**Is Evolution Compatible with the Bible?**

**The Nature of the Debate**

The ongoing debate between evolutionists and creationists about the nature and origins of the universe has produced three distinct positions. In the evolutionary camp are those who believe that the universe is self-made, is roughly 10 billion years old, and provided the necessary conditions for life to begin and to continue developing by the process of natural selection. The creationists contend that the details contained within the first few chapters of Genesis provide a sufficient account of the beginning, describing the miraculous series of events by which God spoke the universe into being. This, in accordance with Biblical genealogy and the research of “creation scientists,” is said to have happened between six- and ten-thousand years ago.

However, the third option, known as theistic evolution, attempts to affirm and reconcile aspects of both arguments. Those who believe in the Creator God, but also wish to maintain a respectable scientific perspective in the present age, generally try to accommodate the creation account in Genesis 1 to fit the modern understanding of the world and all that surrounds it. Supporters of this theory would claim that God used evolutionary tactics to create and develop the universe over billions of years (Brown, 2008). The question that must be asked, regardless of where the most truth lies, is whether or not the core beliefs of theistic evolution are compatible with those of the Biblical account of creation. Careful analysis of each position reveals that the inconsistencies are too numerous to justify a middle ground between evolution and creation.

**Causes of Theistic Evolution**

First it is necessary to examine why belief in theistic evolution exists, and has even become popular, among modern Christians. The foremost cause is that evolution is the dominant, if not *only*, scientific framework being taught in public schools, universities, museums, and other institutions. Though legitimately scientific evidence for creation exists, anything that communicates the existence of a Creator or Designer is censored in virtually all settings, save for those that conduct scientific research on creation. Secondly, theistic evolutionists seek to maintain scientific respectability by affirming some aspects of evolution, namely those that do not directly challenge the existence of a supernatural Creator (Brown, 2008). In addition to seeking scientific respectability, most people of this modern age, a time in which information has never been more accessible, also seek to avoid being labeled ignorant. A recent meme circulating such websites as Facebook, Google Plus, and Pinterest states, “Whenever you’re feeling stupid just remember, theres (sic) still people out there who think the Earth is 6,000 years old” (Sabia, 2013). In light of such derision, theists might adopt evolutionary beliefs in order to alleviate their cognitive dissonance, or because they have begun to doubt their own faith. They may also feel the need to maintain credibility within the science community by endorsing certain aspects of evolution, if not genuinely believing in it. However, this is neither necessary nor beneficial in building a strong case for creation.

Furthermore, a common misconception regarding the relationship between faith and science leads to the accommodation of the Biblical creation account to fit evolutionary theory. The misconception is that scientific explanations of natural phenomena somehow discredit supernatural explanations. According to this notion, a supernatural explanation for the beginning, such as a miraculous six-day creation period, is no longer necessary because of the expanse of knowledge available about the natural world. Wilkinson (2013) challenges this line of thinking, that scientific discovery and belief in a creator are not mutually exclusive. “If the whole material universe is created by God, then science—the investigation of that universe and discovery of its workings—is affirmed” (Without Peer or Competitor section, para. 1). Theistic evolution recognizes this, but maintains that God required natural processes, such as natural selection across billions of years, in order to achieve his creative purposes.

**Effects of Theistic Evolution**

When one who is convinced that God did indeed create the universe is also convinced that evolutionary theory is factual, a theistic evolutionist is born. Because revelation about God is believed to come from the Bible (“special revelation,” as it is known in theological circles), the first eight chapters of Genesis are thought of as containing the story of how God created, and subsequently flooded, the world. Theistic evolutionists do not debate whether God actually did these things, at least to some degree; the debate is over how the Biblical creation account should be interpreted. Therefore, when weighing the account in Genesis with the teachings of evolution, they choose to accommodate the Biblical version of these events. This is somewhat understandable, considering evolutionary theory was developed in English within the last 200 years, whereas Genesis was written in an ancient language and has been preserved over thousands of years. Nevertheless, it is important to examine the ways in which the Genesis account has been reinterpreted to satisfy evolutionary theory.

In casting aside a literal interpretation of the Biblical creation account, theistic evolutionists have developed five major theories that attempt to explain how creation could have occurred as outlined in Genesis. The first of these is known as the Day-Age theory, as it supports the idea that each of the six days allotted by God for creation was, in fact, a long age (Brown, 2008). This is based on the interpretation of the Hebrew word for “day,” *yom*, not as a single day with morning and evening, but rather as an entire age with millions of them. The next theory, known as the Gap theory, proposes that a significant time elapse existed between verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1. Into this period would fit billions of years, a time during which God could have created, judged, and destroyed the “first” world before reforming it in verse 3. From this point, the gap theory suggests, the literal days of creation could progress as stated in Genesis.

The three remaining theories also represent creative reinterpretations of the Genesis account. The Revelation theory supposes that the literal, six-day period referred not to actual creation events, but rather a period during which God revealed to Adam what he had actually done over billions of years. The Progressive Creation theory holds that God’s creative activity indeed occurred in six literal days, but that these days were non-consecutive and spanned billions of years. Finally, the Framework theory cites the poetically parallel nature of the Genesis account, and proposes that although creation occurred over a vast amount of time, it is condensed into days for literary purposes (Brown, 2008). Each of these five theories represents a way in which theistic evolutionists accommodate Scripture to express support in human understanding.

**Biblical Support for Creation**

Biblical evidence reveals not only the ways that each theory of reinterpretation is not supported by the narrative of Scripture in its entirety, but also the ways in which the Genesis creation account is confirmed by the most influential voices in Scripture. This evidence is found both in linguistic conventions and in thematic consistency, each demonstrating how alternative interpretations of Genesis 1 misuse a text intended for a specific audience with a specific purpose. Though that audience has changed over time – from the people of Israel to all people – its purpose of communicating the truth about God the Creator remains unchanged.

The devices of the Hebrew language are perhaps the most important consideration when attempting to interpret the first chapter of Genesis. As discussed, the use of *yom*, the Hebrew term for a 24-hour period, is the subject of much debate. However, conjecture about its reference to a different period does not take into account the conventions of the language or the use of the word throughout the Old Testament. According to Stambaugh (1988), the pairing of *yom* and a number occurs 357 times in the Old Testament, and in each case the context refers to a 24-hour day. This analysis verifies that Moses, writing to an audience of ancient Hebrews, intended to communicate that God created the heavens and the earth within the confines of 24-hour days as humans understand them. Furthermore, references to morning and evening within the same verse occur 38 times throughout the Old Testament; each instance is clear in its intention to convey a 24-hour period with one morning and one evening (Stambaugh, 1988).

Those hoping to justify the use of *yom* in Genesis 1 as figurative language often point to Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8, which compare God’s understanding of time with mankind’s: in God’s view, a thousand years is like a day, and vice versa. However, these are context-based verses as well. They express that God is beyond the confines of time, and that his understanding of patience is different than humans’. They also have implications for eschatology and the return of Christ. To associate them directly with the use of *yom* in Genesis 1 is simply an inaccurate reading of the text (Stambaugh, 1988). For a verse that is contextually and thematically consistent with Genesis 1, one may look to the moment when God gives the Ten Commandments to Moses: “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:11).

As evidenced by this episode from Exodus, the theme of God’s supernatural creation persists beyond the first chapter of Genesis; in fact, it endures throughout the entirety of Scripture. Therefore, the Genesis creation account cannot be dissected in isolation from the remainder of the Biblical narrative. What starts with “In the beginning” ends with the promise of a new beginning (Rev. 21:1-4). According to Wilkinson (2013), “When we consider the biblical narrative as a whole, we see that the Creator is also the Redeemer. God's work does not stop at Genesis. The agent of creation is also the goal to which the creation tends, its eschatological purpose” (The Creator Is also the Redeemer section, para. 1). Of course, Jesus plays a critical role in the space between these two glorious events. He not only knew intimately the details of creation (Matt. 19:4-5), but was also present before and as it occurred (Col. 1:15-17, Jn 1:1-3). As Wilkinson (2013) summarizes, “Any apologetic that stems from the doctrine of Creation must have a key place for Jesus” (Look to Jesus section, para. 3). Given the undeniable connections between Jesus, the initial creation period, and his imminent return, it behooves all of his believers to trust in his power, his authority, and his creativity.

**Conclusion**

 Those who read the Biblical creation account with the conviction that God indeed created the universe and everything in it will likely reach one of two conclusions. One is that the events detailed in Genesis happened exactly as it says; another is that it must have happened differently because science tells us that such processes are not natural, and therefore not possible. For those seeking an answer, the best place to look may be to the nature of the Creator himself. Consider Psalm 145:

“Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.
One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts…
The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. All your works
praise you, Lord; your faithful people extol you. They tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that all people may know of your mighty
acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is
trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.” (v. 3-4, 9-13)

Though the understanding of God’s creative purposes and of the limitlessness of his power may weaken as mankind’s understanding of the natural world increases, the truth of God’s nature endures, fathomed or unfathomed.

Logically, if God is supernaturally all-powerful, he could have orchestrated creation any way he saw fit. If he is trustworthy and faithful, as the psalmist says, he would not intentionally mislead his people with cryptic ambiguities. Certainly, God’s thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Is. 55:9), and his wisdom is beyond our understanding (Rom. 11:33), but the knowledge that he chooses to impart to mankind would be revelation suitable for our finite minds. Is not God’s revelation more trustworthy than the fallible, manmade processes used to provide answers to our deepest questions? Is it not bolder to press into the wisdom of the Creator and to pursue his truth than to passively accept the most convenient explanations the world has to offer? Consider the encouragement found in James 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”

**References**

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