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# The Problem with Scientific Creationism

JESSICA PIEPGRASS

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“And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind’: and it was so” (Genesis 1.24).

This biblical verse, according to Henry Morris, should be taken as historical fact. The world was created in seven twenty-four-hour days, and on the sixth day creatures of the earth were made. Morris is a proponent of scientific creationism, which is a way of reconciling the Genesis account with scientific evidence. However, it seems apparent to me that scientific creationism is more a method of interpretation than a scientific theory. In this brief essay, I contend that Henry Morris’s “scientific” program is fundamentally flawed in three different ways. First, Morris’s staunch insistence and reliance on the historical accuracy of the Genesis account leads to significant problems. Second, Morris repeatedly insists that evolution and Christianity cannot be reconciled in any meaningful way; this hinders, rather than helps his cause. Third, his argument rests on presuppositions that taint his objectivity in this “scientific” venture.

## LITERALISM

The problem that arises while critically examining Morris’s ideas about scientific creationism is *why* he feels it is so important to take the Genesis account literally. Morris concludes that if there is a creator, then it is a reasonable conclusion that “God, the Creator, would somehow reveal to His creature man, the necessary information concerning the creation which could never be discovered by himself.”<sup>1</sup> I think there are several problems with this statement. First, Morris assumes that he understands how the Creator thinks. In other words, since a human leaves behind an account of their actions, then surely God too would leave for us a specific account of how God did things in the past. It is made abundantly clear in scripture that God knows better than us, God knows more than us, and God will not reveal to us everything that we want to know. For example, Isaiah 55.8–9: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

It almost seems as though Morris believes God owes us an explanation. And frankly, I’m not comfortable with the idea of God owing me anything. I don’t agree that the Creator of the universe is indebted to me in any matter at all. To expect the Creator of the universe to function similarly to humans is a bit presumptuous. Yes, the Bible says we are made in his image and likeness; however, the Bible does not say in which ways we are and are not similar to God. Thus, it is quite a leap to presume that Genesis is intended to be a play-by-play account of how the world was created.

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1. Henry M. Morris, *Scientific Creationism* (El Cajon, CA: Master Books, 1985), 203.

Also problematic is how Morris refers to humanity as “His creature man.”<sup>2</sup> It seems to imply that out of all that God created, humans are the most precious, and essentially the only “creatures” that matter. This is a very narrow-minded and anthropocentric statement. It seems lofty and arrogant to assume that we humans are the pinnacle of God’s creation. It is made incredibly clear in scripture that God looks after and cares for all of his creation, and that all of creation is regarded as “good” in the eyes of God.

Morris goes on to describe the Genesis account of creation as “marvelous and accurate.”<sup>3</sup> He also says that it “give[s] data and information far beyond those that science can determine” and “provide[s] an intellectually satisfying framework within which to interpret the facts which science *can* determine.”<sup>4</sup> Morris openly states several times that he believes the Genesis account contains information that humans would never discover on their own. He believes that the Genesis account is above our understanding and ways of understanding. This argument is confounding on several levels. It seems that what he is trying to say is that scientific creationism is the only way of understanding how the world was formed, but at the same time he says that science, as we currently understand it, will never figure it out. He is justifying his methods of putting scientific facts into his framework of the Genesis account by stating that this is the only way to understand both science and scripture. This is inherently unscientific!

In her book *Evolution vs. Creationism*, science educator Eugenie C. Scott states,

“ . . . even if it is usually not possible absolutely to prove a scientific explanation correct . . . to disprove a scientific explanation is possible . . . progress in scientific explanation has largely come by rejecting alternate explanations.”<sup>5</sup> Good science seeks to disprove a theory. Good science does not pick and choose facts to support a view one already believes to be infallible. Furthermore, science is simply one of many ways of understanding the universe; yet, this particular method relies upon “the natural world itself as the arbiter of truth.”<sup>6</sup> I am not arguing that science is the only or even the best form of knowledge; I am arguing, however, that to say scientific creationism is science is an incredibly misleading statement.

Morris contends the earth looks older than it really is. He states, “the whole universe had an ‘appearance of age’ right from the start.”<sup>7</sup> Passages in Genesis that seem to indicate that God created the stars and sun in already formed states and Adam and Eve as adult human beings are used as justification for this contention. Morris also argues that the flood depicted in Genesis is an entirely valid explanation for vast beds of dinosaur fossils. Morris does not believe that rocks were created with fossils in them, for that would be “evil.”<sup>8</sup> That, in Morris’s eyes, would be deceit on God’s part, and God, as most Christians will agree, is not deceitful in nature. But, I must ask, is it not deceitful for God to have made stars that appear much older than they are, and would it not be deceitful for God to have made the earth seem as though it has been developing for millions, even billions of years? I agree with Morris, God isn’t dishonest. The God that I believe in would not create a world with canyons that seem to have been developing for millions of years, or stars that appear to all human technology to be billions of years old. That is not the nature of a God I want to follow. By affirming his belief that God would not have lied to us by placing misleading fossils in the ground, Morris opens himself up to these types of age-appearance questions, which speak directly to the character of God. And for these types of questions, Morris offers no answer.

Why is it so essential for Morris to take the Creation story as depicted in Genesis so literally? I believe he has several theological reasons for fixing his faith so tightly to a literal interpretation of Genesis. First, he believes that an essential part of the fall is that the world is now in a state of decay. According to Morris

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Eugenie C. Scott, *Evolution vs. Creationism* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), 11.

6. Ibid., 3.

7. Morris, 209.

8. Ibid., 210.

we are now in “the bondage of decay.”<sup>9</sup> In order for this key theological belief to be true, Adam and Eve literally needed to have eaten the apple, which has sent humans, as a species, down the path of sin and the rest of the world into a perpetual state of decay. Morris argues that the “universal tendency towards death” can be explained by the fall of humankind.<sup>10</sup> Morris asserts that pre-fall people were not intended to die and that no evil would have been present in the world. But look at the absurd consequences this interpretation forces. For example, Morris believes that all creatures were originally intended to be herbivores—as the Institute for Creation Research states, it was only after the fall that predatory animals became “quite vicious.”<sup>11</sup> Creation.com offers several other possibilities, one of which is that mechanisms now used by carnivorous animals may have initially had a more benign purpose. For instance, snake fangs were intended to inject “fruit-softening” chemicals into the plant-based foods they were about to eat and perhaps mosquitoes drew sap from trees, and not blood from animals.<sup>12</sup> These arguments are in direct contradiction with everything we know about biology and force Christians like Morris to make entirely impractical claims about the natural world around us.

Morris also uses what he sees as a lack of evidence for evolution to support his theory. Morris repeatedly stresses that neither evolution nor scientific creationism can be concretely proved. He states, “no one can *know* what happened before there were people to observe and record,”<sup>13</sup> and goes on to assert that the only history that is real is that which is written.<sup>14</sup> This assertion conveys yet another of Morris’s biases. He takes only what constitutes accurate knowledge in our current western context as valid evidence. Morris is neglecting the fact that oral traditions were common in ancient (and relatively modern) eastern traditions. Furthermore, asserting that written history is the only history that can be trusted completely ignores that fact that, in many cultures, oral traditions thrived for centuries with incredible accuracy.

### INCOMPATIBILITY

Morris states that there is no other way to make the biblical account of a global flood fit with the biblical description than to completely reject geological dating.<sup>15</sup> The only way to explain the fossil record we have and the vast sediment deposits is the “Noachian Deluge.”<sup>16</sup> Morris’s blatant dismissal of scientific understanding and dating of fossils is extremely problematic. To rule out decades of scientific and generally accepted research is irresponsible.

While I am not arguing that scientifically proven knowledge is more valid than theological knowledge, I am arguing that biblical literalism is not essential to the core of Christianity. There are essential beliefs in Christianity: God is good, perfect and omnipotent; Christ is God’s son sent out of love for humanity. But is the age of the earth or the manner in which God chose to create it critical to those aforementioned essential components of Christianity? I do not believe so. I contend that Morris is entirely too hung up on non-essential parts of the Christian faith. In going so far and being so adamant about the Genesis account he alienates all possibility of any dialogue with people who believe differently than he does. Morris thinks that anyone who tries to reconcile scripture and evolution is simply compromising both their faith and scripture.<sup>17</sup>

9. *Ibid.*, 212.

10. *Ibid.*, 213.

11. John D. Morris, “If All Animals Were Created As Plant Eaters, Why Do Some Have Sharp Teeth?” Institute for Creation Research, <http://www.icr.org/article/if-all-animals-were-created-plant-eaters-why-do-so/> (accessed March 18, 2009).

12. Creation.com, <http://creation.com/images/pdfs/cabook/chapter6.pdf> (accessed March 18, 2009).

13. Morris, *Scientific Creationism*, 131.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 251.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, 215.

Morris says that the “Word of God must take first priority,”<sup>18</sup> but Morris fails to recognize that his interpretation of the Genesis account as literal and historical in nature is simply that: an interpretation. Geology, archaeology, paleontology and biology are all scientific fields that have reached the same basic consensus about the age of the earth. It’s old! Much, much older than the age of Morris’s Noachian flood. The lack of cohesion between the many different fields of science and Morris’s “scientific” creationism harms the credibility of his argument.

Morris goes on to argue that “evolution is inconsistent with God’s omnipotence.”<sup>19</sup> No, I argue that Morris simply believes that evolution does not fit with his *interpretation* of who God is. I see God’s omnipotence as power that can work in innumerable ways. If God chose evolution as the means through which the universe came about, that’s his prerogative. Of Morris’s entire theological framework, I take the most issue with his conviction that he has an understanding of God. The logic he expects his creator to have, and the ways he expects the Creator to go about his actions are ways in which a human with Morris’s mindset would work. Morris simply puts God in a box—a box of how Morris himself believes God should work. By ruling out evolution because it doesn’t fit his understanding of God, Morris is in fact limiting God.

### PROBLEMATIC PRESUPPOSITIONS

Morris believes that science is an important project to pursue because of the various topics that arise when one studies science. For example, science studies the causes and effects of the world around us. Morris thinks that when one starts to account for the causes and effects that allow the universe to function, one will ultimately begin to wonder what the first cause was that set the chain into motion.<sup>20</sup> He is right in the sense that when you are looking for causes to the effects that you see, you will eventually get back to the question of how it all began. For instance, it is perfectly natural to wonder *how* the earth came to be. At the same time, it is also natural to ask *why* it came to be, but do the two answers have to be the same? I’ll return to this in more detail.

Morris further confuses the issue between “how” and “why” questions when he discusses why scientific creationism should be taught to all students. He says that scientific creationism should be taught in public school because, “Each person needs more than anything, a sense of his own identity . . . this is impossible without a sense of his origin.”<sup>21</sup> That, however, is an inherently religious statement! The search for *purpose* has throughout history been the predominant reason for religion and philosophy. Purpose, at least in the sense that Morris is talking about, is not necessarily a scientific endeavor. How we got here is a scientific question, why we are here is not. By making it clear that he thinks his interpretation of current scientific facts is essential to understanding who we are as human beings, Morris is actually blending science with religion.

The Institute for Creation Research (ICR), founded by Henry Morris, pursues the goal of reconciling science and the Genesis account. According to the ICR’s website, “Scientists who are creationist repudiate any form of molecules-to-man evolution in their analysis and use of scientific data.”<sup>22</sup> ICR also proclaims that it is their mission to “defend biblical truth with scientific evidence.”<sup>23</sup> My chief concern with these statements is that ICR seems to be looking for ways to make the evidence fit with what they already believe to be true. Scientific creationists are very honest about the fact that they want to defend the Bible by using science, but good science starts with a theory and then tries to disprove it. My concern is that the scientific

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 219.

20. Ibid., 2.

21. Ibid.

22. Institute for Creation Research, <http://www.icr.org/research/> (accessed March 18, 2009).

23. Ibid.

creationists know what they want to believe already, and instead of trying to disprove their theory, which is what good scientists should do, they look only for evidence which supports what they already hold to be true.

In *Scientific Creationism*, Morris presents a very interesting view of evolution, he states that evolution is “1) naturalistic; 2) self-contained; 3) non-purposive; 4) directional; 5) irreversible; 6) universal; and 7) continuing,”<sup>24</sup> while the “process of special creation” is “1) supernaturalistic; 2) externally directed; 3) purposive; and 4) completed.”<sup>25</sup> Morris has summarized both evolution and special creation into points he sees as incompatible. Morris fails to recognize that there are scholars, and Christian ones at that, who believe that evolution is compatible with God, and that evolution does not necessarily entail a “non-purposive” existence. By lumping all evolutionist thinkers into such a narrow category Morris is doing himself, and the scientific creationist movement, a great disservice. Instead of opening the possibility of dialogue, Morris is being both offensive, and inaccurate. There is nothing that prevents evolution from being interpreted from a Christian point of view.

### CONCLUSION

I sincerely believe that Morris has done his research program, and Christianity as a whole, more harm than good. He discredits his own claim of being “scientific” by repeatedly infusing his claims with philosophical and inherently religious statements. And, as I have shown, he begins his research program with an inherently religious worldview. It is also important to keep in mind that if God intentionally created the earth to appear older than it is, that would make God deceitful. I refuse to believe that the God I believe in is not perfect in every way. Religion and science can be reconciled, or at the very least help to inform each other, but a miscalculated mash-up of the two is not the way to go about it. Morris’s insistence on biblical literalism and his use of Genesis as literal history damage his claims of validity, thus hindering Christianity’s credibility in the scientific arena.

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24. Morris, *Scientific Creationism*, 11.

25. *Ibid.*