

QUESTION 1

What Are the Major Issues and Concepts Concerning Creation and Evolution?

Type the word “evolution” in the Amazon.com search line, and it will offer over 61,000 books. A similar search for books on “creation” will yield over 31,000 results. The creation/evolution controversy is an overwhelmingly large subject, and the debate shows no signs of diminishing. This book attempts to distill the conversation to the 40 most significant questions and, in so doing, provide the reader with an adequate overview of the main issues.

The creation/evolution controversy has been ongoing for over 200 years (the debate actually predates Darwin’s publication of *On the Origin of Species*, 1859). Certain issues, concepts, and views are recurring while other significant notions have recently come to the forefront, and anyone hoping to have a grasp of the debate must be familiar with them. This chapter briefly discusses the four major approaches to creationism, the distinction between creation and evolution, the role that presuppositions play in evaluating scientific data, and the various concordist and nonconcordist interpretations of Genesis 1–3.

The Major Approaches to Creationism

Young-Earth Creationism (YEC)

YEC proponents argue for a literal, six-day creation that occurred approximately 6,000 years ago. They contend that the proper interpretation of Genesis 1–3 requires this position. Death, disease, and predation (i.e., the predator/prey relationship) entered the world through the fall of Adam. For the most part, geological evidences of an ancient earth are attributed to the flood of Noah. YEC advocates find the astronomical evidences of an ancient universe (such as light from distant stars) much more difficult to explain. A variety of theories are offered, but the predominant one is still the mature

creation view, otherwise known as the “appearance of age” hypothesis. We address questions about the age of the earth in Questions 17 through 22. The leading representative group today for the YEC position is the organization Answers in Genesis, headquartered in Petersburg, Kentucky.¹

Old-Earth Creationism (OEC)

Old earth creationism is sometimes called progressive creationism. OEC proponents argue that God created in successive stages over a period of millions or billions of years. In other words, OEC advocates accept the scientific evidence for an ancient universe (and the big bang theory), but they do not accept the predominant biological theory of origins, which of course is Darwinian evolution. OEC theorizes that God miraculously created Adam and Eve about 60 to 100 thousand years ago. The strongest objection YEC proponents have to OEC is its acceptance of animal death and disease prior to Adam’s fall. We address questions about death and the fall in Questions 25–27. The leading representative group today for the OEC position is the organization Reasons to Believe, based in Glendora, California.²

Evolutionary Creationism (EC)

Proponents of evolutionary creationism (also called “theistic evolution”) accept the current scientific theories both of the origin of the universe and of the human race. That is, EC accepts the Darwinian hypothesis that all life, including humans, descended from a common ancestor (generally understood to be a single-cell life form). EC advocates believe that God endowed creation with the principles and laws that caused the essential components of life to self-organize. Random mutation provided the immense variety we observe in the fossil record and in living things today, and natural selection determined which species survived and which went extinct. Some EC proponents do not understand Adam and Eve to be literal persons (though, as we will see, there are significant exceptions to this point). We address questions pertaining to this model in Question 24 and Question 38. The leading representative group today for the EC position is the BioLogos Foundation, located in Grand Rapids, Michigan.³

Intelligent Design (ID)

The Intelligent Design movement began as a group of scholars and scientists who were unconvinced by the Darwinian hypothesis and were disturbed by the philosophical naturalism that seems to underlie it. ID proponents argue that an objective examination of the scientific evidence alone (without appealing to the Genesis account) will lead an unbiased inquirer to the

1. <http://www.answersingenesis.org>.

2. <http://www.reasons.org>.

3. <http://www.biologos.org>.

conclusion that design by an Intelligent Being (i.e., God) makes an inference to the best explanation. ID contends that arguing over the age of the earth distracts from the bigger adversary—Darwinism and the philosophical atheism underlying it. As a result, one can find both YEC and OEC proponents within the ID movement, and in fact a handful of ID advocates hold to certain non-Darwinian versions of evolution (Michael Behe, author of *Darwin's Black Box*, is a prime example). We address questions pertaining specifically to ID in Questions 39 through 40. The leading representative group today for the ID position is the Discovery Institute, headquartered in Seattle, Washington.⁴

The Distinction between Creation and Creationism

We often forget to make the distinction between creation and creationism. One is a doctrine while the other is an apologetic approach. On the one hand, creation is a foundational doctrine of the Christian faith. The essential features of the doctrine of creation are unchangeable tenets. The Bible teaches that those features include the truths that God, without compulsion or necessity, freely created the universe out of nothing according to his own will and for his own good purposes. Though marred by the arrival of evil and sin, creation reflects the nature of its Creator. So creation is both great and good.

On the other hand, creationism is an apologetic approach which attempts to integrate the doctrine of creation with the current understandings of the natural sciences. In particular, creationism seeks to relate the first 11 chapters of Genesis to the latest findings of science. For example, how does the biblical account of God creating the sun, moon, and stars square with what we understand through astronomy? Or the creation of plants and animals with research in biology and genetics? Or the account of Noah's flood with geology? Or the account of the dispersing of nations after the Tower of Babel with anthropology? Creationism deals with issues such as the age of the universe, the origin of the first humans, and the nature of the world prior to the fall of the original couple.

So creation is an unchanging and unchangeable doctrine while creationism, by its very nature, must constantly change and be amended. The doctrine of creation is derived from Scripture and is as old as the biblical witness itself. Creationism is relatively new, because it arose alongside the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century. As science developed, so did creationism, especially after Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. We must keep the distinction between creation and creationism in mind as we explore the important issues highlighted by this book. We must know what to hold firmly and what must be open to revision. Our commitment to doctrine must be strong, but we hold to any particular apologetic approach much more loosely. We address the essential features of the doctrine

4. <http://www.discovery.org>.

of creation in the next three questions. The remainder of the book focuses primarily (but not exclusively) on issues relating to creationism.

The Role of Presuppositions when Interpreting Empirical Data

Everyone approaches the empirical evidence with presuppositions. It is generally recognized that facts are not self-interpreting. No facts “just speak for themselves.” *Presuppositionalism* recognizes that all approaches to truth begin with certain presuppositions, assumptions, or postulates, and these assumptions are taken on faith.⁵ This is true of all human studies, whether the field of study is mathematics, geology, or theology. A study of the universe must start with one of two presuppositions: *supernaturalism* or *naturalism*.⁶ Christian theists start with the presupposition of supernaturalism. Supernaturalism is the view that reality is greater than nature. God transcends the universe and is its Creator. Atheists start with the presupposition of naturalism (or more precisely, philosophical naturalism). The astrophysicist Carl Sagan famously began his discussion of the universe by declaring, “The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.”⁷ Sagan is not making an empirical observation; he is giving his presuppositional starting point.

The question is how, when, and how much the empirical evidence should cause us to adjust or change our presuppositions. What should we do when the scientific data seems to clash strongly with our presuppositions? If that happens, should we consider completely jettisoning our presuppositions? In this book we will examine the views of Darwinian evolutionists and theistic evolutionists, old-earth creationists and young-earth creationists. Perhaps it should not be surprising, but the positions at the ends of the spectrum—Darwinian evolutionists and young-earth creationists—are the positions that hold the most adamantly to their respective presuppositions. Both refuse to let the empirical data cause them to step away from their original philosophical commitments. Theistic evolutionists and old-earth creationists, by contrast, more readily allow the scientific data to affect their respective interpretative models.

In the writings of Darwinists and young-earth creationists, the controlling influence of presuppositions is striking. As noted previously, the two positions are at opposite ends of the spectrum of positions. Yet, they have some features in common. Significantly, both recognize two things about the universe: first, the universe appears to be ancient and, second, it appears to be

5. See R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 304–9; John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1987), 348–54.

6. See Phillip Johnson, *Reason in the Balance: The Case against Naturalism in Science, Law, and Education* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

7. Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), 1.

very well designed. But they both believe these appearances are an illusion. What they disagree on is what part is the illusion. Darwinists believe the earth is old and the inference of design is a misconception. Young earth creationists argue that the truth is the other way around: the world is designed but its origin is very recent.

What is going on here? Controlling presuppositions are at work. Atheists presuppose naturalism while theists presuppose supernaturalism. A pre-commitment to naturalism can be seen in the writings of the well-known atheist Richard Dawkins. He admits that the world certainly appears designed and that, at first blush, the Darwinian explanation seems absurd.⁸ However, Dawkins believes that Darwinism allows him to dismiss the evidences of design. In a well-known passage, Dawkins declares,

An atheist before Darwin could have said, following Hume: ‘I have no explanation for complex biological design. All I know is that God isn’t a good explanation, so we must wait and hope that somebody comes up with a better one.’ I can’t help feeling that such a position, though logically sound, would have left one feeling pretty unsatisfied, and that although atheism might have been *logically* tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.⁹

A presupposition to philosophical naturalism (i.e., materialism or atheism) predisposes Dawkins to embrace Darwinism over the evidences of design. Evolutionary biologist Richard Lewontin is even more explicit:

Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science *in spite* of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, *in spite* of the tolerance of the scientific community of unsubstantiated just-so-stories, because we have a prior commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to

8. Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 3.

9. *Ibid.*, 6.

the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door. The eminent Kant scholar Lewis Beck used to say that anyone who could believe in God could believe in anything. To appeal to an omnipotent deity is to allow that at any moment the regularities of nature may be ruptured, that miracles may happen.¹⁰

In the above quote, Lewontin admits two things. First, the scientific enterprise itself does not require an acceptance of materialism. And second, his absolute allegiance to materialism causes him to reject the inference of design, no matter how compelling the evidence. With these words Lewontin reveals that he is not operating as a dispassionate scientist, but as a devotee to his presuppositions.

Presuppositionalism or Fideism?

There are a number of approaches to the relationship between faith and reason, and at this point it is helpful to note the distinction between presuppositionalism and *fideism*.¹¹ As we noted before, presuppositionalism recognizes that all approaches to truth begin with certain assumptions that are taken on faith. However, there is one important caveat at this point. The presuppositionalist believes that the validity of one's presuppositions must eventually be tested by using the laws of logic and be demonstrated by a consistency with the evidential findings. Fideism, by contrast, does not believe one's presuppositions can be tested. Like the presuppositionalist, the fideist believes that one starts with certain presuppositions. But unlike the presuppositionalist, the fideist does not subject his starting assumptions to any type of feedback or check. The fideist operates by "blind faith."

Most YEC proponents identify themselves as presuppositionalists.¹² They start with the presupposition of the Bible's inspiration and authority (as do all conservative evangelicals). YEC advocates, however, add another crucial presupposition. Namely, they seem to hold that the YEC reading of Genesis 1–11 is the only interpretation available to the Bible-believing Christian.¹³ The approach of many YEC adherents seems to veer perilously

10. Richard Lewontin, "Billions and Billions of Demons," *New York Review of Books* 44, no. 1 (January 9, 1997): 28–31 (emphasis original).

11. See Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 47–65.

12. Ronald Numbers, *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1992), 207.

13. "Since the Bible undisputedly teaches a young earth, when someone claims that scientific evidence proves otherwise, we can be certain that they are mistaken" (Tim Chaffey and Jason Lisle, *Old-Earth Creationism on Trial: The Verdict Is In* [Green Forest, Ark.: Master, 2008], 153). See also John MacArthur, "Creation Believe It or Not," *MSJ* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 17.

close to fideism. Consider the testimony of Kurt Wise about his attitude toward empirical evidence:

As I shared with my professors years ago when I was in college, if all the evidence in the universe turned against creationism, I would be the first to admit it, but I would still be a creationist because that is what the Word of God seems to indicate. Here I must stand.¹⁴

As the context makes clear, when Wise spoke of creationism, he meant the young-earth position. His courage, candor, and fidelity to the Scriptures must be commended. But if one's presuppositions are unassailable, then his approach has shifted from presuppositionalism to fideism.

In contrast, old-earth creationists and evolutionary creationists concede that they allow the finding of science to influence the way they approach the creation account in Genesis. Philosophically, they follow more closely in the tradition known as *empiricism*. Empiricism allows experience and evidence to have a significant role in the formation of one's position. Young-earth creationists are strongly critical of this feature and often characterize OEC and EC in very harsh terms.¹⁵

Integrating the Bible and Science: Concordist and Non-concordist Approaches

So how should Christians go about the task of reconciling what they understand the Bible to teach about origins with the consensus understandings within the scientific community? Or is such an attempt misguided from the start? Interpretive models that attempt to harmonize Scripture and science are called *concordist* approaches (*concord* means “harmony” or “agreement”). Other models understand the Bible and science to be speaking in such different ways that they are non-overlapping. Not surprisingly, these models are called *non-concordist* approaches.

Concordists contend that God has revealed himself through two books—the book of nature and the Bible.¹⁶ They argue that creation gives us general revelation about the Creator (Ps. 19:1–6) while Scripture gives

14. Kurt Wise, *In Six Days: Why Fifty Scientists Chose to Believe in Creation*, ed. John F. Ashton (Green Forest, Ark.: Master, 2001), 355.

15. See, e.g., Jonathan Sarfarti, *Refuting Compromise: A Biblical and Scientific Refutation of “Progressive Creationism” (Billions of Years), as Popularized by Astronomer Hugh Ross* (Green Forest, Ark.: Master, 2004).

16. Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004), 87–90. Some attempt to narrowly define concordism to include only progressive creationism. In this book we define concordism as any attempt to legitimately integrate the findings of science with Scripture.

us special revelation that reveals who the God of creation is (Ps. 19:7–11). Therefore, Christians have the ability and responsibility to adopt an interpretive model that constructively integrates Genesis 1–3 with modern science. Often this is accomplished by a significant reinterpretation of either the natural or biblical data.

Concordist Approaches

Concordists interpret the creation account of Genesis 1–2 with a number of different theories. The major concordist theories are these:

- *The 24-hour theory:* This theory holds that the days of Genesis 1 are literal 24-hour days, and that the universe was created in six days.
- *The gap theory:* Proponents of this view posit that an indeterminate period of time—a gap—exists between the first two verses of the Genesis account. This view allows for the earth to be ancient while still interpreting the six days of creation as literal 24-hour days.
- *The day-age theory:* Day-age theorists argue that each day of creation in Genesis one is an era of time. This view understands the six days to extend over millions or billions of years.
- *The promised land theory:* This theory holds that the Hebrew expression for “In the beginning” denotes an unspecified length of time—perhaps billions of years. The six days of Genesis 1 speak of the preparation of the promised land and do not refer to the creation of the earth or universe as a whole.

Each of these theories has a chapter devoted to it in Part 3 of this book.

Non-concordist Approaches

Proponents of non-concordism view concordism as misguided. They believe that attempts to harmonize the Bible and science fail to take Scripture on its own terms. Therefore, concordism is doomed to failure and, as an apologetic endeavor, does more damage than good. The major non-concordist approaches are as follows:

- *Genesis as myth:* Many neo-Orthodox and liberal theologians view Genesis in mythical terms. They believe that the author of Genesis borrowed many of the details of the creation account from prior Canaanite and Mesopotamian myths.
- *Genesis as allegory:* Some evangelicals consider Genesis 1–3 to be a non-literal description of the general human condition. Rather than providing actual history, Genesis presents the theological truths that God is the sovereign Creator and that humanity is estranged from him due to our sinfulness.

- *Genesis as literary device:* This position views Genesis 1–3 as a polemic against the polytheistic idolatry of the surrounding culture. The six days of creation are understood to be a literary structure rather than literal 24-hour days. The first three days describe the forming of creation, while the second three days describe the filling of creation. The framework theory and the temple inauguration theory are examples of evangelical versions of non-concordist interpretations. Though they view the six days of creation as a literary device, they reject the low view of Scripture as expressed by the myth and allegory positions.

Separate chapters are devoted to the framework theory and the temple inauguration theory in Part 3. We address the question of whether or not the mythological and allegorical approaches to Genesis are viable options to evangelicals in Questions 24 (“Were Adam and Eve Historical Persons?”) and 38 (“Can a Christian Hold to Theistic Evolution?”).

A Word as We Move Forward

No issue has less unanimity among evangelicals than the matter of discerning the best way to relate the doctrine of creation to the scientific theory of evolution. Therefore, we devote much of the book simply to surveying the options proposed by various camps. The arena for the debate is rapidly changing, and the number of scientific discoveries, especially in the field of genetics, is accelerating. By necessity some of the positions set forth in these pages are done so tentatively.

None of the four views—young-earth creationism, old-earth creationism, evolutionary creationism, and intelligent design—are without serious problems. We, the authors, have differing opinions with one leaning to young-earth creationism (Rooker) and the other to old-earth creationism (Keathley). At times our differences show up in the answers we provide to the upcoming questions. But our fellowship in Christ is strong. We both affirm the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, and we both believe that the God Who gave us the Bible is the God Who created heaven and earth.

These are exciting days to be involved in the task of developing a theology of science. Evangelicals are a missional people. As such we cannot shy away from the difficult issues presented by origins science. We must engage the natural sciences with confidence and integrity. We must endeavor that the Lord Jesus Christ will have worshippers in every vocation, and we must advance the kingdom of God into every arena of life—including the natural sciences.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are the differences between creation and creationism?
2. What is the primary disagreement that young-earth creationists have with the old-earth creationist position?
3. What role do presuppositions play in our interpretation of the evidences?
4. What are the distinguishing characteristics between concordist and non-concordist approaches?
5. Why have young-earth creationists, old-earth creationists, and some evolutionary creationists joined together in the intelligent design movement?