

ARTICLES

TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GENERAL THEORY OF CREATION

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INTRODUCTION

A succinct statement of the general theory of creation has long been needed to provide the basis for its discussion and development. An attempt is made herein to provide such a statement. Creation theory is presented as a series of postulates derived from the Creator's revelation as presented in nature, the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. No attempt is made, on this occasion, to document the various points of the theory either from revelation or nature. It seems desirable to have available a clear statement of a creation theory so that subsequent effort can address itself to specific refinement, reinforcement or refutation of the theory.

The latter sections of this paper briefly discuss the scientific method and the relevance of creation theory to science and to the church.

THE THEORY

"...the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them..." — Exodus 20:11.²

POSTULATE 1. The physical substance of the observable universe and the laws of their interactions were brought into existence by an infinitely wise Creator, and their continued existence is dependent upon His maintenance.

POSTULATE 2. In the relatively recent past a creative event(s) occurred on earth. By this act the earth was organized and/or created to provide a suitable substrate for living organisms, and organisms were created to live upon that earth.

POSTULATE 3. The events of Postulate 2 occupied an extremely short period of time (six literal days).

POSTULATE 4. The biological world was created so as to relate intimately with the physical world. There was a balanced fauna

and flora present including the major categories of plants and animals now living.

POSTULATE 5. Man was endowed with characteristics unique in the creation. These included: 1) higher intelligence, 2) the exercise of dominion over the animals, 3) a knowledge of the Creator, and 4) free will.

POSTULATE 6. The initial creation was perfect. It was designed for mankind by a Creator whose character is love. As such it provided for man a completely adequate opportunity for physical occupation and sustenance and met fully his aesthetic and spiritual needs.

POSTULATE 7. The initial creation was modified, subsequently, in such a way that it became progressively less “perfect.” Death became the lot of all organisms.³

POSTULATE 8. The crust of the earth provides a record, albeit incomplete, of the past history of the earth. In particular, the upper layers contain the remains of organisms destroyed in a major post-creation event — the flood (see also note 3).

POSTULATE 9. The organisms existing today are the descendants of those brought into being during the initial creation period. There have been no subsequent creations.⁴

POSTULATE 10. The present characteristics and distribution of organisms are the result of the dynamic interactions between the organisms and the ecological history of the earth. The biological world as we know it is well-described as “descent with modification.”⁵

POSTULATE 11. The Creator is not capricious in His actions and thus the biological and physical universe can, most often, when adequately understood, be described in mathematical terms.⁶

THE GAME

“They (scientists) know — often to their despair as human beings — that science is an endless opening of sealed boxes which turn out to have more sealed boxes inside. The more one learns, the more there is to learn. There is never a last word.”⁷

Science may be likened unto a game. A game played by little boys grown old. As with any game the game of science is played according to its rules. While there are many variations on the game of science, there are certain basic rules that all players observe. These basic rules are the

“scientific method,” and an understanding of the “method” is basic to an understanding of science and how it operates. Very generally, the “method” works as follows: In the natural world, observations⁸ are made. In an attempt to explain and account for these observations one or more hypotheses or theories are developed. These make certain predictions about the expected results of additional observations, and their success or failure results in increased confidence in, selection among or modification of the hypotheses. If two, or more, competing theories seem to explain the observations equally well, the simplest one is adopted on the basis of the rule known as “Occam’s Razor.” A phenomenon sufficiently well-studied will usually have a single, generally accepted theory to explain it. It is helpful to think of the hypothesis and theory as tools of science. Their usefulness as tools is evaluated on the basis of how well they work. The better the tool the better it a) predicts correctly the outcome of untried experiments, b) suggests novel and informative experiments and c) integrates diverse data into a more understandable whole.

It is interesting to note that a theory is not evaluated on its correctness, for that cannot be known. A scientist hopes, of course, that his particular theory is true, and he tends to talk about it as though it were. The underlying reason for playing the game is the belief that the “method” — observation, hypothesis, additional observation, theory — will lead to a more adequate explanation of natural phenomena and ultimately to a correct understanding thereof. Whether such a faith is justifiable cannot be tested; however the game thus far has proved so productive and so interesting that it will continue to attract eager players for a long time to come.

AND SO THE GAME WAS PLAYED

The question “Where did I come from?” has fascinated most men, particularly men of science who are accustomed to asking and trying to obtain answers to difficult questions. Since the question deals with an historical event(s), it is not directly amenable to science which studies things that currently exist, are presently occurring, or are repeating or repeatable events. But the question is of such basic interest that it is dealt with anyway. It is possible to do this because most theories of origins make many predictions as to the state of things at present, and so the reasonableness of such a theory of origins can be evaluated.

In Western science it was long believed that both the living and non-living aspects of the universe originated by the command of God, who was their Creator. Christianity pointed to the account of creation and the

deluge as providing a basis for the understanding of earth history. To the limited information given in the Biblical literature was added the interpretation of the theological scholars. Many of these interpretations achieved the rank of dogma.⁹

As the game was played it became increasingly obvious that certain aspects of the revelation-plus-dogma were at variance with observation. This growing incompatibility led to the development of alternative theories which would more adequately account for the facts of the natural world.¹⁰ The Darwinian synthesis of 1859 represented a significant milestone in the articulation of an alternative theory for the origin of living things. It was free of reliance on theological information, and it accounted for non-fixity of the species — a readily made observation in direct conflict with the existing revelation-plus-dogma.

There were many factors important to the subsequent establishment of the evolutionary theory. For one, believers in the revelation-plus-dogma viewed the theory with horror. They seemed incapable of seeing their concept as a two-part entity and thus capable of development and modification. Rather than providing an explanation for Darwin's data in terms of their view of earth history they responded by casting dispersion upon the new theory and its promulgators. They pointed to the weaknesses of the evolutionary theory rather than to the strengths of their own. Their negative response contrasted with the articulate and active promotion of evolutionary concepts which appeared more adequate than the revelation-plus-dogma of the day and almost guaranteed the new theory's acceptance by the scientific community as their tool for doing science.

Another factor that was probably important in the establishment of the evolutionary theory was that the theory removed the Creator from one's worldview. The great conflict between Christ and Satan that has embroiled this planet cannot be ignored. A theory which eliminates the Creator also eliminates a responsibility to the Creator. It is hard to evaluate the influence of this factor in the establishment of the evolution concept, but the difficulty individuals have today in surrendering their lives to Christ makes it seem that it may have been (and still is) considerable.

Finally, the evolutionary theory met the three requirements of a good theory adequately and well. Many of the adherents to the theory believed it to be true, but ultimately this probably was not the basis of its acceptance. IT DID SCIENCE BETTER! It was, therefore, a better theory and, by the rules of the game, adopted as the current theory.

“... GO FORTH ...”

“... *Go forth therefore and make all nations my disciples*” —
*Matthew 28:19.*²

Is it possible that an adequate theory of origins can make a contribution to the fulfillment of this commission? If so, what might that contribution be?

At the very heart of Seventh-day Adventist theology is the concept of the Creator. Seventh-day Adventist, a name chosen with care to emphasize two of the important aspects of the church’s message, illustrates the point. “Seventh-day” refers to the Sabbath, the memorial of God’s creation, a weekly celebration of His creatorship. “Adventist” points to Christ’s return to this earth and to His promise of re-creation. The whole concept of salvation seems to hinge on the existence of an initially perfect state. With Christ’s creatorship so central to the gospel, what, then, is the most effective means for communication of this aspect of Himself? This question is of particular importance when speaking of Christ to those who understand the natural world to have originated by strictly mechanistic processes. As such a person becomes acquainted with Christ and His mission to earth, he comes to realize that an acceptance of Christ for what He claims to be is an acceptance of Christ as his Creator. Such an acceptance must present a real intellectual challenge to one whose background is evolutionary theory.

What information would be useful to a person caught on the horns of the dilemma of what he “knows” to be true and what Christ claims? Perhaps a long list of the areas of science in which the evolutionary concepts are currently inadequate? Perhaps a recitation of the errors made by evolution-oriented scientists in more than a century of research? Perhaps a list of hoaxes perpetuated in the name of evolutionary science? Perhaps all of these? Nay! These suggestions seem inadequate in the extreme — yet unfortunately they summarize to great extent what has been and is being offered by believers in the Creator.

Much better, it would seem, would be a calm, reasonable presentation of the concepts of creation — what revelation says happened and how this correlates with observation of the natural world. The sincere seeker after truth cannot arbitrarily rule out the possibility of a Creator. In recent years the discoveries of science, particularly in the areas of genetics and molecular biology, have made it increasingly clear that the Creator cannot be ruled out on scientific grounds either. Indeed, the creation concept

provides a simplifying and unifying principle for many of the hard facts of science. Creation theory suggests exciting new vistas into nature that hold real promise in science's eternal quest for truth. To the player seeking an edge in the game of science, creation theory offers fascinating possibilities.

It is useful to distinguish between what can be called creation theory and creation theology. Creation theology is defined as the sum total of all revelatory information having to do with the origin of the earth and subsequent developments thereon. This record is characterized by its incompleteness and sometimes by its irrelevance (to science). The fact is that its details are designed solely to contribute towards God's revelation of His character: the nature of His government. Many of these details, interesting or even significant from a theological point of view, may be quite trivial from a scientific point of view.

That some aspects of creation theology make no apparent contribution to creation theory is no reason to depreciate their value or to question their accuracy. They just simply make little or no contribution to the game of science as it is being played at the present time. They illustrate the important point that creation theology and creation theory are fundamentally different. Creation theory takes those elements of creation theology which suggest experimentally testable insights and integrates these with the vast amount of information about nature available through the present and past efforts of science in an effort to develop a reasonable understanding of the natural world as we see it today.

Creation theory, then, is a tool to be used in playing the game of science.

CREATION THEORY: A VIABLE AND VALUABLE CONCEPT

“God has permitted a flood of light to be poured upon the world, in both science and art; but when professedly scientific men treat upon these subjects from a merely human point of view, they will assuredly come to wrong conclusions.”¹¹

Modern creation theory can make a valuable contribution in two areas — to the Christian church and its mission of presenting the good news of Jesus Christ and to science and its goal of understanding nature.

In the first instance, it helps individuals to be intellectually honest with themselves as they accept Christ as their Savior. There must be millions for whom the acceptance of the creatorship of Christ would be most difficult because of their orientation to the evolutionary theory. Yet

such difficulty is not inherent in the overwhelming adequacy or correctness of the evolutionary theory. Nor is it inherent in the fundamental inadequacy or falseness of creation theory. The difficulty exists because of a general failure on the part of creation-oriented scientists to use the suggestions of revelation in the development of a comprehensive creation theory.

To science, a general theory of creation could provide the insights of a basically more accurate understanding of the origin of life and earth history. There are many areas of nature where the evolutionary and creationary models make similar predictions, and creation theory would be expected to add little to our understanding in such areas. Also, much day-to-day science concentrates itself on such small aspects of nature that no general theory of origins makes substantial contribution to the experimental design or to the interpretation of the data obtained. However, there are areas of nature where the two views make fundamentally different predictions. Using the unique suggestions of creation theory a scientist should be able to make, on the average, more frequent and/or significant advances in the understanding of the natural world than a scientist not using such insights. He should be able to play the game of science more successfully. He should be able to DO BETTER SCIENCE!

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ENDNOTES

1. Also Visiting Associate (1973-1974), California Institute of Technology.
2. New English Bible.
3. Shortly after creation mankind was caught up in the controversy raging in the universe. A being of high rank we know as Lucifer (Satan) had challenged the concept that the Creator was love and His government just. Mankind sided with Lucifer, and modifications of the creation ensued. One class of changes is called "the flood." The flood was a world-wide disaster which evoked great hydrologic and tectonic upheavals. Another class of changes is described as curses. Whether they represented creative acts of God, explosive genetic adaptations to changed environmental conditions, genetic, and/or physical manipulations of Lucifer, or a combination of these is not clear. But , the result is — the creation no longer is "very good."
4. See note 3 for a possible important exception to this rule.

5. Mechanisms built into living systems to provide for variation within the created types coupled with the effects of postulate 7 have produced the great variety that we now see in living systems. The original organisms were adapted to their ecological setting. As conditions changed, the plants and animals became adapted to their new environments.
6. The Creator is a being of order. Although He “invented” and established the rules by which the universe operates and is quite capable of changing those rules at any time, He normally does not do so. Miracles may be those rare occasions where He has changed some of His rules for a limited period of time and perhaps over a limited area of the creation. A miracle, even though its occurrence was carefully monitored by the best of observational science, might defy “normal” explanation. It is a unique occurrence and as such its explanation lies outside the realm of the scientific method and normal science.
7. Beadle G, Beadle M. 1966. The language of life, an introduction to the science of genetics. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., p 53.
8. As used here observations might better be called the “discoveries of the prepared mind.” Observations are the “data” of science. They are often obtainable only through the use of complex apparatus and sophisticated experimentation.
9. Dogma is used here to describe ideas not explicitly stated in revelation but believed to be implicit therein and accepted as equally true with the Biblical information itself.
10. See: Green JC. 1959. The death of Adam. Ames, IA: The Iowa State University Press; White AD. 1955. A history of the warfare of science with theology in Christendom. NY: George Braziller.
11. White EG. 1958. The story of patriarchs and prophets. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, p 113.