Views on the Origins of the Universe **[1]**

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I thought that it would be good for me to explain my position on the origins of the universe. I am not doing this as part of a larger debate [2], but I feel that clarifying my position now would be helpful for what I may want to say in the future.

In a nutshell, I believe that God created the universe, but I do not know by which mechanic He did this. There are many theories and positions out there and I am just going to briefly mention the three broadest and most common ones. The first is *young earth creationism*. This view takes Genesis 1–3 literally and holds that God created the entire universe with all life in it in six 24 hour days. This all happened between 6000 and 7000 years ago, which makes the earth very *young* when compared to the other two theories. This date is arrived at if you correlate events in the Bible with dated events from history, and then count back using the genealogies given in the Old Testament. (This is the same way by which Jews believe that it is currently the year 5772.) Many prominent church leaders today hold this view and I have friends who also hold this view. The next theory is *old earth creationism*. This theory holds that the earth is much older and that the Genesis narrative should not be taken completely literally. There are different types of old earth creationism as well as various ages given for the earth, but it is in the tens of thousands of years or even much more. This allows people who hold to this view to still account for archaeological evidence which predates 5000 BC as well as certain types of fossils. Yet still by this view God was very directly involved in the creation of the universe when it happened. The final theory is called *intelligent design* (ID). ID affirms the Big Bang theory and evolution (both micro and macro), stating that the universe is 13 billion years and that life on earth began nearly 4 billion years ago. In all of this was God's guiding hand and providence. Science cannot explain what caused the Big Bang or some apparent flaws [3] of Darwinianism, but a theistic world view solves these problems.

The above has been a hopelessly terse introduction to the broadest classification of theories on the origins of the universe (at least those commonly encountered amongst Christians). But I am sure that the reader is already familiar with them and I want to proceed to my main point, which is to explain my position. As I have already said, I am undecided on how God actually created the universe. But I can be more precise by saying that I am torn between old earth creationism and ID. ID appeals to me because of the science. Creationists will take offense at that as they will also present scientific evidence for their position (even the young earth creationists), but I am not convinced by their science. I am not very well acquainted with modern theories of evolution, but the science behind the Big Bang theory certainly seems fairly solid to me. But ID poses a seriously problem for Christian theists, as it implies that there were not a literal Adam and a literal Eve. I

personally do not think that ID necessarily implies that Adam and Eve could not exist nor act as representatives of mankind (which is necessary to explain sin in the world), but it definitely is the weak point of the theory. ID is vehemently criticised by many theologians specifically because of this point. I believe old earth creationism could solve this problem, but as I said I do not see it in the science. As such I lean more towards ID than old earth creationism, but I have not ruled the latter out completely.

What about young earth creationism? For me it is simply unbiblical. According to the Genesis narrative, God created the sun on the third day. But in ancient Hebrew culture (to whom this story was given), a day was defined as the period of time between the setting of the sun, its rising and setting again. If there is no sun, there is no measurement of a day! A counter to this argument would be that God still operated on a 24 hour basis, but that seems like a weak argument to me. Many, if not most, Jewish scholars already rejected a literal interpretation of the creation narrative in the medieval period exactly because of this point. Even many modern orthodox Jews continue to do so.

So why the insistence on science? Well, in short, I am a scientist. I know there is such a thing as good science and such a thing as bad science. I have seen much bad science and it has made me somewhat pessimistic about the current state of the scientific community. But I believe that the science behind the Big Bang theory (at least) is (mostly) solid. Now we live in a physical world which God designed and sustained. Part of that world is science, and we all make use of it, whether we are creationists or evolutionists. Nearly all of modern technology came about because of science which was done well (al be it not necessarily ethically, but that is another discussion altogether). To deny only certain pieces of science because it does not fit your world view is not a good way to reason.

Some people think that science is about knowing truth. I beg to differ. Science is the *search* for truth in the natural world. During this quest, there has been some "good science" which was wrong, but for the most part science only provides *partial* explanations (this is also the reason why scientists still have jobs: there is more still to be learned). A good example can be found in Simon Singh's *Big Bang*[1]. In Chapter 1 (specifically Tables 2 and 3), Singh shows how thought about the universe developed from being geocentric (that is, an earth-centred view of the universe) in ancient Greece, to being sun-centred by the Renaissance. Initially the geocentric view looked scientifically sound as it had the broadest explanatory power[2]. It was only after centuries of scientific development that the sun-centred view began to gain ground as it started beating the geocentric view on a point-by-point basis. It required much science to develop the sun-centred view to have broader explanatory power and scope than the geocentric model, and thus become the scientifically accepted model. Another example is Newtonian physics. Newtonian physics revolutionised science as it provided a coherent model for describing and predicting much of everyday mechanical phenomena. It flourished until it was usurped by Einstein's general theory of relativity. Now, the geocentric view was simple *wrong*, but one can argue that Newtonian physics was not wholly wrong, but simply insufficient to explain the subtleties of the natural universe. We continue to use Newtonian physics up to this day because it is sufficiently accurate for most "everyday" calculations on earth. The theory of general relativity is too complex to apply to "everyday" scenarios and the gain in accuracy is negligible. But in a certain sense, Newtonian physics *is* wrong, because it presents a view everyday life which is not 100% accurate. In the same way, I believe, the theory of general relativity will one day be superseded by another model of the physical universe which has broader explanatory power[3]. But the fact that Newtonian physics remains useful emphasises the facts that science deals with *models*: theoretical constructs which makes sense of the natural world. Think of a scientific model as a scale model of a house or a town: it gives a good picture of the house or town, but does not describe it completely. For example, the scale is too small, the doors are not on real hinges and cannot open, and the trees are made out of plastic, not organic matter. But, if you want to know what your house or town would look like if you were to fly over it in a plane, then the might might very well be quite accurate.

My point is that one must bear in mind that science is continually evolving (pardon the pun). As such, science should not be used to learn objective truths about the physical universe. However, science is *using the natural world* to learn *about the natural world*. Maybe it is just me, but that sounds a bit like Genesis 1:28. God has given the natural world as it is and we should use it as best as we can. Yes, we must not forget God in all of this and push Him out of His creation, but if He did indeed create something in a specific way, who are we do deny it?

I am not too bothered about being undecided on this issue. For me it is relatively unimportant exactly how the universe came to be (although not necessarily wholly unimportant). What is important is that we are here, that God has revealed Himself to us in the person of Christ, that He has given us forgiveness for our sins and charged us to take the message of grace and salvation out to all people. That is priority number one. Bickering about how we got here does not help much in this regard. The same for me is true about looking forward: rather than theorise and argue over the end of the world, do the work which we have been given now, know that our good God has promised us good in the future and an eternity in His awesome presence.

We have the Word of God on these matters and whether it is literal or allegorical, it *should* be used to preach salvation in Jesus the Messiah, as that is how He decided to tell the story to us [4].

- 1. Singh, Simon. Big Bang *[5]*. London: Fourth Estate, 2004.
- 2. Al be it with certain "hacks", such as Ptolemaic epicycles. Having to revert to such "hacks" or amendments to a theory (or at least to too many of them) in order to keep the theory valid in the face of objections is actually a sign of bad science. However, at the end of the day the most important criterion is still explanatory power and scope, which the geocentric view had at the end of the first century AD.
- 3. I mentioned "hacks" earlier and how they point to underlying errors in scientific theories and models. I believe dark matter and dark energy to be such hacks, invented to keep the observable universe consistent with the theory of general relativity. Dark matter and dark energy is unobserved (unobservable), mysterious "stuff" which makes scientists' calculations balance out. I am glad to see that some scientists are moving away [6] from the theory of dark matter.

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