

A deep space photograph showing a vast field of stars, some bright and some faint, scattered across a dark background. Several prominent galaxies are visible, including a large, bright, irregularly shaped galaxy in the upper right and a smaller, more compact one in the lower left. A bright star in the upper center has a prominent four-pointed diffraction pattern. The overall scene is a rich and detailed representation of the universe.

Science and the Bible
Old Earth Creationism

Goals

- Define the Old Earth Creationist view
- Identify its representatives
- Review the evidence for the view
- Analyze its exegetical support and problems
- Analyze its resolution of theological problems

Rau's Method

- Gerald Rau, *Mapping the Origins Debate* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012)
- Three-part analysis:
 - 1. Background theory (“philosophical axiom”)
 - 2. Inferences
 - *On* the empirical data
 - *From* the empirical data
 - 3. Logical conclusions

Rau's Definition

- Philosophical axiom: “God chooses to reveal himself through the Bible and creation, both of which clearly disclose his existence and identity.”
 - Nature is seen as a record of revelation
 - Romans 1:18-20
 - What about Young Earth Creationism?

Rau's Definition

- Inferences: “We must find the most straightforward interpretations that allow us to harmonize the biblical statement that God created in six days with the empirical evidence that the universe and earth appear to be billions of years old.”
 - Note revelatory status of the “book of nature”
 - Note the acceptance of age

Rau's Definition

- Logical conclusion: “Since God wants his actions to be clear, the earth must indeed be billions of years old, and his work in creation will be clearly discernible as discrete creative acts over time, in the same order as revealed in the Bible.”
- Note:
 - Ancient earth
 - Discrete and discernible creative acts

Specific Claims

- Mainstream science's account of the age of the universe is correct
 - The universe is ~ 13 billion years old
 - The earth is ~ 4.5 billion years old
- Accepts the fossil record
- Thus, life has existed for several billion years
- Death and suffering have always existed, except for humans and only as a consequence of the Fall

Who Holds To It?

- Most conservative Evangelical theologians
 - Millard Erickson
 - Wayne Grudem
 - Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest
- Most conservative Evangelical biblical scholars

The Evidence for an Ancient Universe

- Red shift of light implies an expanding universe
- Differential red shift yields a definite beginning
- The “Big Bang” ~ 13 billion years ago
- Cosmic background radiation
- Creation and distribution of heavy elements

Evidence for an Ancient Earth

- Geological record
 - Sequential formation of geological strata
 - Erosional structures
 - Time-dependent processes
 - E.g. coral formation
- Fossil record
 - Development over time
 - Extinctions

Assessment and Conclusion

- OECs accept this narrative of natural history
- Considered as fact
- Disagree at points
 - Biogenesis
 - Taxonomy
 - Creation of humans
- Controls the historical elements of Genesis 1-3

Exegetical Issues

- Conflicts with the scientific narrative
 - At least 30 (Mortenson)
 - Earth originally inundated
 - Formation of sun and stars on day 4
 - 24 hour days
- Genesis 1-3 are not *strictly* historical

Exegetical Strategies

- Chronological
 - Strictly prosaic (young earth creationists)
 - Gap theory
 - Ideal-day theory
 - Day-age theory
 - Intermittent-day theory
- Logical
 - Framework theory
 - Topical pictures logically arranged
 - Polemical

Implications

- Significant, but secondary, role to evolution
- Humans are evolutionary late-comers
- Billions of years of life before the creation of humans
- Billions of years of death and suffering before the Fall

Theological Problems

- Natural evil
- God's pronouncement that the creation was "good"
- What is a human?
- Was Adam historical?
- Was the Fall historical?
- The meaning of "sin"

Theological Problems

- The extent of the curse:
 - “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Romans 8:20-22
- Implications for redemption

Conclusion

- Old Earth Creationism is the favored view among Evangelical scholars and ID proponents
- Acceptance of the secular narrative requires exegetical and theological accommodations
- Fails to satisfy either extreme