people in.

So, I hope you'll be here next Saturday.

See you next week.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> See Darwin Correspondence Project

<sup>ii</sup> See <http://www.discovery.org/a/3191>

<sup>iii</sup> Quoted at <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/age-universe-and-genesis-1-reformed-approach-science-and-scripture/>

<sup>iv</sup> See <http://news.discovery.com/space/faster-speed-of-light-110922.html>

<sup>v</sup> See <http://bylogos.blogspot.ca/2012/07/rc-sproul-waffles-on-creation.html>