On Creation “Science”

Chad E. Brack
December 2, 2019

The problem with the creationism movement is that its proponents tend to begin with a predetermined belief and attempt to mold evidence to support the desired outcome. In typical pseudoscience fashion, creationists reject facts that do not fit their agenda and use fallacious arguments or rhetoric to convince people of their claims. Furthermore, some creationists engage in outright deceit to meet their goals. Tracing the modern creationism and intelligent-design movements back to antievolutionism and the bad science of flood geology that arose in the late 19th century, we can plainly see that creationism is not a scientific theory to rival the theory of evolution. It is a belief system firmly grounded in religious ideas that is deliberately disguised as science. Stephen J. Gould shows us that religious beliefs and scientific evidence need not compete with one another.¹ They can explain two different aspects of the same world.

Charles Darwin was not the first to develop a theory of evolution. Jean-Baptiste Lamarck proposed environmental adaptation in 1809,² and Robert Chambers published Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation in 1844. Darwin’s On the Origin of Species came 15 years later.³ Geology was beginning to show that the Earth was much older

than previously believed, people were toying with ideas about catastrophism, and gradual change over time was becoming the accepted view. What made Darwin special was that he provided a mechanism for change via natural selection, which was a dangerous idea because it allowed for the removal of providence from nature. No longer considered a radical view, the Old Earth was well-established science by the mid-1800s, and evolution had also gained favor in the academic community. By the *Origin of Species*, most Christians had moved past belief in a young Earth due to the new scientific evidence, but when Darwin established humanity as prone to the same evolutionary processes as the rest of nature in his 1871 book, *The Descent of Man*, Christians could not abide. Even many evangelicals had been able to accept the old Earth and evolution as long as God guided it toward humanity, but a new movement to deny the science quickly formed out of the Seventh Day Adventist community. By the 1920s, the main critics of evolution were Christian fundamentalists and evangelicals whose goal was to eliminate evolution altogether. Their roots traced to the teachings of Ellen Gould White.

White (1826-1915) was a prophetess who cofounded the Seventh Day Adventists with her husband, James White, in 1846. In 1840 she had joined the Millerites, a

---


8 Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America*, 52.
group that believed the second coming of Christ would take place in 1843 or 1844. After Christ failed to return, White claimed to receive visionary revelations and recast the event as the beginning of the judgement. She adopted a following who considered her an authoritative source for theology, science, medicine, and history. White claimed to witness the creation of the world in a vision and taught that God took six actual days as taught in *Genesis*. She also used the Biblical account of the flood to explain questions in geology and history, such as mysteries in the fossil record. White “consistently subordinated science to Scripture” and said “The Bible is not to be tested by men’s ideas of science … but science is to be brought to the test of this unerring standard.”

One of White’s most influential followers was George McCready Price (1970-1973). Price claimed to have “nearly succumbed to evolution” before being “saved by sessions of intense prayer” combined with White’s book, *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Price was inspired to begin a “scientific career” to promote what he called “new catastrophism.” In 1906 he published *Illogical Geology: The Weakest Point in the Evolution Theory*, which was based entirely on rhetoric and fallacious argumentation. He went on to publish more books, including *The New Geology*, and to teach at Adventist schools. By the 1920s, he became the premier “authority” for fundamentalists. Price received honorary degrees from Adventist universities, taught...

---


10 Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America*, 53; 96-97.

11 Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America*, 93.

12 Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America*, 100-101.
at seven Adventist schools, and held the title of professor of philosophy and geology despite his lack of formal training.\textsuperscript{13} He taught geocentricity, that dating fossils is impossible, that all strata are the same age, and that evolution is false based on flood geology and Biblical scriptures.\textsuperscript{14} For Price, the Bible only allowed for a single act of creation.\textsuperscript{15} He successfully spread his ideas throughout other Christian communities by publishing, lecturing, and concealing his Adventist influences. By the 1990s, many evangelicals had come to believe that Price’s flood geology was the traditional Biblical creation account.\textsuperscript{16}

As creationists spread antievolutionism and flood geology, they created organizations dedicated to competing with science. Infighting also broke out within the Adventists organizations due to disagreements over evidence and strategies. Most Adventists believed that “true science” only agreed with Biblical teachings, but John Harvey Kellogg disagreed, arguing that “Science deals chiefly with one sort of truths, religion with another class of truths.”\textsuperscript{17} Price’s best student, Harold Clark did actual research to determine that Price was wrong. He repackaged Price’s catastrophism as “science of creationism,” removed Price’s text from Pacific Union College, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Numbers, \textit{Darwinism Comes to America}, 53.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Numbers, “Price, George McCready.”
\item \textsuperscript{16} Numbers, \textit{Darwinism Comes to America}, 109.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Numbers, \textit{Darwinism Comes to America}, 94-95.
\end{itemize}
published an actual theory called *The New Diluvialism*. Price was furious. After the Adventists created the Geoscience Research Institute (GRI) in the late 1950s to boost their credibility, a major rift occurred when their chemistry teacher, P. Edgar Hare, found the age of marine shells to conflict with traditional Adventists teachings. Hare wanted to reform the GRI’s methodology toward a more science-friendly methodology, but Frank Lewis Marsh argued that research should serve only to corroborate the scriptures and White’s prophecies. Marsh advocated for a conservative, traditionally fundamentalist approach. Richard M. Ritland, an actual Harvard-trained biologist, served as GRI director for a time and believed that God’s revelations came from both nature and scripture; however, when Robert H. Pierson took over in 1996, he clearly endorsed Marsh’s view. The rivalries and differences of opinion resulted in internal strife within Adventist organizations but had little effect on the spread of Young Earth Creationism. Fundamentalist and evangelical Christians ignorant of the Adventist origins of their teachings would do the heavy lifting in that regard.

John C. Whitcomb Jr. and Henry M. Morris’ 1961 book, *The Genesis Flood*, was the key to establishing Price's flood geology as the orthodox view.

Several organizations emerged to challenge evolution with variations of “creation science.” In the 1930s a Price convert created the Religion and Science Association to stand against evolution, but it dissolved within two years because the

18 Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America*, 53; 103-104.

19 Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America*, 53; 106-109.

20 Young and Edis, “Introduction,” 2.
leaders could not agree on how to understand Genesis. During World War II, “progressive creationists” formed the American Scientific Affiliation for those who believed Biblical inerrancy and scripture exist in harmony with nature. In the late 50s the Adventists established the GRI, and within six months of Price’s death in 1963, creation “scientists” formed the Creation Research Society (CRS) to spread flood geology. The CRS promoted flood geology and special creation over divinely guided evolution or other forms of creationism and repackaged “creation science” as “scientific creationism” in the 1970s. Their goal was to get creationism taught in public schools by shifting their strategy from fighting to remove evolution from the curriculum to promoting “equal time” for both “theories.”

In 1972 Henry Morris founded the Institute for Creation Research (IRC) to train students in flood geology and to propagate Young Earth Creationism in churches and religious schools. The IRC distributed its message using almost entirely Christian apologetics. No faculty published any research. Much like in the GRI, the IRC suffered infighting between members who wanted to use a scientific approach versus those who thought the organization should be a missionary enterprise.

21 Numbers, Darwinism Comes to America, 53; 53-54.


23 Numbers, “Price, George McCready.”

24 Numbers, Darwinism Comes to America, 55; Longley, “Creationism,” 628.

After the Supreme Court ruled that teaching Creationism in schools violates the Establishment Clause by elevating Christianity over other religions, creationists repackaged their teachings as “Intelligent Design.” In the words of Matt Young and Taner Edis, “the intelligent-design movement sprang up after creation science failed.” In 1990 the Discovery Institute (DI) was founded as a think-tank to propagate intelligent Design. As opposed to simply denying the evidence for evolution, the DI presents intelligent design as a legitimate scientific theory to revival evolution. The idea became popular after Phillip Johnson published his 1993 book *Darwin on Trial*. Intelligent-design materials deliberately avoid fundamentalism and try to focus on the appearance of competition with modern science. The DI does not, however, actually do any real science and its members have privately admitted to using science as a façade to disguise creationism.

Creationism organizations work to convince people of their claims using pseudoscience, fallacious arguments, and mischaracterizations of scientific theories. They react to evolution and accepted geology as White and Price did—by simply denying the evidence in favor of Biblical teachings. Petteri Nieminen and Anne-Mari Mustonen showed that creationist writings contain several kinds of fallacies, they use “selected data from natural sciences as counter-evidence against evolution,” and their arguments are “not directly connected to scientific proof.” Furthermore, they

26 Young and Edis, “Introduction,” 3.


28 Petteri Nieminen and Anne-Mari Mustonen, “Argumentation and Fallacies in Creationist Writings Against Evolutionary Theory.” *Evolution: Education and Outreach* 7, no. 11 (2014), 1-2. According to Nieminen and Mustonen (1), the fallacies were prevalent in samples from young Earth creationism, old Earth creationism, and intelligent design.
typically use *ad hominem* attacks against Darwin’s character, appeal to consequences based on renouncement of theism, and appeal to ignorance in attempts to discredit evidence. In other words, creationists tend to side-step the actual issue in favor of rhetoric.

The use of rhetoric is important for “creation science” because, as Timothy Wilson and Attila Krizsán point out, the actual goal of creationists is to compete for “dialogic space.” Their mission is to get accepted into the academic world as a competitor. It is “not scientifically motivated, but rather, a deliberate attempt to bring religion into decision-making by politicizing the teaching of science.”

Their goals are “cultural, moral, political, and theistic,” as shown by leaked documents from the DI. According to *The Wedge*,

[The DI] seeks nothing less than the overthrow of materialism and its cultural legacies, ... [to] replace materialistic explanations with the theistic understanding that nature and human beings are created by God, ... to replace [the materialist worldview] with a science consonant with Christian and theistic convictions.

This is not science. This is religion sneaking into laboratories and classrooms.

According to Joshua Tom, belief in no scientific consensus is a predictor in scientifically deviant beliefs, and traditional education is far less important than typically assumed. Political and religious arguments are more influential than

29 Nieminen and Mustonen, “Argumentation and Fallacies in Creationist Writings,” 2-7.


32 *The Wedge* (Discovery Institute, 1999).
education and socialization of science. Tom found that it is not scientific literacy, but rather the perception of scientific consensus that makes the difference.\textsuperscript{33} This illustrates the thinking behind the creationists’ plan to encourage teaching “the controversy” where none exists. According to Edis and Young, “advocates of intelligent design do not practice science ... because they make no substantive predictions, do not respond to evidence, have an axe to grind, and appear to be oblivious to criticism.”\textsuperscript{34} They also use untestable hypotheses.\textsuperscript{35} For Mark Perakh and Matt Young, “what is unscientific is to decide ahead of time on the answer and search for God with the determination to come up with a positive result.”\textsuperscript{36} Tom points out that no creation science has been published in a peer-reviewed science journal.\textsuperscript{37} Despite all of these facts, creationists earn an audience by expanding the dialogue into the realm of their pseudoscience to present the appearance of controversy.\textsuperscript{38} Their focus on the public, not scholars or scientists,\textsuperscript{39} has even convinced lawmakers

\begin{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{34} Young and Edis, “Introduction,” 8.


\textsuperscript{36} Perakh and Young, “Is Intelligent Design Science?”, 185.


\textsuperscript{38} Wilson and Krizsán, “Politics in Science,” 867.

\textsuperscript{39} Scott, “Antievolution and Creationism,” 265.
\end{verbatim}
in several states to take steps to discredit the theory of evolution in public classrooms.\textsuperscript{40}

A secondary effect of this strategy is that it causes scientists to resort to similar tactics in order to protect scientific consensus. In 1941 the American Scientific Affiliation organized to discredit the pseudoscience of flood geology and to protect the name of creationists who were not fundamentalists.\textsuperscript{41} In 1981 the National Center for Science Education formed to educate the public on the creationism controversy.\textsuperscript{42} In 1984, the National Academy of Sciences officially condemned creationism.\textsuperscript{43}

According to Nieminen and Mustonen, scientific rebuttals get drawn into fallacious claims and lead to counter-fallacies.\textsuperscript{44} Scientists tend to concentrate on empirical evidence but get derailed by irrelevant side-arguments against things like the fine-tuning of the universe, biogenesis, or the origin of matter.\textsuperscript{45} In the midst of the heated debate, both the creationist and the scientist suffer from fallacious reasoning. Furthermore, the fact that so many scientists spend time discrediting intelligent design tends to lend it a certain amount of credence.

\textsuperscript{40} Longley, “Creationism.”

\textsuperscript{41} Numbers, \textit{Darwinism Comes to America}, 54.

\textsuperscript{42} Scott, “Antievolution and Creationism,” 274.

\textsuperscript{43} Numbers, \textit{Darwinism Comes to America}, 56.

\textsuperscript{44} Nieminen and Mustonen, “Argumentation and Fallacies in Creationist Writings,” 10.

\textsuperscript{45} Barnes, Church, and Draznin-Nagy, “The Nature of the Arguments,” 43-44.
Despite the ongoing debate, Gould declared the controversy to be over. For Gould, the magisterium (teaching authority) of science is concerned with the empirical constitution of the universe while the magisterium of religion is about ethical values and spiritual meaning. Though they might bump into each other from time to time, the two do not overlap. In other words, science tells us about what the world is made of and why it works the way it does. Religion helps us to understand what that information means for us in terms of morality and value. Gould even demonstrated that it is possible for the two to inform each other if done in the right way. First, he accepted creationists as graduate students, demonstrating equal academic opportunity for everyone. Second, his theory of punctuated equilibrium owes at least partial thanks to his debates with creationists. The majority of species seem to arise suddenly in the fossil record. Creationists saw this as a sign of origin by “divine fiat.” Darwin understood it as a result of an imperfect fossil record. Gould suggested that stasis is a genuine phenomenon since speciation occurs during patterns of punctuated equilibrium instead of gradualism. His open recognition of the origin of his theory clearly demonstrates that religion and science can inform each other as long as they do not overstep their bounds. The fact that humans evolved from common ancestors with the other great apes does not answer questions about the existence of God. Likewise, religious scriptures are not science textbooks.


47 Gould, “Nonoverlapping Magisteria.”

To sum, the modern movements for Young Earth creationism and intelligent design are fatally flawed due to fallacious arguments and deliberate deceit. As Eugenie Scott explains, both creation science and intelligent design “end up defining acceptable science on the basis of preexisting religious ideology.” They start with a conclusion and use pseudoscientific methods to build support for their claims. Scientists generally reject supernatural explanations for practical reasons rather than religious animosity, but creationists take scientific findings as de facto religious statements. As creationism spreads to the UK, Australia, Latin America, South Korea, and other parts of the world, science education is increasingly important to stop the dissemination of false information. Gould showed us that science and religion belong to two different aspects of the world and need not compete. As we’ve seen throughout history, religious ideas can and do adapt to contemporary scientific understandings of the world. Religion can even provide interesting insights and ideas relevant to science. The problems begin when people deliberately influence, alter, or trump scientific observations in favor of desired, religiously-inspired results. It is the place of science to understand the tangible workings of the physical world and the realm of religion to deal with questions of higher purpose, value, and right behavior. Creationists have overstepped these bounds by conflating the two sides of the human experience, and they are deliberately encouraging others to do the same.


Bibliography


The Wedge. Discovery Institute, 1999.
