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# The Jewish View of Creationism

*"When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?" --John Maynard Keynes*

Few adjectives produce more of an emotional charge than "fundamentalist." It conjures up images of unhinged radical mobs in neo-Klan attire (indiscriminately) firing their AK-47's in the air, or of barefoot ignoramuses clutching their Bibles and getting excited to head off to the town lynchin'. Regrettably, there are far too many folks -- both inside and outside the religious camps -- with a sub-par comprehension of the actual fundamentals of religious thought and practice. This lack of knowledge tends to feed the stereotypes that the non-religious world perceives. Within the fundamentalist/secularist battle that has been flaring across the world stage for the last 200 plus years, there is perhaps no greater flash point than that of creationism, as was recently evidenced in the 27,000 comments made in [a recent HuffPost piece on the topic](#).

To the secularist, the notion that we should flippantly toss aside hundreds of years of scientific investigation unequivocally demonstrating an extremely old universe simply because some ancient tome says it was created less than 6,000 years ago is nothing short of idiocy. What I hope to demonstrate is that Judaism's understanding of this matter (and many others) is significantly more nuanced, complex and surprising than what is currently believed to be the standard religious gloss on the subject. The truth of the matter is that Judaism is frequently (and unfairly) lumped together with other religious systems that actually have vastly different ways of looking at things.

One thousand years ago, the great Jewish philosopher and physician, Moses Maimonides, wrote that there is no contradiction between Torah and science and that if one is perceived, then there was a misapprehension of the science or the Torah. Two centuries later, Rabbi Isaac of Akko, a disciple of the great Moses Ben Nachman (Nachmanides) and one of the foremost Kabbalists of his generation, wrote some surprising commentary regarding the age of the universe. In his work "the Trove of Life," he explains that the Earth was actually 42,000 years old when Adam was created and that these years are "divine" years and should not be thought of as 365 regular days. Rather, a divine year is 1,000 times longer or 365,250 years. He based this on a verse in Psalm 90 that says "1,000 years in your eyes is like a day gone by." Do the math. According to Rabbi Isaac, the universe is 42,000 x 365,250, or 15,340,500,000 years old. This figure is squarely within the ballpark of where modern cosmology places the age of the universe. How did he know this? And how did he possess the temerity to conclude it in the midst of the Dark Ages? Perhaps our fundamentalism is not quite as primitive as is supposed.

Dr. Gerald Schroeder, an Ph.D. in physics from MIT, has spent the last 35 years investigating the confluence of science and Torah and has a novel, yet compelling, approach. Starting with Einstein's discovery of the relativity of time, he explains how great changes in gravity or velocity produce measurable changes in the flow of time. He demonstrates that on an imaginary planet so massive, with a force of gravity so great, that its time was slowed by a

factor of 350,000, a visitor would live out three minutes of normal-feeling time while concurrently, the folks back home would have lived out an entire two years. Looking from Earth, the actions of the "big planet" visitor would appear to be unfolding extremely slowly, and vice versa from the other vantage point. Big Bang theory posits that the entire universe at its inception was but a minuscule speck. This notion was supported and recorded by Nachmanides in the 13th Century when he explained that the universe was originally condensed into the size of a mustard seed. As the universe expanded (again, a notion supported by both science and Torah), time expanded with it so that every time it doubled in size, time would pass at half its original rate. Following this logic, Dr. Schroeder demonstrates that it is perfectly conceivable that from the universe's perspective, six 24-hour periods had passed and concurrently the dilated outer reaches of that space would view it as if 15 billion years had elapsed. Have a look at his book *The Science of God* for the full treatment, including charts outlining the exact duration of each Biblical day.

I understand that it will be irresistible for some to label this approach as "apologetics," "reverse engineering" or worse. Bear in mind that true intellectualism requires us to remain open to new ideas that don't fit neatly into our current worldview. Most people are so wholly invested in their way of thinking that no amount of evidence would suffice to disavow them of it. Nonetheless, there are still some brave souls out there with the courage to take a second look. These ideas are old, based on the writing of well known and established Jewish scholars, who in turn learned them from more ancient sources. These sources depict an origin of the universe that is clearly, and uncannily, similar to that of modern cosmology and quite unlike the views of some "fundamentalist" religions out there. And when these sources have in the past conflicted with the cosmological thinking of the time, it is often the science that has evolved to an understanding closer to that of the religious. The Big Bang Theory, for example, positing that the universe is expanding infinitely from a single point, was quite controversial. Since the 1960s, that theory has been largely accepted as scientific fact.

That should give us pause. Science and religion have different functions in our lives, but they are not necessarily and always in opposition. Do your own research. If it's true, then integrity demands a re-evaluation of the value (of at least one) fundamentalist religious system.