

## **In the beginning**

### **How do we know the origin of the universe and life?**

**Arthur A. Eggert**

Research scientists and confessional Christians propose different answers.

Research scientists and confessional Christians both have firm convictions about how the universe and life began. It is clear, however, that they strongly disagree. Why is this true? To understand their disagreement one must look at the assumptions that lead to their conclusions.

#### **SCIENTIFIC ASSUMPTIONS**

The function of basic science is to create models (theories) that explain how the things that are observed in the world work. For example, why is an apple observed to fall? Scientific models usually include assumptions, equations, logical expressions, and limits of applicability. To build such models scientists use what is called the scientific method. When they observe an event, they weigh, count, and measure whatever appears to be related to the event. After gathering data from several events, they create a model to explain the data. They use the model to predict what will happen in yet untested cases. They observe these cases and refine their model if the observed results are different from those predicted by that model. This cycle is repeated until they conclude their model is good enough for its intended usage.

While each model has its own assumptions associated with it, all scientific observations have three underlying assumptions.

First, scientists assume there are reliable measuring instruments and reference standards available that they can use to make the measurements of events. If rulers or scales cannot be calibrated against unchangeable standards, their measurements cannot be compared.

Second, scientists assume the measuring process does not affect the events being measured. If measuring the speed of a motor can only be done by retarding its motion, one cannot tell how fast the motor is actually going.

Third, and most basic, scientists assume that all activities they observe are solely the result of the interaction of the laws of nature and the inherent properties of matter and energy.

#### **SCIENTIFIC PROBLEMS WHEN EXPLAINING THE ORIGINS OF LIFE**

Scientists have been very successful at explaining many observations made in nature by their models. Their success has produced the great technological advancements that we see. Comparing today's world with the world of 1810 shows astounding

technological progress in almost every area of life. Some scientists, therefore, have assumed that they also can successfully build models to explain the origins of life and of the universe. There certainly are enough fossils, geological strata, mineral and fuel deposits, variations in life-forms, and extraterrestrial objects for them to measure and contemplate. Science, however, is faced with three underlying problems in this effort.

First, the most basic assumption of science says, in effect, "There is no God nor are there other supernatural beings." Suppose a woman is trying to bake ten dozen chocolate chip cookies. Also suppose several hungry teenagers periodically wander into her kitchen and grab some of the cookies. As a consequence, she cannot know how many cookies she will have when she finishes baking. If any of the observations that scientists make are the result of God acting by supernatural means, their models will be unreliable at explaining events. The existence of God renders even the best scientific model only as reliable as God wants it to be. Scientists who are Christian understand this.

Second, science is limited by sample size. If a scientist claims no one can speak Mongolian and finds that the first million people he asks cannot speak it, has he proved his claim? Of course not! Models that have been "proved to be correct" must often be modified or discarded when events occurring under other conditions are observed. No model can be deemed completely accurate unless it is tested under all possible scenarios, that is, by exhaustive analysis. This is usually impossible because of the size and diversity of the universe. The truth of any scientific model is therefore always the prisoner of the next observation.

Third, just because a model is viable, does not mean it is correct. If I see someone eating breakfast in St. Paul and see him in the evening in Chicago, I might theorize that he has flown between the cities. It is a viable model, but he could have driven or taken a bus or train instead.

## **CHRISTIAN ASSUMPTIONS**

The primary concern of Christians is their relationship to God. That relationship is based on their belief in the saving work of Jesus Christ. Yet we cannot know Jesus except through the Scriptures. Therefore, the primary assumption of Christianity is that the Bible is the inerrant, verbally inspired Word of God. It is the standard by which all teachings are judged.

The Bible tells us about the Lord. He is the God who has all the power and all the knowledge that exists. He is present everywhere, and he fills all time. The Bible says he created the universe and organized it during a six-day period, using only his word. He created man in his own image, giving him a physical body and a soul that is not physical. God established the laws of nature. Everything God created was perfect. The Bible also says God cursed the world because man sinned. When man's sinning became worse, God destroyed most living creatures through a universal flood. He later

confused man's language when man became arrogant. During these and other times, God intervened in the world outside the laws of nature, using only his word to effect change.

The Bible does not tell us many things about our world. For example, did God create fossil fuels under the earth's crust in the first six days? If God did not create them in those first six days, did he use his almighty word or the laws of nature to form them? Did he create all the land masses and rock strata initially? Or did he change the earth later? Did all those fossilized animals really live? Or did the Lord place them about like a director puts props on the stage for the purposes of the play? The Bible doesn't answer these and numerous other questions. Concerning the world's origins, just as with other biblical teachings, we dare say no more and no less than what the Bible says.

Can any scientific approach help us understand how God created the world? No. When God acts through his word, as he did in the early history of the world, he violates the basic assumption of science. That makes the scientific method useless. Why is this so? The basic assumption specifically forces the exclusion of any supernatural involvement from scientific models. How can anyone know all the actions that God performed supernaturally so as to exclude them? In fact, trying to use scientific modeling to explain or to justify creation is a trap. Models devised by creationists are subject to the same three underlying problems mentioned previously that evolutionists face. It is foolish to jump off the solid rock of biblical revelation to do battle in the quagmire of scientific uncertainty.

The writer to the Hebrews says "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (11:3). We believe that the Lord made the world in six days because the Bible says so and for no other reason.

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