

Creation and evolution

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Course web site: www.covingtoninnovations.com/tough (may move to church web site later)

Recommended reading:

David Snoke, [A Biblical Case for an Old Earth](#)
Francis Schaeffer, [Genesis in Space and Time](#)
Henry F. Schaefer, [Science and Christianity: Conflict or Coherence?](#) (2nd edition, 2016) --- UPDATED REFERENCE

The challenge

The Bible starts with the story of creation. This is one of the best-known things in the Bible.
If that story is false, then the Bible and Christianity are apparently discredited.
If, however, we ignore and reject physical evidence, we are discredited another way.

Questions

About the world

Is the earth (or the universe) young or old?
Did life diversify from a common ancestor as evolution claims?
Is a natural process (evolution) a sufficient explanation of how everything developed?

About the Bible

Does the Bible teach that the earth is young?
Does the Bible teach that there was no animal death before the Fall? (If so, evolution was impossible.)

Preliminaries

We want to **read what the Bible actually says**, not just the mental images we formed when we first read it.
We read the Bible in context, which includes our knowledge of the world as a whole.

“Science” is not separate from mere knowledge about the physical world.

Example: Jesus walked on water; we bring the knowledge that the Sea of Galilee doesn't freeze over.
Is that “science” or is it just knowledge? Meaningless question. (But it is not an unconfirmed theory.)

Physical evidence is God-given. It is part of His general revelation. He made it.

We have to be **willing to say “I’m not sure”** rather than demanding answers that might not be available.

I REJECT:

Modernism: “What the Bible actually teaches is false but we can make it into something else for modern times.”

Postmodernism: “Believe whatever you feel inspires you, but don't claim it's objectively true.”

And I will not try to *just make science go away* the way some people want me to!

Possible positions

(1) Young earth, no appearance of age

Has to believe that all the scientific evidence has been misinterpreted.
The task of reinterpreting it is enormous, maybe impossible, certainly not do-able by non-experts.
Adherents of this position: (a) almost always seriously underestimate what they are taking on; (b) often disrespect the honest work of scientists; (c) often avoid contact with experts and take the case directly to the lay public.
Caution!

(2) Young earth with appearance of age

Suppose God miraculously created a mature (and totally normal) oak tree in your yard.
It would presumably have rings and other signs of age; it would be at a particular stage of maturity.

Or suppose God miraculously created a planet in a stable orbit, and we measured the orbit. Then we could calculate where the planet “was” before God actually created it; there would be no physical evidence that it had not been there all along.

Maybe the whole universe is like that: recently created, but looking as if the laws of nature have been operating for an extremely long time. God might do that in order to have everything physically stable and orderly.

Appeal of this position: *You do not have to get rid of scientific evidence.*

The earth *is* billions of years old *physically*; its condition is as if the laws of nature had been operating on it that long (or longer). The physical evidence does not show that it was actually made more recently, miraculously.

The appearance of age is real and cannot be denied, regardless of when you think it was actually created.

And it saves us a lot of trouble not to have to try to deny it.

Is this the right answer? Hang on, we’re not through...

(3) Old earth, divinely guided creation process (which might include evolution)

Very simply, science is on the right track; everything really *is* as old as it looks (or as science advances, our view will become more accurate).

Geology, evolution, etc., tell us *how God did it*. Note the order of appearance in Genesis agrees with theory.

But this process *did not work by itself*; God guided it constantly and (we think) intervened in a big way when He created the first human beings. Evolution is real but unguided evolution is not the whole explanation.

(4) Old earth, evolution and other natural processes are sufficient

This is the atheist view: The laws of nature are a complete explanation of everything.

Difficulty with (1) (young earth, no appearance of age)

Basically denies a large number of observable facts. The appearance of age is really there.

Requires a *huge* amount of *interlocking, consistent* evidence to go away.

One or two things (like knocking down carbon-14 dating) will not clear everything up.

Beware of books from the 1930s that refute a much older version of evolution and geology.

Difficulties with (4) (the laws of nature explain it all)

Where do you get laws of nature?

- In general: Why are there laws of nature at all? Why is there anything at all?

- Specifically, the “fine-tuning” problem: The gravitational constant, etc., are exactly right to produce a complex universe that can support life. Why should we be so lucky?

Recent appearance of the human mind and language

A major challenge for evolution is that so little is known about the appearance of our own species.

(Yes, there is a theoretical reconstruction, but it is based on surprisingly scant evidence.)

The big problem is **the recent and rapid appearance of human thinking, language, and culture**, not at all like the gradual process that evolution postulates.

Could evolution do its work in the time available?

David Gelernter (non-Christian mathematician), [“Giving Up Darwin,”](#) *Claremont Review of Books*, Spring 2019.

This is a survey of several books, not just Gelernter’s own thoughts.

Key idea: **Billions of years are not enough to build something with billions of parts** by a random process.

Human DNA: 3.2 billion base pairs (and remember evolution had to produce all other lifeforms too!);

first multicellular organisms 800 million years ago; most evolution much more recent than that.

Intelligent design (ID) theory: Evolution is driven or guided by something other than random variation.

ID theory is becoming increasingly separate from religion, and that's a good thing.

Computer implementations, such as genetic algorithms (which adapt programs to data by a Darwinian process) have shed some light on what Darwinian evolution can and cannot do.

Irreducible complexities – not missing links but impossible links

There are many (claimed) difficulties with evolution of the form:

- Evolution only promotes things that have survival value.
- Evolution utilizes changes made by a single mutation – tiny changes, not big ones.
- Every single change, without exception, must improve survival in order to win out.
- But many developments are only helpful when complete; if carried out partly, they *impair* survival.

Examples: the eye; the flagella (tail) of a one-celled organism; etc.

This is bitterly controversial and Wikipedia has (at the moment) a very one-sided article on “irreducible complexity” focusing on the claim that none of the examples are really irreducible.

Could evolution even get started?

The origin of life is an unsolved scientific problem. And then you have the origin of the universe...

Point of caution

There are people who cling to evolution with what amounts to religious faith.

It is the basis of their whole worldview, and they don't want anybody to question it.

This is connected with the 19th-century romanticist desire to believe that everything is inherently getting better and better.

(That is not what evolution delivers! Darwinian evolution is blind, bumbling, and random.)

Now what do we need? What does the Bible really teach?

Literal vs. figurative: I am *not* going to propose that we should “not take literally” things that were meant literally. Our job is to find out what the Bible is actually telling us. Sometimes, though, “literal” becomes an excuse for ignoring context or dragging something into the text that isn't there.

6-day creation: Genesis describes the creation as seen by a person *on the ground* and it is obvious to me that the days are periods of work. Ancient Hebrews didn't wear wristwatches! Don't be so “literal” that you impose a 21st-century meaning on an ancient language. Some early Christians, such as St. Augustine, thought the creation might have been instantaneous and the “days” were just a way of dividing it up for us to understand.

Age of the earth: Obtained by adding up Old Testament genealogies.

- None of the biblical writers do the arithmetic themselves or say anything about the total age of the earth.
- There are bitter disputes as to whether OT genealogies have gaps in them. I think the answer is yes; there is a tradition of “hitting the high points” to end up with multiples of 7 generations as a summary.

Animal death: Did animal death begin with the Fall of Adam, or only human spiritual death?

- Evangelical tradition says animal death began with the Fall, but there's little in the Bible to confirm that.
- Carnivorous species were created before the Fall. We are not told they changed their nature or diet suddenly.
- Unlike humans, animals have not been offered a way to regain eternal life. And what about plants?

Noah's flood: Geological evidence for a worldwide flood is lacking; evidence for a local wide-area flood exists. Assuming the first human beings were created by divine intervention, they would not have been worldwide then. Ancient Hebrews did not know the earth was a globe. Their word “earth” meant “the land.”

With all this in mind, do we actually have to believe the earth is young?

Difficulty with (2) (young earth with appearance of age)

What could discriminate between (2) and (3)?

To create a young earth with the appearance of age, God would have to create:

- starlight in transit from stars more than 6000 light-years away
- fossils of animals that never actually lived
- other specific evidence of events that never happened:
 - animals eating, laying eggs, hatching...
 - supernovae in distant galaxies

That amounts to saying God deliberately deceived us.

For me, that tips the balance and I prefer (3) (divinely guided old earth).

But you make up your own mind. Stay within the bounds of evidence, but don't assume that you can get a definite answer to every question.

Let science proceed. The only way to find out where a line of scientific evidence leads is to follow it.

Science changed its mind about the eternal universe:

150 years ago, astronomers were sure the universe is (or looks) infinitely old; there's no sign that it ever had a beginning at all. Subsequent discoveries led them to completely change their mind – now it's agreed that the universe had an origin (the "big bang") as confirmed by cosmic microwave background radiation.

If Christians had risen up and stopped astronomy 150 years ago, this discovery would never have been made.

So don't try to stop science; dig deep into the science that seems to conflict the most with our faith; that might be where the discoveries are coming!

And do not swallow shoddy science just because it has been "hacked" to conform to Christian beliefs.