

# Reasoning about Evolution of Life and Genesis 1 as Poetry

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## Introduction

When Rees (1999) examined how the universe operated following the Big Bang, he discovered how well-tuned the universe is in terms of natural laws. That is, there are just six numbers whose values are so precise that gravity and electromagnetic forces on micro-dimensions in the atomic scale and the macro-dimensions in the scale of the universe determine that we would not be here if they were off by extremely tiny amounts. On that basis, it makes no sense that these same numbers do not apply to evolution of life. If the universe that was created during the Big Bang is 13.7 billion years old (with an uncertainty of only 200 million years) and that if it has been evolving to make elements heavier than helium in stars and galaxies since its beginning time, these numbers must also apply to how atoms of hydrogen, oxygen, carbon, nitrogen, and sulfur that were produced by star evolution later in the Big Bang process. Such evolution can then occur and interact in the DNA molecules of life during the creation of life and subsequent mutations. Beginning with the first single bacterial cells of life,

these mutations must have allowed life to evolve to multicellular life and then to sponges followed by animal life in the Ediacaran creatures and on into the so-called Cambrian explosion that led to trilobites, clams, snails, brachiopods, etc., that then led to fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals (including humans). Why would a Creator of such natural laws abandon them to create life sometime between 6,000 and 10,000 years ago by magical (miraculous) instantaneous creation of life in the midst of Noah's Flood (lasting one year) to form 50 billion species of life that occur in the fossil record — most of which went extinct during that supposed short period of one year?

## **A different viewpoint**

Rather than translating Genesis 1 with a modern scientific view to fit 20<sup>th</sup> century knowledge, perhaps we should pay attention to what Rabbi Geoffrey A. Mitelman says about how Genesis 1 should be translated in terms of the Hebrew language that was written in biblical times. Rabbi Mitelman is the Founding Director of Sinai and Synapses, an organization that bridges the scientific and religious worlds. On October 20, 2021, he wrote a short article titled: “Genesis is not a science textbook.” In this article he says the following in regard to this title.

*“That may seem like an obvious statement, but from evangelical Christians to liberal Jews to staunch atheists, people grapple with how to reconcile the opening chapters of Genesis 1 with ideas like Big Bang cosmology and the theory of evolution. ...Yet that way of reading Genesis completely misses the point — from both a scientific and a religious perspective.*

*Genesis is not supposed to be a scientific treatise. First, science as we know it today didn't arise until the 1500 and 1600s, and didn't fully come to fruition until the ideas of peer review, data analysis, and instrumentation emerged in the 1900s and 2000s. Those tools simply didn't exist when Genesis was written.*

*But more importantly, the opening verses of Genesis are clearly written to be poetry – indicated by the repeating phrases of “And God said,” “and God saw it was good,” “and there was evening, and there was morning.” We don't read poetry through the lens of scientific analysis; we read it to try to discern why those words were written instead of others. As author (and my cousin) Matthew Zapruder said in an interview on his “Why Poetry?”:*

*...[t]o read poetry is to look for the transcendence poetry can give, the way it can bring us out of ordinary experience, into different levels of understanding, or more exciting, even magical realms. But in order for that to happen, a reader has to at first be completely attentive to the words on the page, and read at least at first in the same way we would a piece of prose or any writing. Otherwise, there can be no meaningful encounter with a poem.*

*...[Yet t]here's also something else, which is that poems have an inherent strangeness to them, both in their surfaces and forms (the way they look on the page: line breaks, and sometimes even more aggressive oddities), as well as strangeness of their movements, which are often unexpected, not linear, associative, leaping. One of the main purposes of the book was to show how and why the formal qualities of poetry are not merely decorative accessories to meaning, but themselves the source of meaning.*

*Reading Genesis in this way means that we shouldn't read it like a peer-reviewed journal on astrophysics or biology. We look at the word choices, the phrasing, the evocations, the allusions, and the questions they raise.*

*As but one example, we can probe why each day ends with the phrase “va’y’hi erev, va’y’hi voker” – “there was evening, there was morning.” We would expect that it would go, “there was morning, there was evening,” since our daily rhythm begins when we wake up and ends when we go to sleep. So, why is the order reversed?*

*The word choices here matter – it doesn’t say, “there was night and day,” or “there was darkness and light,” Yes, those two words come up on the first day of Creation, but those words could easily have been swapped out, saying, for example, “There was night, there was day.” Why “evening,” erev, and “morning,” voker?*

*Well, the word erev (evening”) is also used to mean “chaos” (as in the phrase erev rav, a “mixed multitude,” in Exodus 12:38). And the word voker (“morning”) may be connected to words related to either “split” or “investigate,” as in “putting things in order.” With the repetition of the words va’y’hi erev, va’y’hi voker, “There was evening, there was morning,” the story rhythmically evokes an idea of chaos, then order, at the end of each day of creation.*

*But the universe’s natural tendency to go from order to chaos! Scientists know that from the second law of thermodynamics, but we can also see it our own lives – laundry is going to pile up, not clean itself. We get sicker as we age, not healthier. When food is left out, it rots rather than getting fresher. The only way to combat that tendency is to invest time and energy in correcting for it – that’s why we sort the laundry, go to the doctor and have a refrigerator. That’s one of the key messages from the opening chapters of Genesis: if we do nothing, the world will remain tohu va’vohu, “wild and waste.” God brings order out of chaos, and if we see ourselves as created in the image of God, that is our job, as well.*

*If we look at Genesis as poetry, not science, then we don’t need to do mental gymnastics to fit the square peg of Genesis 1 into the round hole of Big Bang cosmology. Instead, its style reminds us that the*

*universe is naturally chaotic and unpredictable – but we, like God, can strive to bring a little more order in our lives. Even if Genesis is not a science textbook, it can still teach us lessons.”*

## **Conclusion**

Because of the preciseness of six numbers that occur in the way the universe operates; it seems very plausible that there is an intelligent designer who created the universe. But this intelligent designer more likely used these numbers in mutational processes to evolve life rather than to do the creation of life nearly instantaneously over and over again to create 50 billion species found in the fossil record as proposed by the leadership in the **Discovery Institute** or by the leaderships of **Genesis Apologetics, Institute for Creation Research, Christian Ministries International, and Answers in Genesis** during the one-year Noah’s flood. Furthermore, understanding Genesis 1 as poetry is better than trying to make it fit modern 20<sup>th</sup> century science.

## **Reference**

Rees, M., 1999, Just Six Numbers: The Deep Forces that Shape the Universe, Basic Books, 195 p.