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Donald W. Viney

Pittsburg State University, dviney@pittstate.edu

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THE WOES OF CREATION SCIENCE

Donald Wayne Viney

According to Roland Mushat Frye, a professor of English with training in theology, "Creation science cannot be regarded as representing either responsible science or responsible religion" (Frye, 22). Charles Hartshorne, a philosopher, is more explicit when he says that creation science "is bad philosophy, bad science, bad theology, and bad hermeneutics (textual interpretation), and no good thing at all" (Hartshorne, 67). These are strong words. However, this sort of opprobrium cast on creation science is not uncommon. Proponents of creation science view the vehemence with which their position is attacked as unfair. They merely promote "equal time" in the public schools to insure that children are not indoctrinated into believing in evolution without having considered the alternative of special creation. My purpose in this paper is to substantiate the claims of Frye and Hartshorne without endorsing their rhetoric. To be precise, I argue that creation science is bad science, bad philosophy, bad hermeneutics, and bad theology. But it is not "no good thing at all." There is a place in the public school curriculum for the study of creation science.

SCIENTIFIC CREATIONISTS: A VOCAL MINORITY

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there have been those who claim that the book of Genesis provides a scientifically accurate account of the origin of the universe and

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the origin and diversity of life on earth (see Numbers). The latest incarnation of this idea is called creation science or scientific creationism--the terms are interchangeable (Morris and Parker, xiii-xiv). Scientific creationists believe that the biblical story of creation and world history, including Noah's flood, is supported by the evidence of science. The main group in the United States which supports this idea is the Creation Research Society (CRS), founded in 1963. The CRS requires that members "sign a statement of belief accepting the inerrancy of the Bible, the special creation of 'all basic types of living things,' and a worldwide deluge." Only Christians can be members of CRS (Numbers, 230). The CRS is closely associated with the Institute for Creation Research (ICR), founded in 1972 at Christian Heritage College in San Diego, California. Dr. Henry Morris, a hydraulic engineer, is arguably the most important figure in the movement, having been a prime mover in the founding of both the CRS and ICR (Numbers 229, 283). He is a prolific writer and a tireless proponent of scientific creationism.

There are many who would agree with Morris about the veracity of the biblical account of creation and world history. According to *US News & World Report* (Dec. 23, 1991), 47% of all Americans believe that God created human beings pretty much in their present form within the last 10,000 years. The distinguishing mark of scientific creationists is that they believe the scientific evidence supports the biblical account. Scientific creationists lay down the gauntlet. They say, "Creationists are perfectly

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willing to let the issue be decided on the basis of the scientific evidence alone, so why aren't the evolutionists?" (Morris and Parker, xiv). Ironically, the evolutionists believe the issue was decided on the basis of the scientific evidence in the nineteenth century! Of course, scientific creationists do not agree with the evolutionists and they resent the patronizing attitude of their opponents.

Scientific creationists boast that "there are literally thousands of scientists" who reject evolution. As of 1974 the CRS had over 500 members (Morris 1974a, 8). However, in terms of numbers of scientists and science educators, the scientific creationists are in the minority. The two most prestigious scientific societies in the United States, the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the National Academy of Sciences, actively oppose creation science. In addition, the National Education Association, the National Science Teachers Association, and the National Association of Biology Teachers have campaigned against creation science (Larson, 129-130).

Against the opposition of the vast majority of scientists and science educators the scientific creationists have taken their cause to state legislatures. In 1968 the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Epperson v. Arkansas* that laws prohibiting the teaching of evolution--such as the law that was at issue in the 1925 Scopes trial--are unconstitutional. Instead of trying to outlaw the teaching of evolution, the scientific creationists have promoted "equal time" laws that mandate that creation science be

taught alongside evolution. Here too the scientific creationists have been largely unsuccessful. In 1982 United States District Court Judge William R. Overton ruled against Arkansas' equal time law calling it "simply and purely an effort to introduce the Biblical version of creation into the public school curricula" (Montagu, 376). Overton's ruling effectively ended this creationist legal strategy.

CREATION SCIENCE AND SCIENCE

Scientific creationists claim that their view is supported by the deliverances of science. *Prima facie* this claim is false, for many of the things that scientists teach as "scientific facts" are denied by the scientific creationists. Here are two examples: (1) Scientists say that the last dinosaurs became extinct more than sixty million years before human beings walked the earth. Scientific creationists say that dinosaurs and human beings were contemporaries. Unfortunately, the only direct evidence for this claim--the so-called Paluxy river footprints--is now conceded, even by scientific creationists, to be dubious (Kitcher, 120-123). (2) Scientists say that the universe is around fifteen billion years old. Scientific creationists date the universe between six and ten thousand years old. Scientific creationists agree that the universe seems to be very old, but they insist that God created light from distant stars in transit, making it appear that it had been emanating from a distant source for millions of years (Morris

1974, 224).

Evidence for the items I have listed does not presuppose the truth of evolution. However, there are differences between most scientists and scientific creationists on matters that have a more direct bearing on evolution. Here are two examples (continuing the numbering from above): (3) Scientific creationists claim that there is circular reasoning in geologic dating. The relative ages of geologic strata are determined by the fossils they contain; but the evolutionary stage of the fossils is determined by the ages of the geologic strata (Morris and Parker, 240-241). Scientists deny that this circularity exists (Kitcher, 63-66). William Smith, who discovered the method of dating strata by their characteristic fossils, was a creationist. Smith's method was used for more than half a century before scientists accepted evolutionary theory.¹ (4) Scientific creationists claim that the second law of thermodynamics is inconsistent with evolutionary theory (Morris and Parker, 205ff). Scientists deny that this inconsistency exists (Kitcher, 89-96). Counter-agencies making for increased order within a system--like the earth--are not inconsistent with the system, as a whole or statistically, gradually losing energy available for work.

These differences between scientific creationism and its detractors are, I emphasize, *prima facie* evidence that creation science is not supported by the findings of modern science. At any rate it puts the burden of proof squarely on the shoulders of scientific creationists. For those who can follow the arguments--which I have not given but only suggested--the differences may

serve as solid evidence that creation science is not good science. There is a deeper issue of what science is and whether creation science even qualifies as science, much less good science. This is a question for the philosophy of science.

CREATION SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

The only philosopher of science whose work the scientific creationists usually mention is Karl Popper. According to Popper, the chief virtue of a scientific theory is that it be falsifiable by some conceivable observation. Scientific creationists maintain that, according to this criterion, neither creation nor evolution is scientific (Morris and Parker, 9). Ironically, this claim is in direct conflict with their argument that the second law of thermodynamics is incompatible with evolution. They cannot have it both ways. If they use their thermodynamic argument then they must believe that evolution is falsifiable; if evolution is not falsifiable, then they cannot consistently use the thermodynamic argument.

But what about creation science itself? Is it falsifiable? Not according to Morris:

There is not the slightest possibility that the facts of science can contradict the Bible and, therefore, there is no need to fear that a truly scientific comparison of any aspect of the two models of origins can ever yield a verdict in favor of evolution (Morris 1974a, 15-16).

One wonders what it could mean to compare two "models" for their scientific merits if there is "not the slightest possibility" that one of the models can be false. How is it a genuine comparison if one knows the answer in advance? Philosophers of science now know that Popper's falsifiability criterion was too strict, but, as Philip Kitcher says, "there is surely something right in the idea that a science can succeed only if it can fail. An invulnerable 'science' would not be science at all" (Kitcher, 45).

It is a characteristic of scientific creationism that it is invulnerable. No evidence could possibly count against it. We have already noted that, according to creation science, God created the universe to look older than it actually is. Morris and Parker call this "functioning completeness" and they maintain that it "is inherent in the very nature of creation" (Morris and Parker, 307).

Morris is clear on this point:

[The] "apparent age" of the world has no necessary correlation with its "true age." Real creation obviously requires creation with an "appearance of age." Thus, Adam was made as a full-grown man, the newly formed trees had fruit on them, the light from the stars could be seen on earth at the moment of their creation, and so on. If anything is ever truly created, it necessarily must look initially as though it had a prior existence, and therefore it has an appearance of some "age," if that "age" is conceived in terms of present processes" (Morris 1967, 62-63).

This idea was first proposed by Philip Gosse in his 1857 book *Omphalos* (Greek for "navel"). Gosse argued that anything God created would appear to be older than it actually is. The trees in the Garden of Eden would have rings and Adam would have a navel. Gosse referred to this as prochronism. In this way Gosse attempted to reconcile the mounting geological evidence of earth's antiquity with a creation that took place only four thousand years ago (Milner, 339).

Whatever else one says about functioning completeness (or prochronism) it is clear that it disqualifies creation science as being science in any sense that practicing scientists would understand. It is an assumption with no testable consequences and it sheds no light whatever on any scientific theory. As Bertrand Russell once remarked, if the evidence of memory--and I add, dating methods--is not generally reliable, then, for all we know, God could have created the universe five minutes ago (Russell, 159-160). It makes no difference whether we speak of five minutes or six thousand years. The idea is useless from a scientific point of view.

On the issue of dating methods there is a genuine difference between evolutionists and scientific creationists. According to Morris, "if we are to know anything about creation--its date, processes, order, duration, or anything else--the Creator must tell us!" (Morris, 1967, 54). Evolutionists assume that the universe and the earth are as old as the best dating methods say they are. Since the dating methods can, depending on the progress of science

at the time of their use, yield different estimates, evolutionary time scales are open to falsification. Evolutionists exhibit a stance more in keeping with the spirit of scientific inquiry.

CREATION SCIENCE AND HERMENEUTICS

Scientific creationist estimates of the age of the universe are ultimately based on what they believe the Bible teaches. As Morris says, "the only proper approach to determining the date of creation" is to rely on the biblical data alone (Morris 1967, 63). According to Morris, "The Bible is a book of science!" (Morris 1974b, 229). Morris's confidence seems profoundly misguided when one remembers Martin Luther's attack on Copernicus as an "upstart astrologer" and a "fool" whose heliocentric system contradicted the plain sense of scripture (Fosdick, 31). Or again, there are Galileo's prosecutors who appealed to the Bible as a final authority on the movements of the heavens. What few people realize is that those who rejected the new astronomy by appealing to the Bible made as good a case as the scientific creationists make against evolution. For the Bible suggests that the earth is stationary (Chronicles 16.30, 1 Samuel 2.8, and Psalms 93.1 and 104.5) and that the sun moves around it (Joshua 10.12-14, 2 Kings 20.9-11, and Isaiah 38.7-8).

Morris's approach to scripture is perhaps best illustrated by looking at what he says about a passage that has nothing to do with evolution. Leviticus 11.5-6 says that rock badgers and hare chew

the cud. Both *The New American Bible* and the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible point out in their notes on this passage that rock badgers and hare are not ruminants but only appear to chew the cud. This poses a dilemma for a scientific creationist who wishes to endorse the Bible as a book of science. If the biblical authors were merely reporting what appeared to them, then the Bible is not a book of science. But if the Bible is a book of science, then it is a book with some errors, as the Leviticus passage shows.²

Gleason Archer, a Hebrew scholar who supports the scientific creationist view on the falsity of evolution, admits that the Leviticus passage is the report of an appearance and not of a scientific truth (Archer, 126). Morris avoids the problem by a bit of creative linguistics. The Hebrew word for hare is 'arnebet. According to Morris, "The arnebeth is evidently now extinct, so that we do not know exactly what it was, but at any rate it was not a hare" (Morris 1974b, 245). Apparently, when science contradicts the clear sense of scripture, he is willing to change the scripture to mean something else. Most biblical scholars would say that the problem is not in the Bible but in Morris's interpretation of it.

Biblical exegetes usually distinguish the biblical medium from the biblical message. The writers of the Bible expressed their faith in God in a variety of ways. They evoked the grandeur of God's creation through poetry and song. They saw their own history through the eyes of faith and wrote of the mighty acts of God. They expressed hope in God's providence through prophecy. There are also parables, moral fables, and myths. But always the writers

pointed to the transcendent creator whose love is the purpose of creation. All of this was accomplished without the aid of scientific research, exact historical reporting, or even much philosophic sophistication. Notwithstanding, it is a well-spring of Western culture and the heart of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As well say that *Moby Dick* cannot be great literature unless it accurately portrays whaling as say that the Bible cannot be divinely inspired without being a book of science. This simply misses the point.

CREATION SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY

Defenders of creation science characterize creation and evolution as mutually exclusive world views, although they are aware that many theists believe in evolution. They are of two minds about theistic evolution. Sometimes they claim that evolution is inherently atheistic (Morris and Parker, xii, 299). In other moods they acknowledge that theistic evolution is possible. They insist that theistic evolution "must be judged on the basis of theological criteria, not scientific" (Morris and Parker, 300). But what is this but an admission that evolution is not inherently atheistic? Furthermore, if evolution is not inherently atheistic, then one is not arguing about atheism when one evaluates the scientific merits of the theory of evolution. Theologians separate the questions, "What is the explanation (if any) of the existence of the universe?" and "What accounts for

the complex patterns of order, life, and mind within the universe?" Science may well answer the second question without answering the first. As Hartshorne says,

Science deals with relations of creatures, things in the world, to other things, later or earlier in time or elsewhere in space. Only theology and philosophy deal with relations of creatures to the Creator (Hartshorne 1981).

This is not to say that scientific theories cannot have implications for theology. However, it is to suggest that a division of labor is in order. It is not the theologian's business to tell scientists which scientific theories are true. By the same token, it is not the scientist's job to judge the adequacy of various theologies.

Since the advent of modern evolutionary theory Christian theologians have worked in various ways to accommodate the new science without making rearward attempts to salvage outdated theories. Some have said that evolution may be God's way of creating. This was the view of Asa Gray, Darwin's American botanist friend (Gray). The great nineteenth century Anglican clergyman, Charles Kingsley, put the point even more precisely: God makes things make themselves (Hartshorne 1984, 73). Interestingly, one need not know of evolutionary theory to adopt such a view. Jules Lequier, a French thinker and contemporary of Darwin who apparently did not know the Englishman's evolutionary theories, spoke of "God, who created me creator of myself"

(Lequier, 70).

While the scientific creationists are anxious to judge the theological adequacy of theistic evolution, they are reluctant to put their own theological stance to the test. For example, if God creates the universe to look older than it is, does this not make God a deceiver? Morris and Parker reply to this objection with a non sequitur: without "functioning completeness" there can be no creation as they believe it to be (Morris and Parker, 307). This may be true but it does not answer the objection that their theology makes God a deceiver.

Another example of the poverty of the scientific creationist's theology is the assumption that God expects human beings to believe that the Bible is the sole source of information about origins. This assumption is untenable for two reasons. First, as we have already seen, there is good reason to believe that the Bible is not a book of science. Second, a distinctive characteristic of human beings--one of the things that sets us apart from other animals--is the ability to reason at high levels of abstraction. Ever since the days of the ancient Greek philosophers and scientists people have used this ability to attempt to discover their origins--evolutionary theory is simply the latest attempt. A theology which says that God demands or even expects us not to use this ability is like a theology that says Mozart should not have composed music.

CREATION SCIENCE: A GOOD THING?

Hartshorne says that creation science is "no good thing at all." He later qualifies this statement and suggests that creation science might have a place in the schools because "it is so rich in farcical aspects" and would keep students from becoming bored (Hartshorne, 1984, 91). I suggest a less cynical use for creation science -- it could serve as a good example of a bad thing. Every introductory logic text contains a section on informal fallacies. Students are taught the principles of good reasoning by analyzing examples of reasoning's counterfeits. Creation science can serve a similar function in each of the disciplines on which our discussion has touched. For example, scientists have been quite vocal in their opposition to creation science and their arguments are presented in readily accessible anthologies (Godfrey and Montagu). Phillip Kitcher, a philosopher of science, presents an overview of both the philosophy of science and the scientific case against creation science (Kitcher). In addition, biblical scholars and theologians have exposed the hermeneutic and theological mistakes of creation science (Frye).

Another, more positive, contribution of creation science, is that it has forced philosophers, scientists, and theologians to be more clear about the assumptions that undergird their various programs. Defenders of evolution have not been innocent of importing dubious metaphysical and epistemological assumptions into their works. Hartshorne points to such assumptions in the thought

of Carl Sagan (Hartshorne 1991). Christian philosophers and scientists have given trenchant criticisms not only of creation science, but also of those who would use science to support an atheistic stance (Hasker, Van Till, Craig). Likewise, Christian philosophers and scientists have given voice to the dominant trends in thought about creation and evolution that the scientific creationists routinely ignore (McMullin).

Scientific creationists ask for "equal time" in public schools so that students will be exposed to the two "models of origins," creation and evolution. This assumes that creation and evolution are the only two "models of origins" and that they are on equal scientific footing. Both assumptions are incorrect. We have also seen that creation science is deficient philosophically, hermeneutically, and theologically. At very least, however, creation science may serve as an example of what science, philosophy, hermeneutics, and theology are not and it invites scholars to be clear about their presuppositions.

NOTES

1. Morris knows of Smith's work and Smith's creationist views. He even says that "there is certainly nothing much in [the fossils Smith used to date geologic strata] to speak of evolution" (Morris 1989, 189). These admissions are fatal to the objection that Morris raises in his other writings that one cannot use fossils to date the strata without presupposing evolution.

2. The Bible contains many statements, besides the ones mentioned here, that directly or indirectly contradict the teachings of science. It is extremely difficult to imagine that any intelligent person, using only the Bible as a guide, could have discovered that the sky is not a solid dome with water above and below it (Genesis 1.7; Job 37.18; Psalm 104.2 and Isaiah 40.22). It is equally doubtful that careful scrutiny of the Bible would lead one to believe that there is no such place as Sheol beneath the earth where the dead are said to dwell (Numbers 16.33; Job 26.5-6; Ezekiel 26.20-21). A psychology based on the Bible would refer to demon possession rather than neurological disorders to explain epilepsy and related problems (Matthew 8.28-34, 17.14-19; Mark 5.1-13, 9.14-29; Luke 8.26-33, 9.37-43). These are by no means the only examples of the Bible's scientific fallibility, but they are enough to show that it is ridiculous to appeal to the Bible as "a book of science."

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