

# Historical vs. Operational Science: Why Knowing the Difference Between the Two Matters

by Warren Krug

One of the most talked-about events in the field of religion in 2014 must have been the creation-evolution debate on February 4 between TV personality, Bill "The Science Guy" Nye, and Answers in Genesis CEO Ken Ham. AiG estimates at least three million people saw the debate live via the Internet and millions more later watched an archived version of the event.<sup>1</sup>

Of the many topics discussed during the debate, one that especially drew the attention of some viewers, was Ham's discussion of the difference between two kinds of science. One of these two types of science is known as Historical or Origins science. The other has been called Operational, Observational or Experimental science.

A Catholic priest by the name of the Rev. Patrick Sloneke, who witnessed the event, expressed his opinion that Ham won the debate "hands down" because of this issue. While denying that he is a creationist, Sloneke said Ham scored points by showing that evolutionists, like creationists, depend upon interpretations and have their own brand of faith.<sup>2</sup>

So, what is the difference between Historical science and Operational science and why is understanding these terms important?

A secular website, Rationalwiki, understands Historical science as "a term used to describe sciences in which data is provided primarily from past events and for which there is usually no direct experimental data, such as cosmology, astronomy, astrophysics, geology, paleontology and archaeology."<sup>3</sup> Because Historical science is involved in investigations of such topics as evolution and abiogenesis, it also has been called Origins science by creationists.

In defining Operational science, Rationalwiki quotes Answers in Genesis.<sup>4</sup> Operational science, AiG says, "deals with testing and verifying ideas in the present and leads to the production of useful products like computers, cars, and satellites." Because Operational science involves experiments and observations, creationists also refer to it as Experimental science (a term evolutionists also use) or Observational science.

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1 "Over 3 Million Tuned In Live for Historic Bill Nye and Ken Ham Evolution/Creation Debate," Answers in Genesis [February 5, 2014], <https://answersingenesis.org/creation-vs-evolution/over-3-million-tuned-in-live-for-historic-bill-nye-and-ken-ham-evolutioncreation-debate/>.

2. Warren Krug, "Who Won the Debate? Catholic Priest Says Ham," LSI Blog [February 21, 2014], <http://lsiblog.blogspot.com/2014/02/who-won-debate-catholic-priest-says-ham.html>.

3. "Historical and operational science," RationalWiki [November 12, 2014], [http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Historical\\_and\\_operational\\_science](http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Historical_and_operational_science)

4. Roger Patterson, *Evolution Exposed: Biology*, [Petersburg, Kentucky: Answers in Genesis, 2006].

A. Peter Galling in an article on the Answers in Genesis website, displays a table showing some differences between the two types of science.<sup>5</sup>

	Operations science	Origins science
Based on:	The senses (assuming they are reliable)	Assumptions about the past
Uses:	Experiments	Extrapolation
Deals with:	The present	The past
Results in:	Repeatable conclusions, technology	Unrepeatable stories about the past

Rationalwiki slams Operational science as being merely a creationist invention (the name apparently is) while claiming that Historical science has been misinterpreted by creationists. Yet, it is short on providing specific reasons for taking this position. This secular website does quote author Michael Shermer (*Why People Believe Weird Things*) as writing:

Science does deal with past phenomena, particularly in historical sciences such as cosmology, geology, paleontology, paleoanthropology, and archeology. There are experimental sciences and historical sciences. They use different methodologies but are equally able to track causality. Evolutionary biology is a valid and legitimate historical science.

Thus, here is an admission that Historical science and Experimental or Operational science use different methods, but the suggestion is made that they are equally able to arrive at the facts. But is that true?

A paper published in 2002 on a Georgia Southern University website says:

Science has many limitations, but probably its worst shortcoming involves history. For example, if scientists did not know about the Battle of Waterloo, a turning point in history, what could they tell us? If we showed them the battleground, they could dig up bones, teeth, spent bullets, some corroded weapons, and other miscellaneous items to analyze. But they could not tell us much about the battle itself. They could only guess at the most important thing: who won it. ...

These examples show just how poorly science handles history. The beginning of life and the origin of living things are historical events. They are not happening now and scientists cannot observe them. We have no time machine to ascertain what really occurred. Yet we find evolutionists claiming to have the correct insights into these important historical events. Many assert that we came from chemicals and evolved from a common ancestor. Are these assertions based on science, or a naturalistic worldview?<sup>6</sup>

Yet, Historical science need not be objectionable. Creationist scientists do Historical science when they theorize about the Flood or engage in archaeology. It is evolutionist Historical science to which Bible believers must object because it contradicts the Bible.

5. A Peter Galling, "Do Creationists *Reject* Science?" Answers in Genesis [February 4, 2008], <https://answersingenesis.org/what-is-science/do-creationists-reject-science/>

6. Emerson Thomas McMullen, editor, "No Evidence For Evolution: Scientists' Research and Darwinism," Georgia Southern University [2002], <https://sites.google.com/a/georgiasouthern.edu/etmcmull/no-evidence-for-evolution-scientists-research-and-darwinism>

Evolutionist Historical science has given us the Big Bang theory, an alleged event in which nature supposedly created something out of nothing without benefit of the natural laws needed to make such a happening even remotely possible and also an alleged event which the most brilliant scientists have not been able to duplicate in their laboratories.

Evolutionist Historical science has given us abiogenesis, the imagined creation of life out of inanimate matter, a phenomenon which the most intelligent scientists have not yet been able to accomplish in their labs.

Evolutionist Historical science has given us macro-evolution, the idea that single-celled organisms developed over time into humans, a feat which appears to contradict the principles of genetics and which does not really find support in the fossil record, a record which provides not a single example of a series of fossils showing one animal slowly changing into a different one.

Evolutionist Historical science has given us the radiometric dating systems which have suggested the Earth is billions of years old but which depend heavily on assumptions that cannot be tested and which also are contradicted by other dating systems, such as the slowing of the Earth's rotation and the amount of salt in the oceans.

When one considers the major accomplishments by scientists today, Historical science seems to play little if any role. What do medical researchers, rocket scientists, automobile engineers, nutritionists etc. need to know about radiometric dating, abiogenesis, macroevolution or the Big Bang when it comes to new breakthroughs in their fields? And only Operational science and not Historical science can make full use of the acclaimed scientific method.<sup>7</sup>

So, should we just declare evolutionary Historical science to be irrelevant and ignore the whole subject? We might like to, but we can't. Evolutionary Historical science is proving to be a real threat to the faith of many Christians who are taken in by the misleading statements of leading evolutionists and their disciples. If evolution is factual, that poses a problem for understanding what Genesis means by the repeated phrase: "according to their kinds." If the world is billions of years old, that poses a problem when it comes to understanding biblical history and its testimony regarding the first sin and promise of a Savior. If we and the universe have arrived here purely by natural means, why do we need God?

But we absolutely do need God. He is the only answer to why we or anything exists. He alone has provided us the means by which we can live in eternity. He has given us His Son, Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and opened the door to heaven through faith in Him. And we can be thankful for the work of creation scientists who have shown us how to understand the difference between the science which threatens our faith and the science which doesn't.

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<sup>7</sup> . Anne Marie Helmenstine, "Scientific Method Steps," About Education [June 23, 2014], <http://chemistry.about.com/od/lecturenotes13/a/sciencemethod.htm>