Christianity and the Question of Origins
The Creation/Evolution Continuum: Understanding Different Views
Blackhawk Evangelical Free Church
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“One of the attractions of the popular caricatures that reign in this area is that they make confident choice appear supremely easy. Unfortunately, the more accurately one sees the issues, the more difficult is the resolution.”

— Del Ratzsch (The Battle of Beginnings, InterVarsity Press, 1996)

“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)

I. Introduction: Christianity and the Question of Origins
A. The question before us: How ought we as Christians to think about the question of origins?
B. My purpose is four-fold: to inform, to encourage, to remind and to caution
   1. To inform you of the major positions, not to persuade you of the validity of any one of them
   2. To encourage us all to become better informed of our own positions and those of others
   3. To remind ourselves that, with respect to origins, sincere Christians can and do differ sincerely
   4. To caution us all not to use our own position as a “litmus test” in judging other Christians

II. Origins: The Creation/Evolution Continuum
A. We need to recognize not a creation/evolution dichotomy but a creation/evolution continuum.
   1. Major positions along the continuum: young-earth creationist, old-earth creationist, theistic evolutionist (or evolutionary creationist), naturalistic (or materialistic) evolutionist
   2. Intelligent design as a relatively recent approach to the challenge of giving the creationist position an intellectual foundation by beginning with scientific evidence of design
B. My goal here: to lay out the major positions along the continuum
   1. I will try to present what I consider to be the main features of each position as they might be set forth by a person who holds that position
   2. I will also try to point out the strengths and weaknesses of each position, at least as I assess them
C. Some important definitions
   1. Evolution, including the distinction between microevolution and macroevolution
   2. Creationism, including the distinction between young-earth and old-earth creationists
   3. Naturalism, both as a scientific explanation of nature and as a philosophical world view

III. A Young-Earth Creationist Speaks (“Ken”)
A. Major tenets of Young-Earth Creationism (YEC)
   1. Genesis is literally true – i.e., is written as history, including the chapters on origins (1-11)
   2. God spoke the universe into existence, including humans and all other living things
   3. All of creation was accomplished by God in six 24-hour days
   4. The earth is between 6,000 and 10,000 years old; there is much evidence in favor of a young earth and any apparent evidence to the contrary can be explained and discredited
   5. Most YECs accept beneficial genetic changes over time, though they prefer to call it adaptation
B. Development: This view dates in its present form from the publication in 1961 of The Genesis Flood by Henry Morris and John Whitcomb, which was the first significant 20th century effort to present a scientific rationale for the young-earth creationist viewpoint, also called special creation.
C. The YEC flagship institutions: The Institute for Creation Research (ICR), San Diego, CA (www.irc.org), Answers in Genesis, Petersburg, KY (www.answeringgenesis.org)
D. Some prominent YECs: Ken Ham, Henry Morris, Paul Nelson, Gary Parker, John Whitcomb

IV. An Old-Earth Creationist Speaks (“Hugh”)
A. Major tenets of Old-Earth Creationism (OEC)
   1. The age of the earth is measured in billions, rather than thousands, of years.
   2. 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 of secondary concern
   3. OECs typically accept microevolution but not macroevolution
   4. Special creationism can be harmonized with data showing that the earth is ancient, though the nature of that harmonization differs among OECs
B. OECs accommodate science and the text of Genesis 1-2 in any of several ways
1. *Gap Creationism:* Assumes a large temporal gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2
2. *Day/Age Creationism:* Understands the “days” of creation as long periods of time
3. *Progressive Creationism:* God created “kinds” of organisms sequentially, over long periods of time; evolution within a “kind” occurred but not descent by modification

C. The OEC flagship institution: *Reasons to Believe (RTB),* Covina, CA (www.reasons.org)

D. Some prominent OECs: Walter Bradley, Phillip Johnson, Hugh Ross, Ken Samples

----------Major difference: Mechanism (creation versus evolution)----------

V. An Evolutionary Creationist Speaks (“Francis”)

A. Major tenets of Evolutionary Creation (EC), also called Theistic Evolution (TE)
1. God the Creator used evolution to bring about the universe according to His plan
2. Astronomical, geological, and biological evolution are readily accepted as the means
3. Of special significance is the role of God in the creation of the human soul

B. This is the official position of the Roman Catholic Church, as stated by Pope John Paul II in 1996 and is also the *de facto* position of some, maybe even most, mainline Protestant denominations

C. A major problem with this position is that it is often viewed with considerable suspicion by creationists and naturalistic evolutionists alike
1. Creationists reject this view because it assumes not just micro- but also macroevolution
2. Naturalistic evolutionists reject it because it invokes a supernatural power

D. The TE flagship institution: *BioLogos,* Grand Rapids, MI (www.biologos.org)

E. Some prominent ECs: Francis Collins, Darrell Falk, Deborah Haarsma, Denis Lamoureux, Jeffrey Schloss.

----------MAJOR DIFFERENCE: AGENT (GOD VERSUS CHANCE)----------

VI. A Naturalistic Evolutionist Speaks (“Richard”)

A. Major tenets of Naturalistic Evolution (NE); also called Materialistic Evolution (ME)
1. All of the natural world 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 random events, natural selection, and descent by modification, the evolutionary process first described by Charles Darwin in *The Origin of Species*
3. It is therefore not necessary to see man (or any other present-day organism, for that matter) as the product of design or the result of a purposeful process or as special in any way

B. Evolution as a scientific explanation vs. a philosophical worldview: an important distinction
1. As a scientific explanation, evolution is consistent with the methodological materialism of modern science: the natural world is to be explained in terms of natural processes
2. As a philosophical worldview, many, though not all, naturalistic evolutionists go on to say that the laws of nature are all there is — i.e., that the supernatural does not exist.

C. Some prominent NEs: Richard Dawkins, Stephen Jay Gould, Christopher Hitchens, Carl Sagan

VII. Intelligent Design: What Is It and Where Does It Fit In? (“Michael”)

A. The concept of Intelligent Design (ID)
1. ID 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 such as random chance and natural selection.
2. ID is therefore a means of advocating the concept of design — and hence of a designer — without specifically identifying the designer as the Judeo-Christian God (or any other god, for that matter)

B. Major tenets cited in support of ID (and actively disputed by its opponents)
1. *Irreducible complexity:* All parts are needed for a system to function (mousetrap, flagellum)
2. *Specified complexity:* Anything that is both complex and specified has likely been designed
3. *Fine-tuned universe:* The many features that make life possible cannot be attributed to chance

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

D. Some prominent IDs: Michael Behe, William Dembski, Guillermo Gonzalez, Phillip Johnson, Steve Meyer

VIII. Conclusion: How Then Shall We Think About Origins?

A. My answer: With humility, forbearance and charity
B. My plea: Remember that if we disagree on the topic of origins, we need to do so agreeably!
C. Final note: Whatever our specific views, we can join together in praising the Lord that He created the entire universe and that as the Lord of all creation, He cares about each one of us as His creatures!

I welcome contact and can be reached readily by e-mail (wbecker@wisc.edu) or cell phone (715-412-0923) — Wayne Becker
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Some Helpful Annotated References

General References

Carlson, R.F., editor. Science and Christianity: Four Views. InterVarsity Press, 2000. This is one of the few books that present young earth creationist, old earth creationist, theistic evolutionist (evolutionary creationist), and intelligent design viewpoints in a single book – and in a remarkably objective manner.


Stafford, T. The Adam Quest: Eleven Scientists Who Held On to a Strong Faith While Wrestling with the Mystery of Human Origins. Thomas Nelson, 2013. A Christian writer interviews scientists with the hope of dispelling the all-to-common notion that “you can choose faith or science, but not both.”

Young Earth Creationism


Flagship organizations: (1) Institute for Creation Research (web site: www.icr.org)
Periodical: Acts and Facts, described as “a monthly news booklet.”
(2) Answers in Genesis (web site: www.answersingenesis.org); periodical: Answers Magazine

Old Earth Creationism


Ross, H. *The Creator and the Cosmos: How the Greatest Scientific Discoveries of the Century Reveal God*, 3rd ed. NavPress, 2001. A well-established old earth creationist makes the point that science has revealed a design for the universe that is surprisingly compatible with the Biblical account of creation. ...


**Flagship organization:** *Reasons to Believe* (web site: www.reasons.org)

**Periodical:** *Facts for Faith*, described as “a full-fledged apologetics magazine.”

**Theistic Evolution** (also called *Evolutionary Creationism*)

Alexander, D. *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* Monarch Books, 2008. A book that “speaks the language of both science and faith in a remarkably clear and accessible way.”


Giberson, K. W., and F. S. Collins. *The Language of Science and Faith*. InterVarsity Press, 2011. Two prominent scientists support the view that science doesn’t overthrow the Bible and faith doesn’t require rejection of science.


**Flagship organization:** *BioLogos Foundation* (web site: www.biologos.org)

**Periodical:** *The BioLogos Forum* (described as “our daily blog”)

**Intelligent Design**


**Flagship organization:** *Century for Science and Culture at the Discovery Institute*, Seattle, WA (web site: www.discovery.csc.org)

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