

THE ILLOGIC OF CREATIONISM

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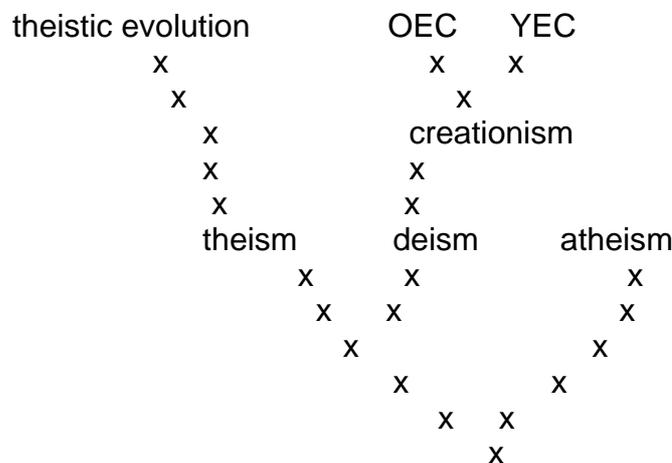
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The word 'evolution' has become, for some Christians, a provocation. They have been led to believe that evolution is essentially an atheistic idea. This misunderstanding has been misused for much unnecessary disputing.

VisioNetwork leader Glyn Carpenter writes (*DayStar* Sept 03) that the creationist/evolution argument is "also referred to as the young earth / old earth debate". This is an unfortunate confusion. Let's get a clear understanding of what the terms mean, and what are the various main beliefs, connected with evolution.

Two main sub-sects exist within the recent USA commercial mind-bugging sect creationism[®]. One version of creationism[®] asserts not only that all species were created in 6 days but also that this brief period of biological creation occurred less than 10,000 years ago. That is 'young earth creationism' (YEC). 'Old earth creationism' (OEC), exemplified by Hugh Ross's 'Reasons to Believe' organisation of S. Calif., acknowledges the scientific evidence that the Earth is much, much older, but also asserts like YEC that evolution has not occurred. The difference between these two sub-sects is of some interest, but it is different from the dispute between those who believe in evolution and those who deny the fact that evolution has occurred.

These differing views on evolution and creation can be diagrammed as a logic-tree, to be read from the bottom:



The diagram summarises the main logical options.

You can believe in God, or not; this is the basic, most important, choice in the logic-tree.

If you choose the atheism fork, you can then try like Dawkins etc to explain how the incomparable coherent complexity of ecosystems, or even just the functions of a humble bacterial flagellum, could have evolved by the workings of physical & chemical laws, with no creative planning.

If instead you choose to believe in God, you have an option of a largely defunct view, deism, holding that God did create the universe but that he then

turned it loose, like a clockwork toy he had wound up and left to run by the natural laws which he'd created. By contrast, theism holds that God not only created the universe but also sustains & guides it from moment to moment.

The tendency known as creationism is - though not usually billed as such by its adherents - a version of deism in its purported explanation of life. Proceeding up the logic-tree, within the creationism branch, we find the two versions, YEC and OEC, holding that, at least regarding the creation of species of organism, God did it all at the start and has not done any more creation since then. Although most creationists are theists because they believe in God's continuing involvement in the world (in the Incarnation, the Resurrection, God's responses to prayer, etc), they are deists in their biology - they believe in a completed creation.

They routinely misrepresent the relevant science. Worse, they deliberately spread the mind-fouling false axiom that *either* there has been evolution *or* there is a Creator. Within the church, they aggressively insert unpleasant phoney arguing; for outside antagonists, they present a caricature of Christianity which is embarrassing target.

Both YEC and OEC are opposed to the mainstream Christian view, which is theistic evolution, combining traditional theology with scientific findings that the different types of organism have been created at successive times over several billion years. God the maker & sustainer of the universe is affirmed by theistic evolution. To me as a Christian & scientist, physical & chemical laws are an expression of creative planning, not an alternative to it. Dawkins just has to accept them as an extraordinary brute fact, the origin of which he studiously ignores.

Theistic evolution results from reading both the book of scripture and the book of nature. We rely on faith that God will not mislead us if we examine honestly what we find in strata, fossils, molecules, and other aspects of nature that allow us to infer past processes in biology. Creationists have misrepresented these scientific findings in many ways (and as a scientist I deeply deplore that misbehaviour, documented in e.g. Prof. Ian Plimer's book 'Telling Lies for God'). But it is their logic that is the prime defect of creationism, counterposing the concepts of creation "vs." evolution, implying that they are somehow incompatible.

Where in this logic-tree does Intelligent Design fit? Exemplified by the video 'Unlocking the Mystery of Life' and the writings of William Dembski, this approach to explaining life confines itself to what is called natural theology, *i.e.* reading the book of nature with intent to infer properties of the designer(s). ID's effect is thus at the base of the logic-tree, helping those who have yet to decide whether organisms are caused by merely material processes or are designed. This is the Argument to Design developed by William Paley two centuries ago. It is fine as far as it goes but is only a tiny, if basic, part of theistic evolution as set forth by leading Christian scholars such as William Temple, Sir Alister Hardy, and our own John Morton (see 'Man, Science and God', Collins 1972). Another leading scholar in natural theology, but taking a broader view than Dembski expounds, is Neil Broom of the University of Auckland (see 'How Blind Is the Watchmaker?' IVP 2001). Broom expounds the Argument to Design as well as anyone, while seeing no theological difficulty in an ancient biosphere and evolution as shown by science.

My essay available at <<http://www.spc.org.nz/Science.asp>> maintains - following Morton - that a more intelligible, direct & conclusive argument is to

insist on all four causes as required to explain life, rather than relying principally on gaps in scientific understanding of the evolution of bacterial flagella etc.