

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The Theological Significance of the Doctrine of Creation:  
Reconciling Creation with Modern Science

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by

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## Introduction

The question of origin has been one that has triggered debate, speculation, and curiosity since the beginning of humanity. Too often, the debate on the origins of the planet and human beginnings is framed as a choice between God and science; however, if God is the Creator of all things, including the foundations of science, then the one should not contradict the other.

In the past, various religious explanations were the norm, with differences often based on regions from where they originated. While the beginnings of evolutionary theory can be traced back to ancient Greece<sup>1</sup>, and others began to develop the ideas more so in the 1600's<sup>2</sup>, Charles Darwin popularized the concept for the modern world during the 1800's.<sup>3</sup> Even so, for American culture, creationist theory was the norm, based on the Christian interpretation of the Bible well into the twentieth century.

For the purposes of this paper, the debate over origin began to truly heat up in the United States with the Scopes Trial in 1925 when a teacher intentionally broke pro-creation laws and taught evolution in schools, resulting in him being brought to trial and eventually losing – yet in the process bringing the debate to national attention and beginning the process of swinging public opinion away from creationism.<sup>4</sup> Even now, nearly a century later, the debate rages on with events like the Bill Nye and Ken Hamm debate exploding in the news, drawing over three

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1 Fowler, Thomas B., and Daniel Kuebler, *The Evolution Controversy*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 43.

2 Ibid., 45.

3 Ibid., 55.

4 Berra, Tim M, *Evolution and the Myth of Creationism*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 132.

million viewers to the live debate<sup>5</sup>, and close to another three million viewers in the months since.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, noted astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson's pro-evolution show, *Cosmos: A Spacetime Exploration*, has been averaging 3.7 million to 5.8 million viewers weekly during its thirteen episode run, further demonstrating the nation's curiosity on the topic and continuing to fuel national conversation.<sup>7</sup>

The scientific community for the most part feels the frustration of seeing religious intolerance finding legal loop holes to discredit or deny access to conclusions drawn from the scientific process, theories and evidence, resulting in a nation behind many parts of the world in the arena of science.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, for devout creationists it seems to be not just a war over origin, but an attempt to stamp out the idea of God altogether, with part of the great fear being that "science without God leads to cynicism and a sense of life without meaning."<sup>9</sup>

### Theories

There are far too many theories to address them all in this paper, however, for the sake of framing the conversation several of the prominent theories of origin will be summarized. One of the mystifying realities for the scientific community is the realization that even within the Christian community there is little agreement on this topic, with a broad range of theories presented as truth, often times with disagreements inciting accusations of lack of faith.<sup>10</sup>

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5 <http://www.charismanews.com/us/42677-3-million-watched-evolution-creation-debate-but-how-many-minds-changed>

6 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6kgvhG3AkI>

7 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmos:\\_A\\_Spacetime\\_Odyssey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmos:_A_Spacetime_Odyssey)

8 Berra, *Evolution and the Myth of Creationism*, 120.

9 Brouwer, Sigmund, *The Unrandom Universe*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 41.

10 Hitt, Austin M., *The Evolution of Creationism In America*, *Science Educator*, 18.1 (Spring 2009), 58-68.

## Intelligent Design

Intelligent Design is a theory, or method of explanation, that has gained traction in recent years by attempting to develop a secular method of identifying and defending design in the universe.<sup>11</sup> As judges ruled creation science to not be science at all, but a religious concept, the need to find a way to communicate creationism in a way that would be legal in schools gave birth to Intelligent Design.<sup>12</sup> By removing any hint of religion, God, or the supernatural from the equation, Intelligent Design instead focuses on the complexity of our universe, the intricacies of the varying systems, and makes the case for patterns of design reflecting an intelligent, or intentional effort and forming the universe. By looking at specific examples, the case is made that the level of complexity discovered could not be explained through random or natural occurrence.<sup>13</sup>

Phillip Johnson, author and one of the primary developers of the Intelligent Design theory noted, “The literature of Darwinism is full of anti-theistic conclusions, such as that the universe was not designed and has no purpose, and that we humans are the product of blind natural processes that care nothing about us. What is more, these statements are not presented as personal opinions but as logical implications of evolutionary science.”<sup>14</sup> In response to this apparent contradiction in his perspective, that pro-evolutionists’ subjective opinions were accepted as fact while creationists scientific theories were rejected as religious tenets and

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<sup>11</sup> Wise, Kurt P., *Faith, Form, and Time: What the Bible Teaches and Science Confirms About Creation and the Age of the Universe*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 281.

<sup>12</sup> Rana, Fazale, and Hugh Ross, *Who was Adam? A Creation Model Approach to the Origin of Man*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005), 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>14</sup> Falk, Darrel R., *Coming to Peace with Science: Bridging the Worlds Between Faith and Biology*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 40.

therefore unscientific, Johnson sought to redefine the terms and create a theory that would stand on scientific standards while leaving room for the possibility of the divine. At its core, the Intelligent Design movement focuses on three propositions<sup>15</sup>:

1. Evolution promotes an atheistic worldview and therefore must be resisted by believers in God.
2. Evolution is fundamentally flawed, since it cannot account for the intricate complexity of nature.
3. If evolution cannot explain irreducible complexity, then there must have been an intelligent designer involved somehow, who stepped in to provide the necessary components during the course of evolution.

Critics of Intelligent Design see it merely as another version of creationism and religion trying to manufacture a loop hole, or back door entrance to get creationism into secular establishments.

### Evolution

As mentioned in the introduction, while many consider Darwin to be the originator of the theory of evolution, the ideas behind it had actually been around for many centuries at that point. The turning point, in many ways, was Darwin's ability to popularize the concept and bring it to the masses in a way that had not been previously achieved.<sup>16</sup> The word evolution literally means "development," and at its core refers to natural. In other words, species naturally change, mutate,

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<sup>15</sup> Collins, Francis S., *The Language of God*, (New York: Free Press, 2006), 183.

<sup>16</sup> Jacoby, Douglas, *Genesis, Science & History*, (Billerica, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 2004), 167.

adapt and develop, with the strongest surviving and the weaker dying off. As a result, both micro and macro changes can occur in a species, or in the development of new species, over lengths of time.<sup>17</sup>

Tim Berra gives these definitions for evolution<sup>18</sup>:

- Microevolution: Change in gene frequency within a population, which may lead to the formation of new species.
- Macroevolution: Involves evolutionary change above the species level, as for example in long-term trends within whole lineages, or in mass extinctions.

In reality, belief in evolution is accepted by everyone, whether they realize it or not – it would be difficult at best to find anyone who would deny the evidence in support of microevolution (development on a small scale). As Douglas Jacoby points out, “the dispute is not really over whether evolution has occurred, but the extent to which it has occurred.”<sup>19</sup>

For the evolutionist, belief in God is not necessarily required, or on the other hand, a contradiction. The real question for the evolutionist scientist is, how did life develop?<sup>20</sup> While there are exceptions, for the most part the accusations of an agenda to eliminate God are without basis. In fact, as noted by Austin Hitt, a secular evolutionist, there is confusion over the attacks from the conservative Christian community on the theory of evolution, and seeming mistrust of scientists in general.<sup>21</sup> Critics, on the other hand, question whether or not there is enough

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17 Ibid., 169.

18 Berra, *Evolution and the Myth of Creationism*, 11.

19 Jacoby, *Genesis, Science & History*, 169.

20 Ibid., 169.

21 Hitt, *The Evolution of Creationism In America*, 58-68.

evidence to substantiate the claims of evolution, as well as express frustration over so many accepting what is labeled a theory as fact.

### Young Earth Creationism

As opposed to the theory of Intelligent Design, Creationism blatantly explains origins through the deliberate act of God. One of the hallmarks of Young Earth Creationism is a very literal understanding of scripture. For example, the seven days of creation would be understood to be a literal seven 24 hour days, and the age of the earth is explained as being around six thousand years (hence “Young Earth”), based on the genealogies found in the Bible which trace Adam, who would have been created in the first week of Earth’s history, to the birth of Jesus, giving a date to creation at 4004 BC. Irish Anglican Archbishop James Ussher was the first to propose this age for Earth based on biblical genealogies.<sup>22</sup> A Young Earth creationist would believe in there being very little time between the start of creation and the arrival of man just days later. They believe in a literal Adam and Eve as well.

Because popular dating methods appear to contradict a literal understanding of the ages in scripture, they are rejected as inaccurate. Astrological data used to support an Old Earth (the time it would take for the light to travel to earth) is also understood as having been created with the rays of light already in place between the distant solar systems and our own, much like Christ’s first miracle with the wine took a process that should have taken significant amounts of time naturally and instead saw it completed instantly.

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<sup>22</sup> Ross, Hugh, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), 82.

Another word describing this approach Genesis is “concordism.” This approach “seeks to give a modern scientific explanation for the details in the text.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, with a literal understanding of scripture, what is stated in scripture must align with science and be possible. As a result, Concordism tries to explain the literal seven day creation, how there could have been waters above the sky (Genesis 1:7), and other similar examples. Concordists propose drastic changes in the ecology due to creation, the fall of man, and the flood to explain how the science of Genesis agrees with science today.<sup>24</sup>

Critics observe that the Bible was not designed to be a scientific text and reading it as such is questionable. They also question why God would create a world which appears in many ways to be far older than it actually is.

#### Old Earth Creationism

Like Young Earth Creationism, Old Earth Creationism attributes the origins of the universe and life to God. Recognizing astrological data that would date the universe at an extremely old age, as well as data from sediment accumulations in bodies of water and coral reef formations that would take millions of years to form, as well as other dating methods, Old Earth creationists acknowledge that the scientific data indicates an ancient Earth and creation.<sup>25</sup> From that standpoint they then interpret the scriptures and God’s manner in creating and guiding creation.

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23 Walton, John H., *The Lost World of Genesis One*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 16.

24 Snoke, David, *A Biblical Case for an Old Earth*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 115.

25 Ibid., 32.

Consequently, in Old Earth Creationism, there is room for several different explanations. Some would hold to the gap theory, that there is a unmentioned span of time between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2; this allows for the aging of the universe, while still permitting a literal seven days of creation. Others would hold to the day/age theory, in which the word “day” in the creation narrative actually refers to ages, not 24 hour periods of time. There is actually some flexibility in the Hebrew to justify this position. Within those contexts, some would still hold to a very literal creation very similar to what is seen today while others would see God using the process of evolution to guide creation to what is experienced today.

One of the questions the Old Earth creationist seeks an answer to is the purpose of Genesis and the creation narrative. Is it meant to be scientific information, explaining the literal process of creation? Is it meant to be historical in nature, giving the details a history book would give? Or is its purpose something else? The Old Earth creationist would argue for the last one. For example, John Walton notes that while the text gives some details that would suggest history, they still fit a more poetical format, and ultimately seems to communicate a focus other than history. Walton would suggest that Genesis 1-11 is actually primarily concerned with demonstrating the need for a covenant with God, while chapters 12-50 describe the formation of the covenant.<sup>26</sup> In many ways, this theory would fit with the larger message of the Bible of God providing a way for a spiritually dead humanity to be restored to Him and spiritual life.

Some critics of Old Earth creationism reject its non-literal approach to portions of scripture. Others accuse it of trying to mix secular and spiritual to the point of watering down the Bible and explaining away the divine hand in creation.

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<sup>26</sup> Walton, John H., *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 37.

## Conclusion

Initially, the goal of this paper was to reconcile science with creation, with the understanding being that if God created the universe, with all of its laws and inspired scripture, the two must agree. Unfortunately, that assumption was based on faulty logic, that scripture communicates science – but that is not the fundamental purpose of scripture. The Bible is God’s tool for revealing Himself to man with the vital message of salvation. Many have called it a love letter, God’s beautiful story of redemption for a fallen mankind. To read it as scientific instruction would read something into the text that was not intended to be there.

John Walton points out one of the dangers of attempting to read into scripture support for modern scientific understanding – especially given that scientific understanding is constantly in flux. That approach would assume “that the text should be understood in reference to current scientific consensus, which would mean that it would neither correspond to last century’s scientific consensus nor to that which may develop in the next century.”<sup>27</sup> In fact, if God were to write the scriptures in such a way as to agree with present day science, it would be impossible for generations before this one to make sense of scripture, while at the same time rendering it outdated to future generations.

In fact, it is critical to note that “there is not a single instance [in scripture] in which God revealed to Israel a science beyond their own culture.”<sup>28</sup> God saw fit to communicate in a manner which was understandable, and did not see the need to reveal beyond that – because ultimately,

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<sup>27</sup> Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 17.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

His purpose was not to give man a full understanding of creation, but instead to bring His fallen and spiritually dead children back to spiritual life through His plan for redemption.

“Though that [God’s] message transcends culture, the form it was given in is, to some extent, culture-bound.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, the Bible was written to be applicable to all time and all people, however, the creation story was written from a Jewish perspective thousands of years ago, and that cultural reality requires recognition. It is inappropriate to try and reconcile scientific discoveries and understandings to a text thousands of years old. While from a historical context the scriptures continued to be confirmed by historical discoveries, they are of a fundamentally different nature than that of science and the same kinds of expectations should not be forced on to a text that was not intended for that purpose.

The thesis statement included this sentence; if God is the Creator of all things, including the foundations of science, then the one should not contradict the other. The answer is yes and no. Followers of Christ should not be wary of scientific progress and discovery. They reveal the intricacies of God’s creation and give man a growing picture of God’s power and majesty. Science does confirm the divine when the reader is willing to stop projecting on to the scriptures purpose it was not intended to have.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” Psalms 19:1, NIV.

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<sup>29</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 19.

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