

“Genesis, Science, and the Christian Worldview”

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I. Considerations about Science

A. The nature of science

1. A popular (but problematic) perception of science (“Traditional View”):
 - a. Science is totally objective, rational, and empirical.
 - b. Scientists have little, if any, commitment to their theories.
 - c. Science exhibits consensus and is uniform in its method
 - d. Science is totally separate from “metaphysics” (what is “beyond” [meta] “nature” [Greek=*physis*]).
2. This view of science has been severely criticized and rejected by many philosophers of science.¹
 - a. Science is NOT so objective, rational, and empirical, especially when choices among “competing paradigms” or theories is concerned.
 - b. Scientists have exhibited *tenacious commitment* to their theories, even when much evidence seemed *against* their theory.
 - c. Science often consists of “competing paradigms” of explanation (e.g. Ozone disputes).
 - d. Scientists often adopt metaphysical assumptions in their scientific theories. (E.g. Newton’s physics assumed that “mass” was “absolute”—an assumption that was later directly challenged by Einstein.)

B. Scientists don’t always speak exclusively as “scientists”; they make assertions that go *beyond* empirical science and necessarily become “philosophers.”

Richard Dawkins: “Any creative intelligence, of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution. Creative intelligences, being evolved, necessarily arrive late in the universe, and therefore cannot be responsible for designing it. God ... is a delusion;...” (*The God Delusion* [Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 2006], 31).

Jacques Monod: “Man knows at last that he is alone in the universe’s unfeeling immensity, out of which he emerged only by chance” (*Chance and Necessity*, 1972, 180).

Rich Knopp: “Whenever we hear or read someone discussing science and religion, we need a good ‘hat detector.’ Are they wearing a ‘scientist hat’ or a ‘philosopher hat?’”

C. Different kinds of science

1. “Repeatable, empirical” science
 - a. Subject to repeated tests.
 - b. However, even here, science often makes or accepts assumptions that are not “*purely empirical*” or that align with one of several competing paradigms (see point I.C.2.c above).
2. “Not-so-repeatable and not-so-empirical” science (e.g. detection of dark matter, dark energy, gamma rays, “strings” in string theory, the evolution from one specie to another).
3. “Origin” and “historical” sciences
 - a. Explanations/Postulations of apparently *one-time* events.
 - b. E.g. Historical events, theories about the origin of the cosmos (e.g. Big Bang) and the origin of life (spontaneous generation or abiogenesis—life arising from non-living matter).

D. Many points above are very important as we think about the proper relationship between science and Genesis.

1. Scientific views have changed and will continue to change.
2. Science is not totally objective and it incorporates ideas that are not repeatedly testable empirically.
3. Sometimes, scientists are significantly influenced by their *philosophical* positions.
4. However, science has demonstrated an incredible capacity to understand more and more of the natural world (e.g. medical advancements; space exploration).

¹ For accessible and introductory discussions of this, see my “On the Value of the Philosophy of Science for Christian Faith and Ministry,” chap. in *Taking Every Thought Captive: Essays in Honor of James D. Strauss*, ed. Richard A. Knopp and John Castelein (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1997), 237-270; and Del Ratzsche, *Science and Its Limits: The Natural Sciences in Christian Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity, 2000), 17-72.

II. Competing Explanations for the Existence of the Universe and Life²

A. The universe (matter/energy) is eternal and is all there is.

1. Life arose through purely naturalistic means (no “supernatural”).
2. A prominent view in the 19th and early 20th century.
3. Fred Hoyle (1915-2001) defended this idea with his “Steady State” theory.

B. The universe had many “beginnings” through ongoing “oscillations” of expansion and contraction.

1. We are currently in one of those countless cycles.
2. Some current cosmologists and ancient religions (e.g. Hinduism) propose this.

C. The universe had a beginning at some point in the finite past—alterative explanations:

1. **Complete evolutionary process:** Accepts cosmological evolution (the universe evolved over c. 14 billion years ago) and biological MACRO-evolution (all life forms arose from a common ancestor).
 - a. Naturalistic or A-theistic (e.g. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*)
 - (1) The cosmos arose in some currently-inexplicable way.
 - (2) Nothing was present to “cause” its beginning.
 - (3) Life arose from non-living matter (abiogenesis) without intelligent cause, direction, or purpose.
 - b. Theistic: God has continually “directed” the evolutionary process (see Francis Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* [New York: Free Press, 2006] and Denis Lamoureux, *I Love Jesus and I Accept Evolution* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock], 2009).
 - c. Deistic: God creates the universe in his initial creation with the built-in capacity to evolve cosmologically and biologically (see Howard Van Til, *The Fourth Day: What the Bible and the Heavens are Telling Us about the Creation*).
2. **Periodic Creationism:** God periodically creates at distinct times.
 - a. Young Earth Creationism (YEC): Universe about 10,000 years old.
 - b. Old Earth Creationism (OEC):
 - (1) Universe may be as old as most cosmologists say—about 14,000,000,000 years.
 - (2) See different versions discussed below.
 - (3) (Note: Theistic and Deistic evolutionists would also accept an “old earth” idea, and many would refer to the product of evolution as God’s “creation.”)
3. **Intelligent Design:**
 - a. Both the cosmos and even the “simplest” of living organisms seem to require prior intelligence (perhaps God, but not necessarily a divine being).
 - b. Typically avoids the “age of the universe” question, although advocates typically accept an old universe view.

III. Types of Periodic Creationism (overview)

A. “Young Earth” creationism (YEC)

1. Basic position
 - a. The universe is relatively young (c. 10,000 yrs.).
 - b. The 6 “days” of creation (Gen. 1-2) are sequential, 24-hour solar days.
 - c. Stresses that the repeated phrase “and there was evening and there was morning” refer to a
 - d. A global flood explains most geologic formations (e.g. mountains, canyons, strata).
 - e. Often, YEC stresses “mature creation”—that creation had the appearance of age built into it.
2. Early modern history
 - a. John Lightfoot (1642): Creation occurred Sept. 17, 3928 BC.
 - b. Bishop James Ussher: Oct. 3, 4004 BC.
 - c. Lightfoot’s response: creation week, Oct. 18-24, 4004 BC; Adam created Oct. 23, 4004 @ 9:00 a.m.
3. Contemporary leaders and organizations
 - a. John Whitcomb & Henry Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (1961).
 - b. Creation Research Society (1963).
 - c. Institute for Creation Research (1972; www.icr.org): Henry Morris, Duane Gish.
 - d. Answers in Genesis (c. 1993): Ken Ham (www.answersingenesis.org) and the multi-million dollar Creation Science Museum in northern Kentucky (www.creationmuseum.org).

B. “Old Earth” Creationism (OEC): Different and prominent versions:

I. Basic position

- a. The Bible either does not teach or does not require a YEC; OEC views offer various interpretations of the creation passages in the Bible.

² Typical debates over Darwinian evolution are not even relevant to this issue. Darwinism (or more properly “Neo-Darwinism”) appeals to mutations and natural selection to explain the origin of new species. However, the existence of life is necessary before mutations are possible and before natural selection has anything to work with.

- b. The age of the universe and of life *could* be consistent with consensus scientific views.
 - (1) E.g. Big Bang: universe is c. 14,000,000,000 years old.
 - (2) E.g. The earth is c. 4.5 billion years old.
- 2. **“Gap” theory:**
 - a. A large gap between Gen. 1:1 and Gen. 1:2.
 - b. 1:2 “The earth became formless and void” (vs. “the earth was formless and void”).
 - c. The possibility arises that a prior creation (Gen. 1:1) (e.g. including the presence of fallen angels) was destroyed (Gen. 1:2) and God started over (Gen. 1:3-ff).
 - d. Defended by the Scofield Reference Bible (1907) and Harry Rimmer, *Modern Science and the Genesis Record* (1937; reprint 1973).
- 3. **“Day-Age” view** (Progressive Creationism)
 - a. Hebrew *yom* (“day”) can mean different lengths time.
 - b. Big Bang cosmology plus specific acts of divine creation over possibly vast periods of time.
 - c. Defended by Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994); *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998).
 - d. Defended by David Snoke, *A Biblical Case for an Old Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006).
- 4. **“Analogical Day” view**
 - a. The “days” offer an *analogy*, rather than an *identity*, to the days of human work (cf. Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 104:23).
 - b. The repeated phrase “and there was evening and there was morning” highlight the pause that occurs in God’s work each day (as in that of the Jewish day). It also offers the basis for other “Sabbaths” (i.e., the “Sabbath day” at the end of the week; the “Sabbath year” (Lev. 25); the “Jubilee” Sabbath (Lev. 25); and the Sabbath “rest” that remains for God’s saints (Heb. 4).
 - c. Defended by C. John Collins, *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 77-96; Vern Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 131-143.
- 5. **“Literary Framework” view**
 - a. The “days” are God’s “work days,” but the days are presented in a “literary framework.”
 - b. The “days” are not sequential from 1-6.
 - c. Days 1,2,3 highlight God’s creation of a “domain” or “container” in which he then creates the “objects” of each domain (days 4,5,6).
 - d. Thus, the creation sequence follows the correlation of days 1/4, 2/5, 3/6.

Genesis 1:3-31

Day 1: Light created (day); separated from darkness (night)	Day 4: Two great lights (sun and moon) and stars—signs for days and years
Day 2: An “expanse” (heaven) in the midst of the waters; waters separated	Day 5: Living creatures in waters; birds; sea monsters; every living creature ... with which the waters swarmed.
Day 3: Dry land and seas; “let the earth sprout vegetation”; plants; trees	Day 6: Cattle; creeping things and beasts of the earth; man

IV. General Considerations in Interpreting Genesis 1-2.

A. Cultures and “time”

- 1. “Clock time”
- 2. “Event time”

B. Key hermeneutical (interpreting) principles:

- 1. Consider the type of text (e.g. prose, narrative, poetry, biography).
- 2. Consider the cultural context (e.g. What did other cultures believe? How is Genesis unique?)
- 3. Is it to be understood) from a human point of view (“from below”) or from a “God’s-eye” point of view?
 - a. “Appearance” language (“phenomenological” = how it appears to us).
 - b. E.g. The sun “rises” and “sets” (Matt. 5:45; Gen. 15:17).
 - c. E.g. The “four corners of the earth” (Isa. 11:12; Rev. 7:1).
- 4. Ask: “What did this mean to its original hearers or readers in the ancient near-East?”

V. Young Earth vs. Old Earth: Theological Considerations³

A. Re: Basic rationale

1. YEC:

- a. God's Word must be taken as the ultimate (and beginning) authority, not “humanistic science.”
- b. The Word speaks of “days” in a straightforward sense. The days were sequential and 24-hour solar days.

2. OEC:

- a. Taking the “days” in something other than 24-hour days does not reject the authority of God's Word; it's a matter of how God's authoritative Word should be rightly understood.
- b. The purpose of the Genesis 1-2 should be set in the context of, and in contrast to, ancient near-eastern cultures (e.g. Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Sumerian, Babylonian) and their “creation accounts” like the *Enuma Elish*⁴ and the *Atrahasis Epic*.
 - (1) These texts attribute creation to many different gods who fought among themselves—even killed each other—and who end up creating humans for various purposes.
 - (2) E.g. Humans were created to help with the work overload of the gods.
 - (3) E.g. The *Atrahasis Epic*: Humans were created from mixed clay on which the gods spit.
 - (4) E.g. The *Enuma Elish*: The universe was formed out of a goddess (Tiamat) who was split in half by another god (Marduk).
 - (5) In none of these accounts is the duration of creation important or even relevant.
- c. Genesis emphasizes the who, the what, the why, and to a lesser extent the how.

B. Re: Arguments about “day” (yom)

1. YEC:

- a. We should interpret *yom* literally as a “day” with an evening and morning.
- b. Each of the six days include the phrase “and there was evening and there was morning”
- c. *Yom* following an ordinal (e.g. first day) is always “literal.”

2. OEC:

- a. Claiming that it's “always literal” after an ordinal presumes that it's literal in Genesis 1.
- b. Hosea 6:2 uses *yom* after an ordinal in a non-literal sense (“He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day”).
- c. The 7th “day” does not seem to be a “literal” 24 hours.
 - (1) God “rests” on the seventh day
 - (2) The Sabbath is sometimes a full year (Lev 25:4)
- d. Gen. 2:4 uses the word *yom* to refer to the entire creation: “This is the account [toledah = “generations”] of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day [*yom*] that the Lord God made earth and heaven.” [YEC responds by claiming that this refers to what follows, not to the account that preceded in Genesis 1.]
- e. Gen. 2:17 God tells them that “in the day [*YOM*] they eat from the forbidden tree, they will “surely die.” While they “died” spiritually that day, they certainly did not die physically that “day.”
- f. *Yom* is clearly used for longer periods of time than 24 solar hours.
 - (1) Time of divine judgment (e.g. Isa 2:12, “day [*yom*] of reckoning”).
 - (2) An indefinite time of temptation (e.g. Ps 95:8-9a, the “day of Massah”).
 - (3) A long period of time (1000 years) (e.g. Ps 90:4; 2 Pet 3:8).
- g. Genesis 1-2 faces severe difficulties with a 24-hour solar-day view.
 - (1) The sun is not created until day 4.
 - (2) Within the SAME 24-hour day (day 6):
 - (a) Livestock, wild animals, and creatures that move on the ground were created.
 - (b) Adam was created.
 - (c) Adam had to name all the animals (Gen. 2:19-20).
 - (d) “No suitable helper was found” for Adam (Gen. 2:20).
 - (e) Adam was put to sleep so Eve could be fashioned (Gen. 2:20-22). (Both “male and female” were created on “the sixth day” [Gen. 1:27-31])
 - (f) And by the end of the day, “it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

C. Re: Death and Adam/Eve's sin.

1. YEC:

- a. Physical death, of any kind, comes only because of, and after human sin (Gen 3:19).

³ Scientific considerations are also critical. YEC and OEC attempt to make a “scientific” case for their views. However, I will by-pass those matters and focus on some central *theological* arguments.

⁴ See <http://www.crivoice.org/enumaelish.html> for the entire account.

- b. Adam *could* have lived “forever” (Gen 3:22-23); hence, without Adam’s sin, he would not have died.
- c. Scripture attests that “by a man came death” (1 Cor. 15:21-22; cf. Rom 5:12,14-15).
- d. Corruption and decay began after human sin (cf. thorns and thistles).

2. OEC:

- a. The 1 Cor. 15 passage is about man, not animals. (“... as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” Is this also referring to animals?)
- b. Adam did not have an *inherent* capacity to “live forever”; he needed access to the garden and the tree of life (Gen. 3:22-24). By implication, he could have died had he “wandered away” or forsook the Garden.
- c. Re: “The Garden of Eden”
 - (1) How large was the “garden”? If it did not extend to the whole earth, how could they be “cast out”?
 - (2) If it was limited in size, what was “outside” the garden?
 - (3) Might death have already existed outside the garden even before Adam/Eve’s sin?
 - (4) Could this help explain Cain’s implicit knowledge of being able to kill his brother and God holding him so culpable? (Gen. 4:8-11)
- d. Even if all death is caused by human sin, this would not rule out the possibility that physical death of animals and amoeba preceded Adam’s fall.
 - (1) The consequence of Adam’s fall could be retroactively applied in the same kind of way that the benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice could be retroactively applied to those who lived before Him.⁵
 - (2) C. S. Lewis used this idea to explain how prayer can be relevant and effective even after the event prayed for, because God is not subject to our linear timeline.⁶
 - (3) As a result, effects can come before the contributing cause.
- e. After the fall, YEC seems to require a comprehensive RE-creation of all carnivorous animals and all other living things that now “feed” on living things.

D. Re: The biblical flood (Gen. 6)

- 1. Much debate exists over both the science and the biblical interpretation.

2. YEC:

- a. The flood was global or universal.
- b. The biblical language certainly appears universal.
 - (1) “All people” of the earth were corrupted and God asserts that He is “going to put an end to all people” (Gen. 6:12-13).
 - (2) God says, “I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made” (Gen. 7:4).
 - (3) “Every living thing that moved on the earth perished” (Gen. 7:21); “Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out” (Gen. 7:23).
- c. (Note: Using biblical genealogies as complete with no gaps, many YEC’s place the flood at about 2500 BC and Abraham’s birth around 2170 BC).⁷)

3. OEC:

- a. OEC does not rule out a universal flood but many question its necessity on theological grounds and its plausibility on geologic grounds.
- b. “All” life could have perished without a global flood. The flood only needs to be great enough to accomplish this.
- c. However, Biblical references to “all” and “every” are not always “universal.”
 - (1) Gen. 11:1 “The **whole world** had one language and a common speech”; yet (a) one intended result of God confusing their language at Babel was that He “scattered them over the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:9). of the this is after the flood
 - (2) Lk 2:1 “Now it came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of **all** the inhabited earth.”
 - (3) Lk 3:6 “... And **all** flesh shall see the salvation of God” (quoted from Isaiah regarding John’s preaching).

⁵ This position is argued by William Dembski, *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009).

⁶ In speaking of prayer’s possible effectiveness, Lewis says, “... I conclude that we can at noon become part of causes of an event occurring at ten a.m.” (*Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, rev. ed. (1960; reprinted San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 291-292).

⁷ See Jonathan Sarfati, “Biblical Chronogenealogies,” creation.com/images/pdfs/tj/v17n3_chronogenealogies.pdf, accessed April 15, 2010.

- (4) Mt 2:2-3 “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him.” And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and **all** Jerusalem with him.”
4. 2 Pet 3:5-6 “... by the word of God *the* heavens existed long ago and *the* earth [ge] was formed out of water and by water, through which the world [*kosmos*] at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.”
- Ge = “The Earth, Land ... in the geographical sense.”
 - kosmos* = “the Abode of Humanity ... the Inhabited World. ”
 - Peter seems to distinguish between the landmass of the earth and the “inhabited” world.

VI. Problems with Darwinian Evolution (Naturalistic Macro-Evolution)

A. The evidence (and fossil) problem

- See Phillip Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*.
- See Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution*.
- Darwin acknowledged the fossil problem.

“Geology assuredly does not reveal any such finely graduated organic chain; and this, perhaps, is the most obvious and gravest objection which can be urged against my theory. The explanation lies, as I believe, in the extreme imperfection of the geological record” (Darwin, *Origin of Species*, in chap 6, “On the Imperfection of the Geological Record”).

B. The time problem

- 19th century: earth about 100my—not nearly enough time for macro-evolution.
- Big Bang in cosmology (universe 12-14by; earth 4.5by) gives much more time.
- But the “Big Bang” in geology (the “Cambrian explosion”) occurred within about 10my, when almost all major phyla appear in the fossil record. If 100my was not nearly enough time, the Cambrian era allows only 1/10 of that time.

C. The mechanism problem

- Darwin: “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down” (*Origin of Species*).
- Vs. Michael Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box* (“irreducible complexity”): “An irreducibly complex biological system, if there is such a thing, would be a powerful challenge to Darwinian evolution.... if a biological system cannot be produced gradually it would have to arise as an integrated unit, in one fell swoop, for natural selection to have anything to act on” (Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box*, p. 39, emphasis added).
- See Dean Kenyon, *Of Pandas and People*.
 - Kenyon was once a leading evolutionist and co-author of *Biochemical Predestination* (1969), a widely used evolutionary textbook.
 - He has since rejected his view, claiming that the problems are insurmountable for “chemical evolution” in which the chemical materials are somehow “self-organizing.”

D. The origin of life problem

- See Stephen Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperOne, 2009) and William Dembski, *Intelligent Design*.
- William Dembski: living organisms possess “complex specified information” (CSI)—vast amounts of “information” to specify sequences for amino acids to form proteins. But such information is in the DNA, which does not exist until after the existence of the organism. So how did the living organism arise to begin with? Where did this information come from?
- Life requires:
 - The right materials (e.g. 20 amino acids that are only “left-handed”)
 - The right sequencing of the materials.
 - Information (and a communication system) to direct the processes.
- Purely naturalistic processes cannot generate information content, so some “intelligence” is necessary to account for the origin of life itself. (This view supports a YEC, an OEC, or even a Theistic or Deistic evolutionary perspective.)

Some Resources on Christianity and Science

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INTERNET RESOURCES⁸

- <http://www.allaboutcreation.org>. Hosts articles and videos supporting young earth creationism.
- <http://www.answersingenesis.org>. A young earth creationist website headed by Ken Ham.
- <http://www.arn.org>. Access Resource Network website that includes links to leaders of the Intelligent Design movement.
- <http://www.discovery.org/csc/>. The Discovery Institute's website for the Center for Science and Culture.
- <http://www.faihandevolution.org/>. Developed by the Center for Science and Culture at the Discovery Institute.
- <http://www.icr.org>. Institute for Creation Research home page. ICR advocates a young earth creationist perspective.
- <http://www.leestrobel.com>. Website of former atheist and Chicago *Tribune* reporter who is now a Christian.
- <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/>. The website of William Lane Craig, a world-class Christian apologist.
- <http://www.reasons.org>. Reasons to Believe website by Hugh Ross, a Christian astronomer.

⁸ These websites represent different Christian perspectives on science-related issues. Like all Internet sources, they should be evaluated with care and discernment.