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Higher-Critical Thinking And Its Effects (Part IV)

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Recommended Citation

Gane, Roy, "Higher-Critical Thinking And Its Effects (Part IV)" (2010). *Memory, Meaning & Life*. 48.
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Memory, Meaning & Faith

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July 31, 2010

Higher-Critical Thinking And Its Effects (Part IV)

Thus far we have found that strategies for attempting to change Scripture in order to avoid allowing its system of divine principles to guide belief and lifestyle (against [2 Tim 3:16-17](#)) include the following: cutting out what you don't like, supplementing Scripture, treating it as obsolete, ([Part I](#)) and treating at least some of it as merely human through historical criticism ([Part II](#), [Part III](#)). Dr. Younker (see [quotation](#)) provides an example of another approach that has gotten quite a bit of attention lately:

Adjust its interpretation to make it harmonize with science.

This is vastly broader than the Genesis creation issue. For example, another locus of such harmonization would be the tendency of some behavioral scientists (or those influenced by them), who regard homosexual orientation as innate and unalterable, to try to explain away biblical passages that condemn homosexual practice (e.g., [Lev 18, 20](#); [Rom 1](#)). In postmodern society that seeks to nurture and enforce social justice according to norms of relativized morality, this has also become an issue of "political correctness." Since a future post will concern political correctness, I will focus the present piece on the problem of Creation.

Creation is difficult to deal with because CNN was not there to report on the event. In fact, both according to modern science and the Bible, human beings were relative latecomers to Planet Earth, so there was no person like us to record what was happening. Therefore, we must rely on other avenues of information: the Bible and/or science.

The Bible

The Bible claims to present information that humans received from the Creator God himself as his "eyewitness" account. If we believe that he inspired the whole Bible, as [2 Tim 3:16-17](#) says (cf. [2 Pet 1:20-21](#)), we can accept that he created Planet Earth in six days ([Gen 1](#)). The narrative genre of Genesis indicates that these days (plural of Hebrew *yom*) consisted of periods of alternating darkness and light determined by the relative movements of the sun and the earth, as in later narratives of the book. So these days were basically like our days, although we cannot be sure that their length was exactly the same as our present 24 hours because we do not know the precise speed of the earth's rotation on its axis at that time.

Biblical scholars who accept the six days can have differences regarding other factors. For example:

1. Granted that God originally made everything out of nothing (e.g., [Ps 33:6,9](#); [Heb 11:3](#)), did he begin the Creation week with a lifeless planet that had existed in an unformed state for a long time?
2. Did God make all the stars of the universe on the fourth day of Creation ([Gen 1:16](#)), or do the words, "and the stars (NRSV)," mean that he made them, but not necessarily on the fourth day, and perhaps a long time previously?

Science

Rather than receiving information from a personal superhuman being whose witness is accepted by faith, modern science receives information by empirical human observation and experimentation. Sophisticated technologies and bodies of accumulated data make such science a truly impressive source of knowledge. All of us rely on science in countless aspects of our lives, as the computer on which I am typing this reminds me. In fact, we entrust our lives to science every time we ride in a car or airplane.

But scientists admit that the question of ultimate origin is elusive. Even if there was a "[big bang](#)," a theory extrapolated from the fact that the universe is expanding, this does not answer the question: What was before the "bang"? Why did it go off?

How was the “DNA” of the universe encapsulated so densely in what exploded? Some have recognized that a “big bang” is not necessarily incompatible with an Intelligent Designer, or perhaps even God as we know him from the Bible: He could have used such a bang as an instrument to make the universe, perhaps long before the creative activity recorded in Genesis 1, provided that this chapter does not describe creation of the entire universe.

Neither does Darwinian macro-evolution explain ultimate origins. This theory has to do with the progressive origin of new species over a long period of time through chance mutations. But what conditions made the process begin and allowed it to continue, given the delicate balance of elements necessary for life as we know it? Unlike the “big bang” theory, Darwin’s hypothesis directly collides with Genesis 1, which recounts the origin of the basic species during one week through the instrumentality of God. But obviously there has been a form of evolution since then, so that my golden retriever and chihuahua could develop from the same pair of canines preserved on Noah’s ark ([Gen 7](#)). This variety is significant, but it is manifested within the boundaries of a basic type created by God.

There are many forms of evolutionary theory and many areas of investigation that scientists use to support it, such as the [geologic column](#), which appears to show stratified development of species over long periods of time. Impressed by all this accumulated data, some Christians have accepted macro-evolution to varying degrees. They are then faced with the problem of what to do with Genesis 1 and other biblical references to Creation by God in six days (e.g., [Exod 20:11](#)). To harmonize science and the Bible, they compromise the latter. To make Genesis 1 compatible with science, they feel compelled to try to make this chapter something other than a literal account of the origin of life on Planet Earth in one literal week. None of these attempts have really worked, as recognized by [historical-critics](#) who acknowledge that Genesis means what it says, but simply do not believe its message because they do not accept miracles or divine inspiration of this book.

Questions

- What impact does scientific understanding have on your faith and the way you read the Bible?
- How do you deal with apparent contradictions between Genesis and the findings of modern science?
- How can Christian homes and schools do a better job of nurturing faith in a scientific world?
- What difference does it make whether you believe in a six-day Creation according to Genesis or not? Does this underlie or affect other beliefs?

In [Part V](#), Roy Gane considers a way forward for science and theology relations.

Posted by [Roy Gane](#) on July 31, 2010 in [History of Interpretation](#), [Science and Theology](#) | [Permalink](#)

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Comments

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Roy, I appreciate your blog on theology, science, and hermeneutics. I agree that we should not adjust Scripture in order to make it harmonize with science.

I also agree with the following implication that I think is present in your blog. We should be open to adjustments in theology and science so that they may discover the harmony of God’s books of Scripture and Nature.

As you point out, there are some things that Scripture has not specified, such as the original speed of the rotation of the earth and the exact length of the days of creation. If the rotation speed of the earth has been affected by catastrophes like the flood, the creation days could have been longer or shorter than 24 hours. However, Scripture does teach that the days of creation were similar to our current days in that the first seven days were characterized by “evening and morning.”

In addition, you point out that the Bible teaches that God created different kinds of living things. However, it does not specify exactly how these living things inter-breed adapted to the passing of time in a sinful environment.

These examples imply and illustrate that when the human disciplines of theology and science disagree we need to be willing to restudy

God's books of Scripture and nature in a search for harmony.

Posted by: [Martin Hanna](#) | [August 01, 2010 at 03:13 AM](#)

In the penultimate paragraph of my previous comment I meant to say the following.

"the Bible teaches that God created different kinds of living things. However, it does not specify exactly how these living things inter-breed (within their kinds) and adapted to the passing of time in a sinful environment."

Posted by: [Martin Hanna](#) | [August 01, 2010 at 03:36 AM](#)

Thank you for this excellent series of posts.

Posted by: [Johnny Ramirez](#) | [September 11, 2010 at 08:58 AM](#)

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