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## The Role of Presuppositions and Worldviews in the Creation-Evolution Debate

By Dave Greear, BSEE, D Min

In today's world, both the book of Genesis and the Biblical creation model of origins that flows from it are mocked by the main-stream media and the scientific establishment as nothing more than fairy tales. These entities have no more connection to reality than do Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy. They are never given serious consideration as alternatives to the ruling paradigms of the Big-Bang theory for the origin of the universe, spontaneous generation for the origin of life, or of some form of biological evolution for the progression of life from molecule to man. Why is this? Is it due to the overwhelming scientific evidence in support of the ruling paradigms? One would certainly assume that would be the case in light of the confidence exhibited in the secular media about the certainty of evolution. That confidence, however, is badly misplaced. Agnostic microbiologist Michael Denton agrees:

Neither of the 2 fundamental axioms of Darwin's macroevolutionary theory—the concept of continuity of nature, that is the idea of a functional continuum of all life forms linking all species together and ultimately leading back to a primeval cell, and the belief that all the adaptive design of life has resulted from a blind random process—have been validated by one empirical discovery or scientific advance since 1859.<sup>1</sup>

Why then all the confidence in the "fact" of evolution if the evidence does not support this confidence? The answer is found in the *a priori* assumptions or presuppositions of those espousing evolution as a fact. Their confidence doesn't come from the evidence alone but from their presuppositions that have colored their view of the evidence. Presuppositions will always color one's view and influence one's conclusions! This is true both for the evolutionist and the creationist. Both enter the debate with starting assumptions that will influence how they look at the evidence. Furthermore, all evidence must be interpreted anyway. The late "presuppositional" Christian apologist Cornelius Van Til explains,

The issue between believers and nonbelievers in Christian theism cannot be settled by a direct appeal to "facts" or "laws" whose nature and significance is already agreed upon by both parties to the debate.

The question is rather as to what is the final reference point required to make the "facts" and "laws" intelligible. The question is to what the "facts" and "laws" really are.<sup>2</sup>

All evidence must be filtered through one's worldview before any sense can be made of it. The late Dr. Greg Bahnsen, another presuppositional apologist, defines the concept of "worldview":

A worldview is a network of related presuppositions in terms of which every aspect of man's knowledge and awareness is interpreted. This worldview, as explained above, is not completely derived from human experience, nor can it be verified or refuted by the procedures of natural science.... Worldviews determine our acceptance and understanding of events in human experience, and thus they play the crucial role in our interpreting of evidence or in disputes over conflicting fundamental beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

One's worldview, then, becomes the grid through which one interprets all evidence. In the field of Christian apologetics, there are actually several different philosophies relating to the proper use of evidence. "Classic Apologetics," "Evidential Apologetics," and "Cumulative Case Apologetics" all assert to varying degrees that evidence can be used to establish the truthfulness of the Christian position.<sup>4</sup> In contrast "Presuppositional Apologetics" asserts that evidence alone cannot establish truth, for all evidence must be filtered through one's worldview and interpreted.

It is a common misconception today that the creation-evolution debate is a battle over evidence. In truth, both sides have exactly the same evidence! When one digs up a dinosaur bone, for instance, it does not come with a tag telling how old it is and/or explaining how the animal from which it came died. This information must be in-

<sup>2</sup> Van Til C (2008) *The Defense of the Faith*, Fourth Edition, Presbyterian & Reformed, Phillipsburg, NJ, 122

<sup>3</sup> Bahnsen GL (1996) *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith*, reprint, Covenant Media Press, Nacogdoches, TX, 119-120

<sup>4</sup> See Gundry SN and Cowan SB, eds. (2000) *Five Views on Apologetics*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, for a more complete explanation of each of these systems as well as a fifth, "Reformed Epistemology."

<sup>1</sup> Denton M, (1986) *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, Adler & Adler, Bethesda, MD, 345

ferred based on the evidence and one's worldview that is used to place the bone into a context or a story. Therefore, two scientists can come up with two entirely different explanations to explain the existence of the same piece of evidence.

The million-dollar question then becomes, how does one determine which explanation is true if both sides use the same set of evidence? Have we reached an impasse? We must find a way to determine which worldview, and which resulting theory of origins, is true. How is this done? It depends on your worldview! Evolutionists typically solve the problem of competing explanations by defining the competition in such a way as to exclude them from serious consideration. In other words, Christian worldviews and explanations cannot, by definition, be considered scientific. This might be called the "Naturalistic Philosophy" for determining truth.

### **The Naturalistic Philosophy**

The naturalistic philosophy contends, "Evolution is science, but creation is religion." Some form of this mantra has been used repeatedly by the evolutionary establishment in an attempt to discredit creation. However, it can easily be shown that creationism is at least as scientific as evolutionism! Traditionally the definition of *science* has revolved around the scientific method, which includes testing and observation. Evolution, however, cannot be demonstrated, observed, or tested by the scientific method; therefore, it cannot technically be called "science." Note the following admission from evolutionists:

Our theory of evolution has become as Popper described, one which cannot be refuted by any possible observations. Every conceivable observation can be fitted into it. It is thus 'outside of empirical science' but not necessarily false. No one can think of ways to test it.<sup>5</sup>

However, if we distinguish *historical science* (inferences about the past that explain the evidence that exists in the present) from *operations science*, both creation and evolution could be considered "scientific" under this looser definition of science. There is nothing inherent in the traditional definition of science that would exclude the possibility of a supernatural creator. As a matter of fact, most branches of modern science were founded by believers in creation.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, the modern scientific establishment has attempted to change the traditional definition of *science* from that which is based on the scientific method to that which is based on *naturalism*. Naturalism, by definition, excludes God and the supernatural. Naturalism is the unquestioned assumption that underlies most scientific

disciplines today. Harvard evolutionist Dr. Richard Lewontin admits,

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 counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is an absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion, the only basis for rejecting creationist explanations of evidence is that creation must evoke the supernatural and is, therefore, outside the boundaries of "science" (i.e., naturalism). This argument, however, is simply begging the question because it makes an *a priori* assumption that there is no God or supernatural!

Does adherence to the "naturalistic philosophy" mean that evolutionists are absolutely unwilling to even question the validity of evolution? Yes and no. It does not mean that no modifications of their theory or theories are considered. Certainly some "tweaking" of the existing paradigms is allowed as long as the underlying presuppositions inherent in their worldviews are not threatened. By way of example, the "punctuated equilibrium" theory of evolution represents a modification of the *neo-Darwinian synthesis* currently in vogue as the standard version of biological evolution. *Punctuated equilibrium* postulates that evolution occurs very rapidly in spurts, interspersed with long periods of stasis, where no evolution occurs. The *neo-Darwinian* theory in contrast postulates a slow and gradual form of evolution. This modification helps some evolutionists to account for the lack of intermediate forms in the fossil record. Thus, the existing paradigm is salvaged and need not be abandoned in search of an alternative explanation. This type of modification can be termed a "rescuing device." A "rescuing device" can be defined as "a conjecture designed to save a person's view from apparently contrary evidence."<sup>8</sup>

Although rescue devices are useful to "rescue" theories, they come at a price. With each modification, the theory/story explaining the evidence rightfully becomes a little less plausible to the average observer. Both creation and evolution have their "stories," and both can be modified to account for any new evidence, but, again, how do we determine which is objectively true? For the creationist, the answer is to compare both "stories" scientifically to see which story makes better sense of the evidence. For lack of a better term, we might call this the "Creationist

<sup>7</sup> Lewontin R (1997 Jan 09) Billions and billions of demons. *The New York Review of Books*, <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1997/01/09/billions-and-billions-of-demons/>> Accessed 2017 Mar 08

<sup>8</sup> Lisle J (2009) *The Ultimate Proof of Creation: Resolving the Origins Debate*, Master Books, Green Forest, AR, 23

<sup>5</sup> Ehrlich P, Birch LC (1967) Evolution history and population biology. *Nature* 214: 352

<sup>6</sup> See Sarfati J (1999) *Refuting Evolution*, Master Books, Green Forest, AR, 25-26, for examples.

Philosophy” for determining truth since it is the method that has generally been used by creation scientists.

### **The Creationist Philosophy**

The creationist looks at the existing evidence as interpreted through the story of evolution and then looks at the same evidence as interpreted through the story of the Bible. He must show that creation makes sense of the evidence while doing an internal critique of the evolution model in order to show the difficulty it has in making sense of the same evidence. In other words, he starts by presupposing creation to be true and attempts to demonstrate how this presupposition is consistent with the evidence. This effort will not convince everyone because “a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.”<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, it is the contention of creation scientists that the story of evolution has to be modified endlessly to the point that it borders on the absurd if it is to account for all the evidence. It is the author’s contention that what we see in God’s created world is consistent with what we read in God’s Word! In other words, the available scientific evidence can be accounted for very nicely by the Biblical creation model while it cannot be easily and adequately accounted for by any version of the evolutionary model. Time and space do not permit examples, but numerous TASC articles from previous months and years provide illustration enough. The bottom line is that Bible-believing Christians need not be intimidated by the fact that “modern science” teaches evolution. We must remember that “science” doesn’t teach anything, scientists do, and *all* scientists start with presuppositions and bias based on their worldview!

### **Relevance to Apologetics/Evangelism**

One additional point of application is in order. What does this understanding of presuppositions and worldviews mean for the Christian who desires to use creation as a tool for evangelism (Creation Apologetics)? Simply put, we should never attempt to argue someone into the Kingdom of God! Many Christians have fallen into this trap, forgetting that worldviews cannot, and should not, be easily changed. Not only can we determine that the “argument strategy” doesn’t work based on anecdotal evidence, but Scripture itself implies the same! Passages such as John 6:44, I Corinthians 12:3 and Luke 16:31 clearly imply that evidence alone is insufficient to overcome a man’s natural resistance to accepting the Gospel (Romans 3:10-11). The Spirit of God must apply the Word of God to the heart for that to happen. Apologetics can help prepare the soil of the heart, but the seed must be the Word implanted by the Spirit!

If focusing on human skills of persuasion over the Spirit of God is dangerous, watering down the message in order to make it more palatable is an even bigger danger! Those

committed to an “Evidential” or “Classical” philosophy of apologetics might be tempted to find some sort of “neutral ground” when arguing for the validity of Creation, the Bible, and the Christian faith. When this is done, one inevitably has to accept some of the presuppositions of one’s opponent in the debate. Though that would obviously not include full-blown Darwinian evolution, in the modern world it might include presuppositions relating to an ancient age of the earth that are pretty much undebatable “givens” in secular circles today. Under such a scenario, the Christian apologist is much more likely to use evidence that fits within an old-earth framework as opposed to trying to undermine the old-earth framework of his opponent.


Unfortunately, however, this strategy of modifying existing worldviews is very ineffective in that the Christian faith, and evidence used to validate it, never fits neatly into a secular worldview. For instance, where do you put dinosaurs in the approximately 6000 years of Biblical history if you start from a secular worldview? Inevitably, one will have to find a way to “pigeon hole” millions of years into the Biblical text in order to make dinosaurs fit the secular timeline that is taken from a secular worldview. In contrast, if an ancient earth is not assumed, then dinosaurs could have easily lived with man when created on Day 6 of the creation account without the necessity or re-defining the plain meaning of the word “day” (*yom*) and/or doing the mental gymnastics necessary to account for “death before sin” (note Romans 5:12) that is required to reconcile millions of years with Genesis. Thus, a presuppositional philosophy that assumes a totally Biblical worldview gives a more believable scientific explanation than an evidential philosophy that does not. This statement would likely be disputed by old-earth creationists as absurd since the idea of an ancient earth seems much more “believable” in our present world than the idea of a young one, but that is only because they have already accepted the presuppositions (i.e., millions of years) of the prevailing evolutionary paradigm. If one throws out the prevailing paradigm entirely, then a young-earth creation model seems to be more consistent, at least in the author’s opinion, with the straight-forward Biblical text and the scientific evidence than does an old-earth model (It is important to note that there are no dating methods that give “old-earth” ages that do not begin with old-earth presuppositions and assumptions).

Thus, we are far better off to present evidence within the framework of a radically new and different worldview than to try to force it into an existing secular worldview where it does not “fit” consistently. Granted, switching from one worldview to another is a radical leap, but does not the Gospel itself demand a radical leap of repentant faith of those who would accept it? Too many evangelicals today seem to think that palatability of the message is the most important factor in evangelism, but could it be that

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<sup>9</sup> Morris H (1974) *Many Infallible Proofs*, Master Books, El Cajon, CA, 99

consistency of the message is actually the key to seeing true conversions rather than mere professions? A Biblical Gospel must be coupled with a Biblical worldview or it loses its power (Romans 1:16)!

(Much of this article was taken from the first chapter of the author's dissertation, *The Biblical Creation Model Defined, Defended, and Applied: A Presuppositional Apologetic Overview of Genesis 1:1-3:19.*)

## **COMING EVENTS**

**Thursday, April 13, 7:00 pm, Providence Baptist Church,  
6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 207**

Dave Greear will present "Presuppositions and Bias in the Creation-Evolution Debate." Dave will amplify what was covered in his article in this newsletter and will finish with some actual examples of evidence that can be interpreted in more than one way depending on your starting presuppositions and worldview. He will conclude by arguing that the creation model seems to make much more sense of the evidence than does the evolutionary model.