

## ***Question #5 – Doesn't Evolution Explain everything without God?***

*Creation vs. Evolution.* Just the mention of that brings to mind images of debate, disagreement, argument, passion, and often anger and lawsuits. For many people, Christian and non-Christian, the idea of evolution explains everything without the need for God. Richard Dawkins said Darwin's theory of evolution made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist; and many atheists see evolution as ruling out God. Some Christians see it this way too, which is why they staunchly oppose evolution.

Yet there are other Christians who see the science of evolution as completely compatible with their faith. And some non-Christians study the science of evolution but admit it does not speak to truths of religion or morality; it does not prove God does not exist.

The goal here is to lay out where everyone stands and to work through this firecracker issue to see what the real important truths are.

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## I. What is evolution?

1. Definition of evolution from Douglas J. Futuyama in *Evolutionary Biology*
  - a. "In the broadest sense, evolution is merely change, and so is all-pervasive; galaxies, languages, and political systems all evolve. Biological evolution ... is change in the properties of populations of organisms that transcend the lifetime of a single individual. The ontogeny of an individual is not considered evolution; individual organisms do not evolve. The changes in populations that are considered evolutionary are those that are inheritable via the genetic material from one generation to the next. Biological evolution may be slight or substantial; it embraces everything from slight changes in the proportion of different alleles within a population (such as those determining blood types) to the successive alterations that led from the earliest protoorganism to snails, bees, giraffes, and dandelions."
2. Nuances
  - a. "Evolution" when mentioned in the public square by many scientists is the Darwinian evolution which, by definition, rules out God – this evolution is natural and materialistic (there is nothing beyond nature and matter)
  - b. "Evolution" as believed by some Christians is a process put in place by God who either set it in motion or guided it through
  - c. Evolution – the natural processes we see today came about over many years
    - i. When statements about "God" are made, whether it is saying evolution proves God does or does not exist, this is going beyond mere science and into the realm of philosophy and religion
    - ii. Darwinian evolution as portrayed today is more than science; it includes a naturalistic philosophy that rules out God from the start
3. Darwinian evolution (naturalistic, materialistic) rules out God
  - a. It is hard to see how a God could not have chosen to initiate evolution
    - i. This does not mean God did initiate evolution; it means evolution can be harmonized with belief in God
  - b. The problem is: Darwinian evolution is portrayed as science and thus true for everybody (fact) while any mention of God is religion and thus true for only some (value) – see two-story truth idea from "Christianity and Science" outline
  - c. Some even argue the intricacies of evolution may support that God did design all of creation (i.e. it is so complex it could not have arisen by chance)
4. Point: When a naturalistic (materialistic, atheistic) philosophy is added to it (and such philosophy always is) then evolution becomes opposed to Christian faith
  - a. By itself the science of evolution says little in regards to faith, morality, etc.
  - b. Unified truth: science and faith working together, is what Christian faith offers

\*\*\*This paper is not going to say whether or not the scientific process of evolution is true or not. I am not qualified to discuss the validity of the science. The goal is to show different approaches Christians take to evolution; to show that some Christians accept it and some do not; and to examine what the purpose of Genesis 1 really is and what it teaches us. Over-confidence on both sides – Usually those heard are the loudest, most extreme on each side; they make declarations that seem more rhetoric and dogmatic than reasonable and evidential:

Christian Henry Morris: “Now the most amazing thing about this whole state of affairs is the absurdity and impossibility of the very concept of evolution! That a theory which is so utterly devoid of any legitimate scientific proof could have attained such a position of universal power and prestige in the name of science is surely a remarkable commentary on human nature. Whether the explanation lies in some monumental web of intellectual conspiracy or merely is man’s enormous capacity for egocentric self-deception, the simple fact is that the evolutionary philosophy is both totally false and almost totally successful”  
(quoted on 9-10 in Del Ratzsch, *The Battle of Beginnings*)

Atheist Richard Dawkins: “It is absolutely safe to say that if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid or insane (or wicked, but I’d rather not consider that)...[This is] an area where half the country claims to believe an absurd and palpable falsehood. I say ‘claims’ because a belief that is held in carefully nurtured ignorance of the alternative is hardly a belief to be taken seriously”  
(quoted on Ratzsch, 10).

## II. What Do We Learn from Genesis 1?

- ◆ All Christians agree Genesis 1 gives many answers for “*why?*” questions – why are we here? What is our purpose?
  - Modern science speaks to “*how?*” questions (how did humans come about?) but says nothing about “*why?*”
  - *Genesis 1 gives answers to questions modern science cannot answer*
    - Questions of why are theological or philosophical but not scientific
- ◆ Christians debate whether Genesis 1 answers “Why?” and “How?” or just “Why?”
  - Various Christian responses to evolution (does it answer how?) are listed below
  - In this section we focus on the “why” of Genesis 1
- ◆ Genesis 1, like the entire Bible, was written for a specific purpose to be understood by the people living in that time. The best way to understand the Bible is to see what it was saying to them and then to transition to what we learn from it
  - Genesis 1 was not written as a modern science textbook – it is not in support of or in opposition to modern science for there was no modern science
  - The meaning it had when first written is the “literal” meaning – that meaning may be metaphorical, spiritual, etc.
- ◆ 1:1-2:3 serves as an introduction to the whole book
  - 2:4-11:26 begins with “this is the account of”
    - Phrase “this is the account of” occurs often in the pre-history (5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10)
    - 11:27 says “this is the account of Terah” which begins the section telling the history of those God called from Terah’s descendants: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (11:27-50:26 is the section dealing with Terah’s family)
    - ‘this is the account of’ is missing from 1:1-2:3 which sets that introduction apart from the rest of the book
    - “this is the account of” indicates a historical reality for the one whose account we are reading; this may mean 1:1-2:3 is a metaphorical, poetic introduction to the rest of the story
- ◆ What is the purpose of Genesis 1?
  - God is the Creator of all life – thus He is the final authority over it (cf. Heb. 11:3)
    - In the same way, God who created the universe is Creator and authority over Israel (Gen. 12-Exodus)

- There is one God – the sun, moon, stars, and other parts of creation that are made into idols are NOT gods
- God is a redeemer – brought order out of chaos (1:1-2), light out of darkness (1:3-5) – parallels his work in bringing Israel out of Egypt (in Exodus)
- Creation is beautiful (God is an artist): first God creates the background (sky, water, land) and then He fills it; like an artist setting up the canvass and then filling it with beauty
- Creation is energy: Creation continues to create as the land produces plants, the water brings forth creatures, and the land produces living animals (1:11, 20, 24)
- Creation is Good: at the end of each day creation is pronounced to be “good” (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and “very good” (1:31). Many ancient cultures saw the world as an evil place; creation was an enemy to fight against; some later Greeks even saw all matter as evil
- Creation is orderly – the earth was “formless and void” is an image of chaos, very similar to how all ancients saw the world; over the course of the days God brings order to the chaos. We can trust the sun will come up everyday, that nature runs by laws (gravity, etc.)
- Humans have a purpose – we are special (1:27); our job is to take care of the earth (God’s creation; 1:28-30) – we were created to live in relationship with God, each other and with all creation
- ♦ **Genesis 1 answers “why?”**
  - It answers questions of meaning and purpose (questions science cannot provide answer for) more than questions of science (how things came to be)
  - \*This is the place to have conversation with skeptics – where does meaning come from in their lives? How do they know they are worth anything?
- ♦ “Literal” meaning of scripture – what does literal mean?
  - Today “literal” is often taken to mean an interpretation that is opposed to “figurative” or “metaphorical”
    - Thus, to take Genesis 1 “literally” is to see it referring to 6 real 24 hour days; to take it any other way is not to be literal
  - Historically “literal” was taken to mean a text is interpreted in the way the author intended it to mean: so if the author intended it to be metaphorical than it is literally interpreted as a metaphor
    - Thus, if the author of Genesis 1 was not writing a science textbook but instead meant it to be poetic, somewhat figurative, to take it that way is to be literal and is not damaging to the text
  - See Robert Lowery, “Do I Interpret the Bible Literally?” (<http://rlowery.com/blog/2007/07/23/do-i-interpret-the-bible-literally-especially-the-book-of-revelation/>)
- ♦ Whichever position you choose will have problems
  - Young Earth Creationism – How were there 24 hour days before there was sun? How come the order of creation is different in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2? Why do you think the author was writing modern science 3000 years ago?
  - Theistic Evolution/Old Earth Creation – How do you harmonize science with Genesis 1-2? If it is metaphorical, what does that say about Genesis 3 and the first sin?

## II. Various Christian Responses to the Theory of Evolution

### 1. *Young Earth Creationism*

- a. Believes the earth is 6000-10000 years old
- b. Sees the Genesis story of creation as referring to seven literal 24 hour days; the flood (Noah) explains the geological factors we see today
- c. *Presuppositions*: Our specific interpretation of the Bible (of the creation story in Genesis) is one thing we know for sure and it trumps all else. We approach scientific study assuming the earth is young. If science and faith appear to conflict, our science is wrong.
- d. Attitude to evolution: the earth is 6000-10000 years old and evolution as a scientific theory is false
- e. People and Resources:
  - i. Ken Hamm, Henry Morris
  - ii. Answers in Genesis - <http://www.answersingenesis.org/>
  - iii. Creation Studies Institute - <http://www.creationstudies.org/>
  - iv. Institute for Creation Research - <http://www.icr.org/>

### 2. *Old Earth Creationism*

- a. Believes the earth is much older than 10000 years – more in line with secular scientific understandings of the age of the earth. Evolution may have happened in some form (micro-evolution: change within species) but species did not change into other species (macro-evolution)
- b. Harmonizes the science with Genesis account in various ways
  - i. Gap-Theory – there is a gap in time between Genesis 1:1 (creation of universe) and Genesis 1:2 (creation of earth) – during the gap the universe became older and then the days refer to earth's creation
  - ii. Framework appearance of Genesis 1 indicates it is not literal 24 hour days – instead the first three days are creation of realms (day and night, sea and sky, land) and next three fill them (sun, moon, stars, sea creatures, animals) – indicates account is not chronological literal; Genesis 1 is more like the Psalms in poetic metaphor
  - iii. Day-Age – each day refers to a longer time (day is as a thousand years)
- c. *Presuppositions* – Science gives us reliable information but does not support Darwinian evolution
- d. Many “Intelligent Design” proponents here (see below)
- e. Resources
  - i. Michael Behe, Chuck Colson, JP Moreland, Nancy Pearcey, Hugh Ross [http://www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/notable\\_leaders/index.shtml](http://www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/notable_leaders/index.shtml)
  - ii. Reasons to Believe - <http://www.reasons.org/>
  - iii. God and Science - <http://www.godandscience.org/>
  - iv. Answers in Creation - <http://www.answersincreation.org/>
  - v. Lee Strobel – *Case for the Creator*

### 3. *Theistic Evolution*

- a. Believes evolution is scientifically true and that God initiated (or used) it to form our world; the world is thus billions of years old
- b. Harmonizes the science with Genesis account – takes Genesis story in similar interpretation as the Old Earth Creationists

- c. *Presuppositions* – God created us and we can trust our senses so if our study of science shows evolution is true than we should believe it.
- d. Resources
  - i. Francis Collins – *Language of God*, possibly CS Lewis
  - ii. Answers in Creation - <http://www.answersincreation.org/>
  - iii. <http://www.theistic-evolution.com/>
  - iv. <http://www.theisticevolution.org/>

#### 4. *Intelligent Design*

- a. Philip Johnson’s book *Darwin on Trial* in the early 1990s examined the evidence for Darwinian evolution, found it lacking – this began the intelligent design movement
- b. Believes scientific evidence supports belief in a Designer
  - i. Unlike Young Earth Creationism, Intelligent Design does not subscribe to one specific interpretation of Genesis – their goal is not to teach that God created the world in seven days; their goal is to show if the best answer to scientific study is a Designer than a Designer should be mentioned
  - ii. Unlike Theistic Evolutionists, Intelligent Design does not (for the most part) believe science supports evolution
  - iii. Most Intelligent Design advocates fit into the Old Earth camp
- c. Potential Problem: Intelligent Design resembles a “God-of-the-Gaps” Theory
  - i. Example: We do not see how this particular scientific observation could not have come about naturally so it must have been designed
  - ii. Danger: What if further scientific study discovers how such things came about naturally – the Designer is no longer needed as the gap is filled
  - iii. ID response: they infer Design where something is “irreducibly complex” which means it cannot have come about naturally
    - 1. But again, science is expanding rapidly and what may appear impossible to have come about naturally today may have an explanation tomorrow
- d. People and Resources
  - i. Philip Johnson, Michael Behe (*Darwin’s Black Box*), William Dembiski
  - ii. Intelligent Design Network - <http://www.intelligentdesignnetwork.org/>
  - iii. Center for Science and Culture - <http://www.intelligentdesign.org/>
  - iv. Discovery Institute - <http://www.discovery.org/>

#### IV. Lessons from History

1. Augustine – the greatest theologian of the early church believed that Genesis 1 was metaphorical and that God created the whole universe in one instant (God is so powerful he did not need 6 days).

- a. Did not wrestle with modern science for there was no modern science yet
- b. Wrote:

*“Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens, and the other elements of this world, about the motion and orbit of the stars and even their size and relative positions, about the predictable eclipses of the sun and moon, the cycles of the years and the seasons, about the kinds of animals, shrubs, stones, and so forth, and this knowledge he holds to as being certain from reason and experience.*

*“Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; and we should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show a vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn.*

*“The shame is not so much that an ignorant individual is derided, but the people outside the household of the faith think our sacred writers held such opinions, and, to the great loss of those for whose salvation we toil, the writers of our Scripture are criticized and rejected as unlearned men. If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books and matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven, when they think their pages are full of falsehoods on facts which they themselves have learned from experience in the light of reason”* (Collins 157 from Augustine Genesis 19:39)

2. B.B. Warfield – great conservative Protestant theologian who contributed immensely to Bible study, specifically on inerrancy – lived at time of Darwin
  - a. Called evolution “a theory of the method of the divine providence” while arguing that evolution itself must have a supernatural author (B.B. Warfield, “On The Antiquity and the Unity of the Human Race,” Princeton Theological Review 9 (1911): 1-25 quoted in Collins, 98)
  - b. Wrote: *“We must not, then, as Christians, assume an attitude of antagonism towards the truths of reason, or the truths of philosophy, or the truths of science, or the truths of history, or the truths of criticism. As children of the light, we must be careful to keep ourselves open to every ray of light. Let us, then, cultivate an attitude of courage as over against the investigations of the day. None should be more zealous in them than we. None should be more quick to discern truth in every field, more hospitable to receive it, more loyal to follow it, whithersoever it leads”* (B.B. Warfield, Selected Shorter Writings (Phillipsburg: PRR Publishing, 1970): 463-5) quoted in Collins, 179)
3. Galileo – In 1608 built a telescope and made observations
  - a. Prior to him people believed the sun revolved around the earth and that all heavenly bodies were perfect.
    - i. Looked through the telescope – saw the sun had spots and thus not perfect
    - ii. Observations only made sense if earth revolved around sun
    - iii. This brought him into conflict with the Catholic church
      1. His observations were accepted by many Jesuit astronomers, but resented by rivals in the academy (Dominican friars)

- e. Dominican Friar Caccini said in a sermon that “geometry is of the devil” and that “mathematics should be banished as the author of all heresies” (Collins, 154)
  - i. Other priests said Galileo’s conclusions were atheistic and that “his pretended discovery vitiates the whole Christian plan of salvation...it casts suspicion on the doctrine of the incarnation”.
  - ii. Others said his discovery is false because it contradicts the whole Christian idea of salvation – criticism came also from Luther and Calvin
- f. Some scripture supported the Church’s position (Ps. 93:1 - (“The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved”; 104:5 – “He set the earth on its foundation; it cannot be moved”; Eccl. 1:5 - (“The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises”))
  - i. Today few Christians argue these passages intended to teach science but at the time passionate arguments were made that the sun revolving around the earth was central to Christian faith (Collins, 155)
- g. Wrote: “I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forego their use” (158 from Galileo, letter to Grand Duchess Christina, 1615)
- h. 1633 – the Inquisition convicted Galileo and forced him to curse his own work; he spent the rest of his life under house arrest
- i. “In this example, the scientific correctness of the heliocentric view ultimately won out, despite strong theological objections. Today all faiths except perhaps a few primitive ones seem completely at home with this conclusion. The claims that heliocentricity contradicted the Bible are now seen to have been overstated, and the insistence on a literal interpretation of those particular scripture verses seems wholly unwarranted. Could this same harmonious outcome be realized for the current conflict between faith and the theory of evolution?” (Collins, 156).

*“Despite twenty-five centuries of debate, it is fair to say that no human knows what the meaning of Genesis 1 and 2 was precisely intended to be. We should continue to explore that! But the idea that scientific revelations would represent an enemy in that pursuit is ill-conceived. If God created the universe, and the laws that govern it, and if He endowed human beings with intellectual abilities to discern its workings, would He want us to disregard those abilities? Would he be diminished or threatened by what we are discovering about creation? (Collins, 153).*

## V. Conclusion

\*Does evolution prove God does not exist?

- No! Not unless one adds numerous philosophical assertions to the science

\*Is evolution true?

- I do not know. That is for scientists to decide. Christians should take the lead in studying God's world and trying to understand how he created; if the best science we can do supports evolution, then we should believe it; if science does not support it, then we should not believe it.

\*Can belief in evolution be harmonized with faith and creation from Genesis 1?

- Yes. Many Christians do believe both.

\*What is the point of Genesis 1?

- Genesis 1 was not focused on modern science; there was no modern science. The point is that God is Creator, creation is good, and humans have a purpose.

## Bibliography

(See above for books and websites on each subject)

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