

Creation and Evolution: A False Dichotomy?

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I. Introduction: How Should We Think about the Question of Origins?

A. A personal story about binary thinking

B. Finding common ground: What Christians can all affirm about creation

1. God is the Creator through Jesus Christ

16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16-17)

*We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made (Nicene Creed, AD 325)*

2. Psalm 19 – God’s Two Books

1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge...

7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

“...let no man...think or maintain, that a man can search too far or be too well studied in the book of God’s word, or in the book of God’s works.” Francis Bacon, Advancement of Learning, Bk I

[Note: quoted by both Charles Darwin in the preface to *The Origin of Species* and Henry Morris in *Men of Science, Men of God*, pp. 13,14!]

C. Thesis: Christians should avoid binary thinking about the question of origins

1. Not so fruitful: Oversimplification

*One of the attractions of the popular caricatures that reign in this area is that they make confident choice appear supremely easy. (Del Ratzsch. *The Battle of Beginnings*. InterVarsity Press, 1996, p. 8)*

2. Fruitful: A plurality of views attempting to be faithful to God’s Two Books

Many—if not most—Americans think of the creation/evolution controversy as a dichotomy...The true situation is much more complicated. I encourage people to reject the creation/evolution dichotomy and to recognize the creation/evolution continuum.

(Eugenie Scott, *Reports of the National Center for Sci. Educ.*, July/Aug. 1999)

II. Origins: The Creation/Evolution Continuum

A. Some important definitions

1. Biological evolution (Neo-Darwinian synthesis): the process of biological change over time, involving descent with modification, and made possible by random mutation plus natural selection, along with other genetic mechanisms (genetic drift, etc.)

a. Microevolution: small evolutionary changes, usually within a population

b. Macroevolution: large evolutionary changes, including speciation and extinction, typically occurring over long periods of time and across gene pools.

2. Creationism: The position that the universe, and [ultimately] life on Earth were created by one or more intelligent agents. For Christians this agent is God.

a. Creationists hold different view on how direct such creation is and over what time period it has occurred.

3. Naturalism

a. Methodological naturalism: the natural world is to be explained in terms of natural processes [some would prefer “natural science”]

b. Metaphysical naturalism: a philosophical worldview that the natural world is all there is, and that excludes the supernatural

B. Major positions

1. A discontinuous continuum of viewpoints [see Figure 1]
2. Two issues that correlate with the continuum
 - a. "Literal" vs. non-"literal" interpretation of Genesis
 - b. Relative importance and independence of the Two Books

III. Young-Earth Creationism (YEC)

A. Major tenets

1. All of Genesis is to be taken literally, notably Chapters 1 and 2 (and 6-9 for the Flood)
2. God created humans and all other species in acts of special, separate creation
3. The earth is between approx. 6000 and tens of thousands of years old
4. Apparent evidence to the contrary can be explained and discredited, either through scientific alternatives or apparent age
5. Death of animals is often explained as a result of the fall (Genesis 3), based on numerous biblical passages that say that sin results in death.
6. YECs often accept microevolution. Minor changes can occur within "kinds" ("baramins").
7. No YECs accept macroevolution.
8. Two main approaches
 - a. Scientific creationism: In its present form dates from 1 *The Genesis Flood* by Henry Morris and John Whitcomb (1961). Relies heavily on stratification of animal and plant material via a worldwide flood, and a postulated "vapor canopy" that was a major source of water for the flood and conferred properties on the planet not now extant.
 - b. Apparent age

B. Some prominent YECs: (older) Henry Morris, John Whitcomb, Duane Gish, Gary Parker; (younger) Ken Ham, Kurt Wise, Paul Nelson

C. YEC flagship institutions: The Institute for Creation Research (ICR); Answers in Genesis

D. Motivations for this view:

1. Seeks to uphold a strong view of Scripture and God's sovereignty in the world
I want to make it VERY clear that we don't want to be known primarily as 'young-Earth creationists.'
AiG's main thrust is NOT 'young Earth' as such; our emphasis is on Biblical authority.
(Ken Ham, January 1998 AiG-USA Newsletter)
2. Seeks to be faithful to a "literal" hermeneutic ["If the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense."]
3. Seeks to avoid the "hermeneutical slippery slope": the belief that if a "literal" reading of Genesis is relinquished, then the rest of Scripture cannot be trusted.

E. Criticisms of this view:

1. Seems to be incompatible with astrophysics, geophysics, and paleontology.
Natural science at the moment seems to overwhelmingly point to an old cosmos...It is safe to say that most recent creationists are motivated by religious concerns.
(Paul Nelson, in *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, p. 49)
2. Other Christians feel the YEC interpretive approach to Genesis does not take the Bible "literally" enough or seek its "plain" sense for its original audience.

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—————Major difference: Age of the earth (young versus old)—————

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IV. Old-Earth Creationism (OEC)

A. Major tenets

1. God is the active causal agent in creation, with the exact nature of His involvement (i.e., how He created) in non-biological processes regarded as a secondary concern.
2. Big Bang, astronomical and geological gradualism accepted.
3. OECs typically accept microevolution but not macroevolution.

4. Special creationism can be harmonized with data showing that the earth is ancient, although the nature of that harmonization differs among OECs.
5. Humans are a special, typically direct creation of God, based on Gen. 2.
6. Flood is typically considered local to the Near East/Mediterranean, but for some did wipe out all humans except for Noah and family (e.g. Reasons to Believe)
7. OECs accommodate physical science and the text of Genesis 1-2 in any of several ways (a technical term is "concordism")

a. Gap Creationism: Assumes a large temporal gap between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2 [an old view not widely held today].

b. Day/Age Creationism: Understands the "days" of creation to be long periods.

c. Progressive Creationism: God created "kinds" of organisms sequentially, over long periods of time; evolution within a "kind" occurred but not descent by modification. The fineness of these periods varies, and it may look, at its "left" edge, like EC. However, Neo-Darwinian evolutionary mechanisms are considered insufficient.

RTB [Reason to Believe] scholars believe that God miraculously intervened throughout the history of the universe in various ways millions, possibly even billions, of times to create each and every new species of life on Earth. (<http://www.reasons.org/about-us/faq>)

B. Some prominent OECs: Hugh Ross, Walter Bradley, C. John Collins

C. OEC flagship organization: Reasons to Believe

D. Motivations for this view

1. Seeks to uphold a strong view of the authority of Scripture and God's sovereignty in the world, balanced against seemingly congruent results from the physical sciences.

2. Seeks to uphold the unique of humans and the historicity of the Fall.

E. Criticisms of this view

1. YECs criticize it because it accepts an old earth.

2. ECs criticize it as an "ad hoc" way for God to create.

3. Some concordist approaches are criticized as bringing modern approaches to the text that would not make sense to the original audience.

V. Intelligent Design (ID)

A. Major Tenets

1. Most Christians accept the idea that intentionality underlies creation (Col. 1:16-17). This is not what is meant by ID in a technical sense.

2. ID as a technical concept is an argument for the existence of a designer based on the premise that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not by undirected processes, especially natural selection.

3. ID does not specifically identify the designer as the Judeo-Christian God.

4. Irreducible complexity: All parts are needed for a system to function (e.g. mousetrap), and no parts are useful if the system lacks any of its parts. Proposed examples include the bacterial flagellum, blood clotting, etc. The origins of living things from non-living components likewise requires a designer (e.g. Steven C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell*)

5. Specified complexity: Anything both complex and "specified" has likely been designed.

6. Often criticizes methodological naturalism in science.

7. Does not necessarily correlate with one's view on the age of the earth. Many ID proponents are OECs (e.g. Michael Behe); others (e.g., Paul Nelson) are YECs.

8. Fine-tuned universe: The many features that make life possible cannot be attributed to chance, from the fundamental constants of the universe to specific conditions on the planet that allow life. This aspect of ID is often embraced by evolutionary creationists who would reject arguments about complexity above.

B. Some prominent ID proponents: Michael Behe, William Dembski, Steven C. Meyer, Guillermo Gonzalez, Phillip Johnson, J.P. Moreland, Paul Nelson, Jonathan Wells.

C. The ID Flagship organization: The Center for Science and Culture at the Discovery Institute, Seattle, WA

D. Motivations for this view

1. The stated motivation is an attempt to provide an alternative to Neo-Darwinian theory, since this theory is viewed as inadequate to ID proponents.
2. Since many [but not all] ID proponents are Christians, a key motivation internal to the movement is to discredit Neo-Darwinian evolution, due to its dysteleological nature, which seems incompatible with Christian theism.

E. Criticisms of this view:

1. Many scientists who are Christians are not convinced that ID makes positive predictions about how to do science or about scientific mechanism that lead to testable hypotheses. *Easily the biggest challenge facing the ID community is to develop a full-fledged theory of biological design...Without a theory, it's very hard to know where to direct your research focus...Right now, we have a bag of powerful intuitions...* (Paul Nelson, in *Touchstone Magazine* 17, no. 6, 2004, 64-65)
2. No productive alternatives to methodological naturalism have emerged.
3. Proposed examples of irreducible complexity seem to have explanation that comport with Neo-Darwinian explanation; specific complexity as a concept has been criticized.
4. ID has often been criticized as a veiled form of creationism (e.g. the celebrated 20XX court case in Dover, PA). Critics call it "Intelligent Design Creationism".

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————— **Major difference: Mechanism (creation versus evolution)** —————

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VI. Evolutionary Creationism (EC)

A. Major tenets of Evolutionary Creation (EC)

1. An earlier view, often called *theistic evolution*, was often conceived of as involving more direct guidance of the "end point" of evolution. A major problem with this position is that it has been viewed with considerable suspicion by both creationists and naturalistic evolutionists alike.
2. God the Creator used evolution to bring about the universe according to His plan, just as God uses gravitation and other stochastic events (e.g. rolling of dice, quantum physics) to bring about His plan. Astronomical, geological, and biological evolution are therefore acceptable.
3. EC is consistent with methodological naturalism; the natural world should be explained in terms of natural processes, which God upholds.
4. The miraculous events of salvation history (e.g., resurrection of Jesus) occurred; God can and does intervene in the natural world, but not in its day-to-day operations.
5. Some ECs may think that there is a discontinuity between non-living and living systems; others believe that although there is no mechanism at present, one day scientists will understand how this naturally occurred.
6. EC accepts evolution of hominids to produce *Homo sapiens*. Opinions differ about a unique, immaterial aspect to human beings (a "soul" that is different from an emergent property of the body/brain).
7. Forms of this view are officially sanctioned as being compatible with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, as reiterated by Pope John Paul II in 1996. Also the de facto or official position of many, maybe even most, mainline Protestant denominations, and the position adopted in the Clergy Letter (<http://blue.butler.edu/~mzimmer/>).
8. Evangelicals can hold versions of this position and be strongly committed to the inerrancy of Scripture

I am free to say for myself, that I do not think that there is any general statement in the Bible or any part of the account of creation, either as given in Gen. I & II or elsewhere alluded to, that need be opposed to evolution.

(Benjamin B. Warfield, *Lectures on Anthropology*, 1888, reproduced in Livingstone, D. *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders*. Eerdmans, 1987, p. 118)

I believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, and maintain it in print, but I cannot see that anything Scripture says, in the first chapters of Genesis or elsewhere, bears on the biological theory of evolution one way or the other. (J. I. Packer, *The Evangelical Anglican Identity Problem: An Analysis*. Latimer House, 1978, p. 5)

8. Christians can still be philosophical dualists and hold this view (philosopher Richard Swinburne, possibly C. S. Lewis)

B. Some prominent ECs: Denis Lamoureaux, Howard Van Till, Francis Collins, Darrell Falk, Denis Alexander, BioLogos Foundation, many members of the American Scientific Affiliation, Roman Catholic biologist Kenneth Miller.

C. EC flagship organizations: BioLogos, Faraday Institute (UK)

D. Motivations for this view

1. Seeks to integrate what appears to be strong evidence for biological evolution with Christian theism, while seeking to maintain commitment to biblical authority.
2. Seeks to honor the "second book" by acknowledging new biological data in addition to data from the physical sciences.

E. Criticisms of this view:

1. Neo-Darwinian theory is considered dysteleological (lacking in purpose) by YECs and OECs (teleological problem).
2. EC may present problems for understanding the inerrancy of Scripture.
3. EC may present problems for traditional understandings of the Fall.

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=====DISCONTINUOUS MAJOR DIFFERENCE: ULTIMATE AGENCY=====

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VII. Materialistic Naturalism (MN)

A. Major tenets

1. All of the natural world (including origin of life) can be explained by the occurrence of natural events without the need to invoke supernatural or intelligent agents of any sort.
2. All forms of life can be explained in terms of Neo-Darwinian evolution.
3. It is therefore unnecessary to see man (or any other present-day organism, for that matter) as special or the product of purposeful process.
4. Evolutionism as a philosophical worldview

Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.

(Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, Norton, 1987, p. 6)

Man was certainly not the goal of evolution, which evidently had no goal. He was not planned, in an operation wholly planless. (George G. Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution*, Yale Univ. Press, 1949, p. 292)

B. Some prominent MNs: Richard Dawkins, Stephen Jay Gould, Steven Pinker, Christopher Hitchens

C. Engaging with MN

1. Evolutionism can't explain many basic aspects of life

The existence of a limit to science, is however, made clear by its inability to answer childlike questions having to do with first and last things – questions such as 'How did everything begin?' 'What are we all here for?' 'What is the point of living?' (Peter Medawar, *The Limits of Science*, Oxford Univ. Press, 1984, p. 59)

2. Evolutionism may reflect a "Cosmic Authority Problem"

I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God!... My guess is that this cosmic authority problem is not a rare condition and that it is responsible for much of the scientism and reductionism of our time. One of the tendencies it supports is the ludicrous overuse of evolutionary biology to explain everything about life."

(Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word*, Oxford Univ. Press, 1997, pp. 130-131; emphasis mine)

3. Evolutionism: Another personal story

VIII. Conclusions: Where Do We Go from Here?

A. This is a topic about which sincere Christians can and do sincerely differ

B. All Christian discourse should be characterized by humility, patience and charity (Eph. 4:29)

"...But rather, let men endeavour an endless progress or proficience in both; only let men beware that they apply both to charity, and not to swelling; to use and not to ostentation; and again that they do not unwisely mingle or confound those learnings together." (Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, Bk I)

12 Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. 13 Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. 14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19)

C. Whatever our views, we can praise the Lord for His creation and His care of us His creatures!

Resources for further study

Christians Who Are Scientists

The American Scientific Affiliation (US) web site: <http://www.asa3.org>

Christians in Science (UK) web site: <http://www.cis.org.uk>

Evolutionary Biology

Evolution 101: http://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/evo_01

Comparative Treatments of the Creation/Evolution Continuum

Wilkinson, D. *The Message of Creation*. InterVarsity Press (2002) (esp. the Appendix)

ASA Education pages: <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/education/index.html>, by Blackhawk's own Craig Rusbult.

Carlson, R.F. (ed). *Science and Christianity: Four Views*. IVP, (2000).

Moreland, J.P. and Reynolds, J.M. *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*. Zondervan (1999).

Manson, N.A., ed. *God and Design The Teleological Argument and Modern Science*. New York: Routledge (2003).

Haarsma, D.B. and Haarsma, L.D. *Origins: A Reformed Look at Creation, Design, and Evolution*. Faith Alive Publishers (2007).

Scott, E. *Evolution vs. Creationism: An Introduction*, 2e. University of California Press (2009).

Specific Books/Web Sites Representing Various Positions

YEC

Answers in Genesis: Website: <http://www.answersingenesis.org>

Institute for Creation Research:

Ham, K., ed. *The NEW Answers Book: Over 25 Questions on Creation/Evolution and the Bible*. Master Books (2006).

OEC

Reasons to Believe: <http://www.reasons.org/>

Ross, H. *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis*, 2d. ed. NavPress (2001).

ID

Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture Intelligent Design section: <http://www.intelligentdesign.org/>

Dembski, W.A. *The Design Revolution*. InterVarsity Press (2004).

EC

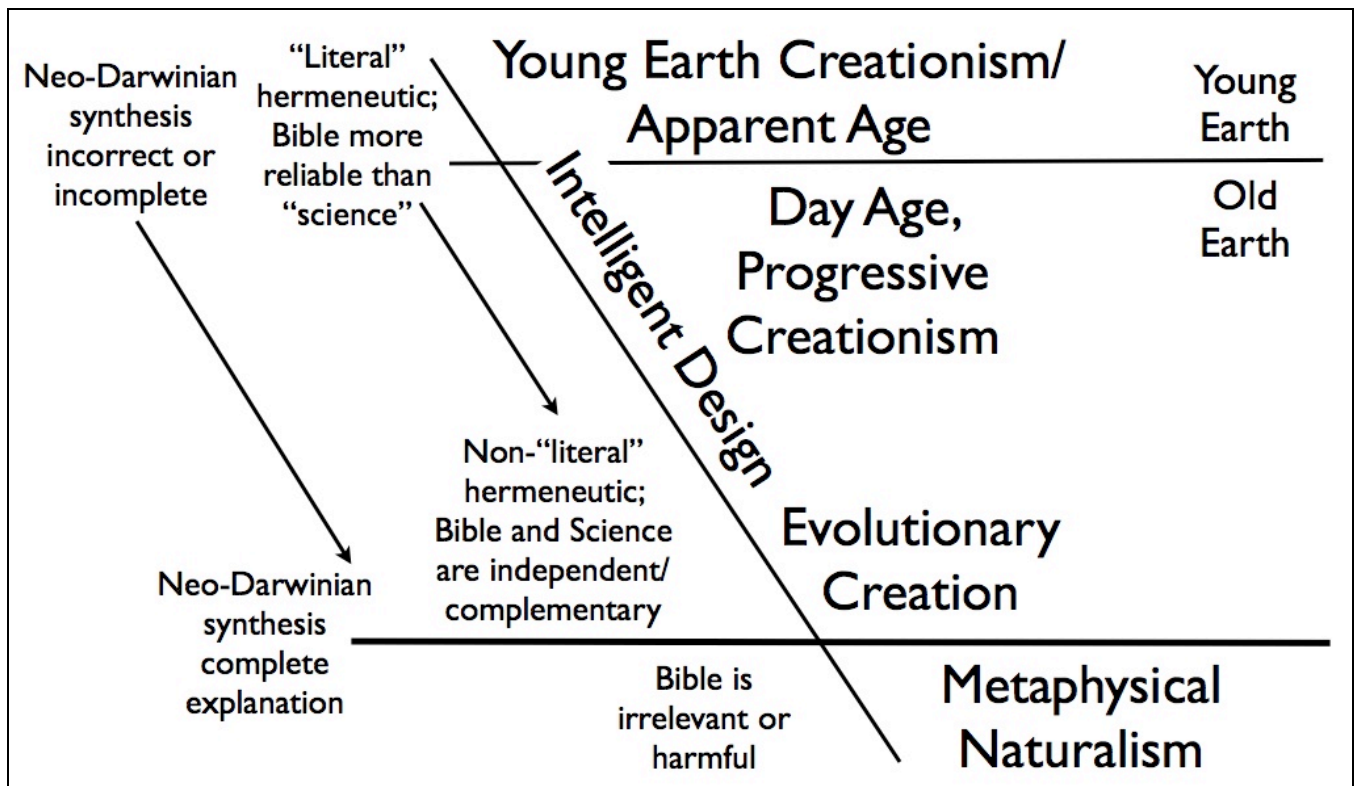
BioLogos Foundation (US): <http://biologos.org/>

Falk, D. *Coming to Peace with Science*. InterVarsity Press (2004).

Collins, F. *The Language of God*. Free Press (2006).

Alexander, D. *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* Grand Rapids: Monarch Press (2008).

Figure 1 - The Creation/Evolution Continuum (adapted from Scott, E.C., *Evolution vs. Creationism*, 2e)



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