

In the Beginning, God Created

Genesis 1: 1 – 2ⁱ

What are you doing in the world?

Somewhere in the original version of the ALPHA course, Nicki Gumbel told the story of a foreign national who was working as a nanny in the United Kingdom, and, as he told the story, there was a day when she found one of her charges engaged in mischief of some sort. Since English was not her first language, while she meant to say, “What in the world are you doing?” what came out was, “What are you doing in the world?” The first question is rhetorical. She probably didn’t really need to ask because she could see with her own eyes the nature of what the child was doing.

The second question—the question she actually asked—is what some have referred to as a first order question; the kind of philosophical question it seems that few bother to ask—at least out loud—and to which even fewer are inclined to offer an answer. It is one of the questions—perhaps the first question—that we need to address in understanding the practical implications of what some have called our “world view”.

“What, then, is this thing called a world view that is so important to all of us...?”ⁱⁱ

wrote James Sire in his book, The Universe Next Door.

Essentially this: A world view is a set of presuppositions (or assumptions) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously) about the basic makeup of our world.ⁱⁱⁱ

And, as Francis Schaeffer had written some years before:

The first [area of philosophical thought] is the area of metaphysics, of “being.” This is the area of what is—the problem of existence. This includes the existence of man, but we must realize that the existence of man is no greater problem as such than is the fact that anything exists at all.

Schaeffer went on:

No one has said it better than Jean-Paul Sartre, who has said that the basic philosophical question is that something is there rather than nothing is there. Nothing that is worth calling a philosophy can sidestep the question of the fact that things do exist and that they exist in their present form and complexity. This is what we define, then, as the problem of metaphysics, the existence of being.^{iv}

In other words, “What are you doing in the world?” or, more precisely, “Why is there even a world for you to be doing whatever you are doing in it?” In addressing this question, it’s fair to say that there are essentially three radically different answers.

What if we cannot know?

The first is that we simply cannot know. We simply exist as evidenced by the realities of pleasure and pain, and even the fact that if we are so inclined, then we can find a stump or a stool and sit down to contemplate the meaning of our existence, but if we truly cannot know,

then existence per se is not good, bad, or indifferent. It simply is. In the words of one pundit, “Nothin’ matters, and what if it did?”^v Philosophically, this is called nihilism:

...the negation of everything—knowledge, ethics, beauty, reality. In nihilism no statement has validity; nothing has meaning. Everything is gratuitous, contingent.^{vi}

Of course, if you really believed this, then you probably wouldn’t be here. What would be the point? Rather, “Let us eat, drink and be merry (or, not). Either way, “tomorrow we die,”^{vii} so, what difference does it make?

Creation and Evolution

But there are two other possibilities (and some variation within each). Both creation and evolution purport to offer an answer as well, and these two alternatives stand in stark contrast. Either,

³ ...the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. Hebrews 11:3 (NKJV) viii

or, there is no God, and there must be some other explanation. Either,

We believe that the Father created heaven and earth and all other creatures from nothing, when it seemed good to him, by his Word—that is to say, by his Son.

and,

He has given all creatures their being, form, and appearance, and their various functions **for serving their Creator...**^{ix}

or we need another answer to the question, “What are we doing in the world?”

Why is anything here?

Of course, the alternative to creation would be some form of evolution, and just within the space of my lifetime there have been too many iterations of that theory to enumerate this morning. It may have started with the Darwinian concepts of “natural selection” and “the survival of the fittest,” but those theories have been soundly debunked, even by people who are not willing to admit the existence of God as an alternative.

Actually, to call them theories is to give them more credit than they deserve. I will freely confess that I am not a “scientist,” except maybe in the same sense that everyone is a “scientist” just like everyone is a “theologian,” regardless, I do believe that words have meaning, and according to Merriam-Webster

A theory is a principle formed **to explain the things already shown in data.**^x

So, the problem with any “theory” of origins is that by definition, the origin of the universe cannot be observed and it cannot be repeated. In that sense, there isn’t any real data to be had, and the definition of hypothesis is probably a better fit, that is:

...an assumption made before any research has been done. It is formed so that it can

be tested to see if it might be true.^{xi}

For example, the so-called “big bang” theory (not to be confused with the situation comedy, of course). According to the website nasa.gov:

Astronomers combine mathematical models with observations to develop workable theories of how the Universe came to be. The mathematical underpinnings of the Big Bang theory include Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity along with standard theories of fundamental particles.^{xii}

Space.com is more forthcoming when it says,

The Big Bang Theory **is our best guess** about how the universe began...the leading explanation for how the universe began. Simply put, it says the universe as we know it started with an infinitely hot and dense single point that inflated and stretched — first at unimaginable speeds, and then at a more measurable rate — over the next 13.8 billion years to the still-expanding cosmos that we know today.^{xiii}

But even though the definition of this untested and un-testable hypothesis states, “The Big Bang Theory is the leading explanation for how the universe began...” it’s really nothing of the kind. All we have to do is ask the simple question, “Where did the matter and energy contained in that “infinitely hot and dense single point” come from?”

One possible answer is that it came from the collapse of a previous universe; that before the universe in which we live there was another that ended in a cataclysmic collapse, and before that, another, and so on, and so on, ad infinitum. Matter and Energy are eternal, and the wheel just keeps turning all by itself, and once in a while it spins out some beings who are just self aware enough to wonder why. And we’re back to Nihilism. We don’t know. We truly cannot know. What is, just is, and whatever is, is right.

In her song, “Woodstock,” Joni Mitchell wrote,

We are stardust (billion year old carbon), we are golden (caught in the devil's bargain), and we've got to get ourselves back to the garden...^{xiv}

But according to the evolutionary hypothesis, the carbon from which we are made is way more than a billion years old and there is no garden to get back to, just that “infinitely hot and dense single point” which was the beginning of all things on this time around the wheel. According to the evolutionary hypothesis, we are nothing more than animated carbon on our way to the compost heap, so, nothing matters, and what if it did?

In the Beginning, God Created

Of course, to be fair we have to admit that from a scientific standpoint, any “theory” of creation would have the same limitations, because creation, as an explanation of origins, also cannot be observed or repeated, not by us, anyway. But therein lies the difference. Creation requires a creator, and that Creator would be outside and entirely distinct from the creation, so, if He was willing, as the One who not only observed but also caused the beginning of all things, then He could also communicate to His creation so that we could truly know Him, and

truly know the purpose for which He created not only us, but all things. This is in fact what has happened, and that revelation—that communication—begins with the words:

¹ In the beginning, God created...

and since there is no Hebrew word for “universe” as such, we are told that He created,

...the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1 (ESV)

and this fact that God created all things is fundamental to our understanding of scripture and of our faith. It is the first truth claim put forward in Scripture, and as such it is also first in our confession.

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

And not only that, we also believe

in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father.

But wait, there's more.

Through him...

(that is, through the Lord Jesus Christ),

...all things were made.^{xv}

And we knew that,

¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. Colossians 1:16 (ESV)

As we have seen in the gospel of John:

³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. John 1:3 (ESV)

Of course, the creed also says,

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.^{xvi}

The “Spirit of God” who, in Genesis 1, verse 2

² ...was hovering over the face of the waters. Genesis 1:2 (ESV)

So, when we read,

¹ In the beginning, God created... Genesis 1:1 (ESV)

we are reading about the work of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Creation is the work of the Trinity, and as such, it is the revelation of God Himself. Romans 1, verses 19

and 20 tells us:

¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made... Romans 1:19–20 (ESV)

We read it in the call to worship last Lord's Day.

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. ² Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Psalm 19:1–3 (NKJV)

By Faith We Understand

I suppose the question that remains for the creationist (and if you are a Christian, then you are a creationist, one way or another), is, “If the heavens declare the glory of God, and there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard, then why do so many people look at the world and see something so completely different—something that leads eventually and inevitably to despair?” The answer is... if the Lord is willing, then we'll look at that in more detail next Sunday. For now, we turn to Hebrews, chapters 10 and 11. Chapter 10, beginning in verse 37:

³⁷ For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; ³⁸ **but my righteous one shall live by faith**, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” ³⁹ **But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.** Hebrews 10:37–39 (ESV)

So, this is what some would call a “salvation part.” Many of you know my opinion of that, but if we allow the distinction at all, then Hebrews 10 is clearly talking about those who “have faith” to the preserving, or saving, of their souls. We are clearly speaking of saving faith here, but we're not speaking in a vacuum. We are not saying that a person can only be saved by faith, and then leaving it to speculation as to definition of saving faith. There is no chapter break in the Greek manuscripts, so, having said that we are of those who have faith and preserve their souls, the Author immediately proceeds to Hebrews 11, verses 1 and 2:

¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation. Hebrews 11:1–2 (ESV)

And what does that look like? Verse 3:

³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. Hebrews 11:3 (ESV)

The author will then go on to walk us through the entirety of Old Covenant history, showing us what it means when we believe that God is the source and support of all things. I wish we had time to walk through this together, but we don't, so you'll have to read it at home. For now, notice that it begins with an understanding “that the universe was created by the word of

God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible,” and it leads us all the way through chapter 11 to chapter 12, verses 1 and 2:

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely,

(let us repent; let us acknowledge that we were made for God)

and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

(let us persevere in the obedience of faith)

² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV)

See, creation and salvation are not two separate issues. They are inextricably entwined. If we are nothing more than billion year old carbon on the way to the compost heap, then we really and truly don't need a savior, and it's a good thing, because everything and everyone else is just billion year old carbon too, and there is no savior to be had. But, if God, the Father almighty, is the maker of all things visible and invisible through the Word, His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who is Himself the Lord and giver of life, then we are so much more than billion year old carbon, we are, in fact, cosmic rebels, and there is a garden, but we can't get ourselves back there. We need a savior, and not just a savior, the Savior, Jesus Christ, “the founder and perfecter of our faith.”

We are looking at creation in this series, but more importantly than that, we are looking at the Creator. As we read from the book of the prophet Isaiah a little earlier.

¹⁸ For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): “I am the LORD, and there is no other.

¹⁹ I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, ‘Seek me in vain.’ I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right.

²⁰ “Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, you survivors of the nations! They have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idols, and keep on praying to a god that cannot save.

²¹ Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? **And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior;** there is none besides me.

²² **“Turn to me and be saved,** all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

May the Holy Spirit fill us, and give us grace to turn to Him and be saved, through faith in our Creator, Redeemer, and Savior, even the Lord Jesus Christ,

the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the

cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1–2
(ESV)

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- i All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).
- ii James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-varsity Press, 1976), 16.
- iii Ibid, 17.
- iv Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972, 2001) 1.
- v John Mellencamp, *Nothin' Matters and What If It Did?* (Polygram Records), 1980.
- vi Sire, *The Universe*, 77
- vii Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:32.
- viii The New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Heb 11:3.
- ix Christian Reformed Church, "The Belgic Confession, Article 12" in, *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1988) 88.
- x "This is the Difference Between a Hypothesis and a Theory," at, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/difference-between-hypothesis-and-theory-usage>.
- xi Ibid.
- xii <https://science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/focus-areas/what-powered-the-big-bang>
- xiii <https://www.space.com/25126-big-bang-theory.html>
- xiv Joni Mitchell, "Woodstock", <https://jonimitchell.com/music/song.cfm?id=75>
- xv Christian Reformed Church, "Nicene Creed", in *Ecumenical Creeds*, 8.
- xvi Ibid.