

Creation

Creation is the view that everything but God was brought into existence by God, who alone has always existed. This is in contrast with various alternative views: (1) that the cosmos has always been and there are no Gods at all (atheism); (2) that the cosmos is itself God (pantheism); (3) that the cosmos is God=s Abody@ while God is its Aspirit@ (panentheism); and (4) that the cosmos is merely something shaped by God or the gods, but that its matter has always existed (dualism; various forms of polytheism).

Creation is the teaching of the Bible and of traditional Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Here we sketch the teaching given in the Old and New Testaments as understood by evangelical and fundamental Christians. Their views on how to relate the idea of creation to scientific data range over a spectrum, which may be subdivided into young-earth (or recent) creation, old earth (or progressive) creation, and theistic evolution (or fully-gifted creation). See *Creationism*.

At its most basic level, the act of creation is the bringing into existence of that which did not previously exist. In this sense creation is spoken of as *ex nihilo* (Latin: from nothing). The creation account in Genesis seems to apply this idea to the universe as a whole (heaven and earth), and perhaps to life and to the human spirit, but not B for example B to the human body. The creation of other spirit beings (angels, etc.) is mentioned in the Bible but not narrated in Genesis; perhaps these belong to another, earlier created order. God=s other creative actions in Genesis may alternatively have been *ex nihilo* creation, or his miraculous working with existing materials, or his non-miraculous (providential) guidance of natural processes. See *Creationism*. Whether time and space were also created with the cosmos has been debated.

God=s creation of the cosmos was a free, personal action. He was not constrained by any logical necessity nor by need for companionship. Christians would see God as having always enjoyed such companionship because of the three-person nature of his being. See *Trinity*. Genesis tells us that God created all things by means of his Word B his spoken command. Christians understand this Word (from the opening verses of John=s Gospel) to be Jesus before he became a human. We learn from Genesis that God=s Spirit hovers over the waters at creation. Apparently the Holy Spirit works within the created order to carry out God=s purposes. God is thus both within and beyond his creation (immanent and transcendent).

God=s purpose in creating was to Adeclare his glory,@ i.e., to demonstrate his character B wisdom, goodness, power, justice, compassion, etc. B to the personal beings he would create, and to share these and other good things with them.

The creation is initially good, in fact Avery good.@ But God also created free, moral beings who could choose either to trust and obey him, or else to doubt and reject him. The Bible=s main plot line tells what happened as a result of the disobedience of the first humans, and how God subsequently reached out to rescue people from the consequences of their own and of others= rebellion against him. The great dilemma of how God can be both a just judge and yet merciful to those who deserve punishment is solved when God himself suffers their punishment and provides their righteousness by becoming a created human in Jesus of Nazareth, living a life

of perfect obedience, and dying a criminal's death nailed to a wooden cross.

Humans were created in God's image. Though this concept is not explained anywhere in the Bible, it seems to be intended to contrast with the animals being made according to their kinds. The point seems to be that humans share some features with God that the animals do not. As animals are called irrational in the New Testament, rationality is apparently part of this. Many passages indicate that humans are spirits (which can survive death), so that this is included in our resemblance to God. Other such features are presumably moral and artistic capabilities, probably a part of our spirituality.

Humans were created to have responsibility and rule over at least the earth-bound part of creation. This means that humans are responsible under God for how we treat the plants, animals and non-living environment around us, as well as for how we treat one another. Our ability to do this successfully has been badly disrupted by our rebellion against God, as has our behavior in all of the other authority relationships we inhabit: God/human, government, employment, marriage, and family.

The idea that we and the cosmos are created has profound effects on how we are to view reality, and (if true) on the meaning and value of our lives. Unlike the other world views in the first paragraph, creation explains both the existence of real, objective standards of ethics, logic and beauty, along with the fact that people regularly violate these standards by the simultaneous existence of both good and evil, and why the one is different from and preferable to the other. It explains why humans are more valuable than animals and why we view cannibalism with horror but need not (and cannot) extend this to meat-eating and vegetable-eating. It explains why we have longings for a life beyond this one, and how God can be just even though justice is not always done in this life.

According to the Bible, our cosmos has not always existed, and one day it will come to an end. It is wearing out. One day it will be replaced with a new heaven and a new earth, in which all will be well.

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