

## Creationism\* or evolution: is there a valid distinction?

*Pressure to impose extreme philosophies seems to be increasing throughout the world, including in the so-called liberal democracies. I raised one example with Charles and he likened it to another form of extremism that I had hardly recognised as such.*

‘Charles, do you not think that those in America who advocate teaching creationism in primary schools are arrogant in the extreme?’

‘Yes, if the approach is absolute,’ *he replied, adding, ‘but no more so than those who advocate the teaching of absolute Darwinism in this country! One is fundamentalist Christianity and the other fundamentalist pantheism, much as the protagonists might not recognise or like the label.’*

‘But surely the first requires imposing one’s faith on others and the second does not?’

‘The difference is less than you suggest, Coe! If knowledge implies proof and belief acceptance of the unprovable then the fundamentalists in both camps are depending on belief, or faith, and not on knowledge.’

*He hesitated so I encouraged him: ‘Go on, Charles!’*

‘Both face questions unanswerable in their disparate but narrow views of reality. The atheist has to address St Thomas Aquinas’ argument of first cause. St Thomas presented cause as proof of the existence of God, God himself being the first cause.’

‘Even if the best brains are unable to refute an argument, might it not still be false?’

‘Yes, but the corollary is also true, it might be valid. Having said that I do accept at the purely physical level it could be that agnosticism is the only rational approach.’

‘But I thought you were a Christian, Charles!’

‘I am, but I accept the metaphysical which allows faith,’ *he responded.*

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\* Creationism: the belief that the universe and living organisms originated from specific acts of divine creation. *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 10th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

*I tried a different tack.* ‘Many scientists argue that the mechanisms that they observe, for example evolution, are so beautiful that they are sufficient in themselves to negate the need for a god.’

‘Is that not pantheism? This holds that creation and creator are one and the same, which is in effect their position: a position that many of them appear to find emotionally as well as intellectually satisfying. Further, most monotheistic approaches have a pantheistic element in suggesting that we see God in his creation and its beauty. So the two views may not be as different as the protagonists might wish. Both accept the concept of beauty which surely is metaphysical!’

*I turned to the creationists.* ‘What are the major problems for the other side?’

‘How does God who is outside this world intervene?’

‘Heaven only knows!’

‘An appropriate response, Coe! But, once again, just because you cannot conceive how it happens, it does not mean it does not happen. I also have a major problem of conception for the materialists. What is the final step between the underlying brain mechanisms and the apparently abstract consciousness?’

‘But it might be at an entirely material level despite your, and indeed my, difficulties in seeing how! I may be more sceptical than you, but sometimes the outcome of organic disease, good or bad, seems to depend so much more on the patient’s morale than the severity of the illness that a physical explanation is insufficient.’

‘Agreed, Coe! Not only does state of mind influence outcome, but throughout the ages there has always been a close association between the spiritual and healing.’

‘Yes, this was recently recognised in the citation for the physician-priest, the Abbot of Ampleforth, on his admission as a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians.’

‘A holistic approach to healing implies that the soul in its widest possible meaning must be involved in

*Clin Med*  
2006;6:629–30

restoration of health. That is why I cannot sympathise with blind support for orthodox medicine to the exclusion of any alternative approach. If it works, it works!

'Yes, so long as pseudo-scientific explanations are avoided and the orthodox approach is not denied. Both are potentially dangerous!'

'I think that we are agreed on that,' *Charles replied, adding*, 'But to suggest the success can only come from the scientific approach to the absolute exclusion of all others is a further example of a false dichotomy!'

*He returned to the main thread.* 'One side sees all as material and the other accepts the metaphysical. Neither side can prove its own case or disprove the other's within its own framework. What is clear is that creation and evolution are not incompatible concepts, and to deny one at the expense of the other is fundamentalist dogma!'

'And your own view, Charles?'

'My heart and soul tell me that there is a God, but strictly rationally I must be an agnostic. Although there can be no proof, using both approaches my intellect deducts with reasonable confidence that there is more to existence than the strictly material world. I would suggest that God has chosen to allow his creation to evolve with only the lightest of hands on the tiller.'

'I may tend more towards the materialistic view than you, but I can see that those who hold that it be difficult, if not impossible, for a theist to be a good scientist not only miss the point but are also arrogant in the extreme.'

'And in the context of healing, the protagonists of alternative approaches should accept the need for objectivity to demonstrate success, but should not be expected to explain it as materialists or necessarily within the bounds of material science.'

*A fair comment with parallel logic, I thought.*

*Coemgenus*