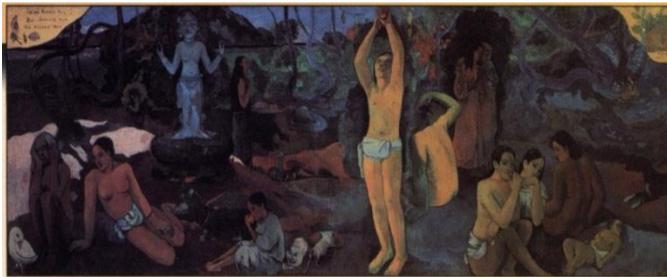


Evolution! Why all the fuss?

There are few topics that arouse more controversy and heated exchange than that of Evolution and Creation (or its cousin Intelligent Design). Aside from the controversies on the evidences and shortcomings of these theories, there is also debate on the merits of the controversy itself – a sort of disagreement about the usefulness of having the debate. Why all the fuss? Is it simply an issue of some people interpreting the Bible too literally? Or an issue of some people's theology not able to cope with advances of science? For those who do not have Biblical convictions or those who allow for a looser understanding of the Bible – should they bother informing themselves on the topic? What is at stake in the evolution/creation(ID) discussion? And why is it of consequence?



"Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?" An 1897 painting by the French artist Paul Gauguin.

A university genetics text, authored by Snustad & Simmons, gives us a probing explanation of why this creates a fuss. They reference a famous painting by the well-known French painter Paul Gauguin. Gauguin painted in the latter half of the 19th century when evolutionary theory was gaining widespread acceptance in Europe. His painting had a caption, 'Where do we come

from? What are we? Where are we going?' Snustad and Simmons comment on this by writing that:

"Gauguin's painting reflects a universal quest for what it means to be human. During the 19th century, people began to see this issue in a new light, especially with the emergence of the evolutionary theory ... Darwin's theory of evolution precipitated one of the most complex and profound intellectual revolutions in human history. This revolution affected philosophy, religion, economics, politics, and social theory, as well as biology."¹

In other words, this subject is not only about the world out there, but it is also about us as humans. Since it deals with the origins and development of human beings, it also provides an answer to what humans are, and what their destiny is. Or even more to the point, this is about me and about you. It addresses what you and I are, and thus also where we are going. This is why the origins topic affects philosophy, religion, economics, politics and social theory – because these disciplines are humanities and thus are based on an understanding of human nature derived from belief about the ultimate origins of humanity. Are Snustad and Simmons exaggerating? Well, consider that Karl Marx, the political and economics revolutionary whose writings inspired the rise of communism in the 20th century, wanted to dedicate his *Das Kapital* to Darwin, and Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) was built directly on Darwin's ideas of the struggle for existence as being the engine creating new species and races². Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a renegade Jesuit priest, had highly controversial views of God that were almost exclusively

¹ Snustad & Simmons. 1997. Principles of Genetics 2nd Ed. pp 774-775

² "The German Fuhrer . . . consciously sought to make the practice of Germany conform to the theory of evolution". Sir Arthur Keith, *Evolution and Ethics* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1947), p. 230

colored by his view of evolution. Nietzsche, the philosopher famous for advocating the idea that God is dead and the idea of a human superman, was also heavily influenced in his philosophy by Darwin. E. O. Wilson is probably the world's leading evolutionary sociobiologist – the application of animal behaviours to human societies. So it is not difficult at all to find people making ground-breaking influences in these various humanities disciplines and deriving their contribution from an evolutionary viewpoint.

Or consider how Kenneth Kardong explains the implications of evolution in his university textbook on evolution. Let's examine three passages at length.

“What did Darwin say that was so disturbing? ... What the Darwinian revolution brought was a new way of looking at the biological part of our world. Darwin saw species – including humans as descending from common ancestors by a process as natural as the forces that guide celestial motion... The Darwinian view involved no Divine act or even divine purpose – humans evolved as parts of the animal kingdom, physical products of natural processes like any other organism populating the planet. Many social philosophers believed in progress and perfection in nature. The Darwinian view replaced these beliefs with concepts of chance and adaptation.” (p. 4)

“Evolution is controversial because it opens a whole new perspective on ourselves, on our culture, and on our future ... It is also quite disturbing to comfortable beliefs because it challenges all that we generally hold about purpose in life, the significance of what we do, and the provincial perspective we cherish about ourselves. If we think deeply about, understand, and follow the significance of the Darwinian revolution, we are changed forever...” (p. 5)

“Those who read and understood what Darwin had discovered could never again see the world in the same way. It was a fundamental shift in our view of ourselves as human beings and of our place in the universe... Darwin supplied a natural explanation for the evolution of life- the world and its creatures all moved by natural causes. And if that were true, then humans too came out of a long history shaped by natural selection, and bear the character of that evolution rather than the stamped image of a Divine Creator. The implications were stark and troubling and also liberating and fresh.” (p. 83)³

What Kardong is saying is that we either see humanity (and thus ourselves) as having the ‘stamped image of a Divine Creator’ or we see ourselves as ‘all moved by natural causes’, with no ‘divine purpose’. I agree with Kardong. There are profound implications as to how we see ourselves, others, and purpose in life that are derived from our understanding of origins. Note how Dr. Will Provine pushes evolutionary beliefs (which he calls ‘modern science’) to its conclusions:

“Modern science implies ... There are no purposive principles whatsoever. There are no gods and no designing forces that are rationally detectable ... Second, ... there are no inherent moral or ethical laws, no absolute guiding principles for human society. Third, [a]... human becomes an ethical

³ Kenneth V Kardong. 2005. An Introduction to Biological Evolution. pp. 4, 5, 83. This is a popular university textbook on evolution.

person by means of heredity and environmental influences. That is all there is. Fourth ...when we die, we die and that is the end of us.”⁴

So why does Provine have these beliefs? Well, given his conviction that evolution provides a natural explanation for the world and its creatures all derived from natural causes then the belief in ‘purposive principles’ and ‘gods’ are not ‘rationally detectable’, and therefore superfluous. To him, it is like believing in Santa Claus – you can if you want to - but it is not rational since, like Santa Claus, God is undetectable. God is relegated to private hopes for those who fancy that idea – but it has nothing to do with the real world. And since (in his view) humans have arisen solely as a result of chance and natural causes, there is no inherently real ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ based on the character and will of a Divine Being. Thus there is no objective basis for ethics, save only what society, the environment and heredity has given us. And with all that, people are rather like complex chemical reactions that last on average about 70 years and when it is over and we die, it is the end of us. One may agree or disagree with Provine’s beliefs, but one cannot say that they do not follow logically from his evolutionary starting premise, and that they do not carry great implications.

It is sometimes countered that evolution does not necessarily lead to ‘bad ethics’ and that many evolutionists have admirable personal morals. This is true, but one should recognize that Provine is not advocating ‘bad ethics’, he is simply stating that given the premise that time, chance and differential reproduction can explain everything, there is no objective reason or basis outside of humans for morals. Evolutionists, as human beings, may base their morals and human dignity from a variety of reasons, even just their own personal preferences. From a creation/ID perspective morality comes outside of ourselves, and we are accountable to it, but from an evolutionary perspective, as Provine articulates, this basis for morals is removed and one is left with society’s or one’s own preferences as the basis for morals. Some people may prefer ‘good’ morals - but others may not. But there is no objective basis in which one ‘ought’ to have good morals. It all depends, in the end, on what your preferences are.

Consider how some astute thinkers have described the implications of this theory on:

God and Religion

“In the evolutionary pattern of thought there is no longer either need or room for the supernatural. The earth was not created, it evolved. So did all the animals and plants that inhabit it, including our human selves, mind and soul as well as brain and body. So did religion. ... Evolutionary man can no longer take refuge from his loneliness in the arms of a divinized father figure whom he has himself created...”⁵

Ethics

“Man has evolved from ancestors that were not human.... The creation of God’s image in man is not an event but a process, and therefore the moral law is a product of an evolutionary development.

⁴ W. Provine. "Evolution and the Foundation of Ethics", in MBL Science, Vol.3, (1987) No.1, pp.25-29. Dr. Provine is professor of History of Science at Cornell University

⁵ Sir Julian Huxley. 1959. Remarks at the Darwin Centennial, University of Chicago. Grandson of Thomas Huxley, Sir Julian was also the first director general of UNESCO and arguably the leading evolutionist of the 20th century.

...Evolution on the cosmic, biological and human levels are parts of one grand process of universal evolution... Man is an ethicizing being. Ethics are human ethics. They are products of cultural evolution.”⁶

“Morality, or more strictly our belief in morality, is merely an adaptation put in place to further our reproductive ends. . . . In an important sense, ethics as we understand it is an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate.”⁷

“By offering evolution in place of God as a cause of history, Darwin removed the theological basis of the moral code of Christendom. And the moral code that has no fear of God is very shaky. That’s the condition we are in.”⁸

“The origin of man, as homo sapiens, occurred towards the end of the Pleistocene – as a result of natural selection in a battle with other hominids and other men. An irrefutable conclusion is that hate and aggression and the tendency to kill are inherent ... Murder, homicide, torture, and genocide characterise the cultural history of man. ... It should be obvious that even the ritualization of murder to the point of being acceptably cultivated, as in knightly battles and duels and in Haager’s war ordinances, has the same genetic origin as blind, merciless, lustful murder”⁹

Human Worth and Dignity

“Darwinism undermines both the idea that man is made in the image of God and the idea that man is a uniquely rational being. Furthermore, if Darwinism is correct, it is unlikely that any other support for the idea of human dignity will be found. The idea of human dignity turns out, therefore, to be the moral effluvium of a discredited metaphysics”¹⁰

“We first located ourselves at the center of a limited universe, but Copernicus and Galileo taught us that we inhabit a peripheral speck in a cosmos ‘of a magnitude scarcely conceivable.’ We then imagined that God had created us in his own image on this little speck, until Darwin ‘relegated us to descent from an animal world’”¹¹

Human Sexuality

“In bonobos [a kind of chimpanzee], however, ... they seem almost constantly sexually receptive. ... The motivation for sex may be as much psychological and social as it is reproductive. ... to prevent violence, to ease tension, especially while feeding, as a greeting, a sign of reconciliation, or to reassure another group member. Sex or some form of sexual activity, heterosexual or homosexual,

⁶ Dobzhansky, Theodosius, “Ethics and Values in Biological and Cultural Evolution,” *Zygon, the Journal of Religion and Science*, as reported in *Los Angeles Times*, part IV (June 16, 1974), p. 6. Dobzhansky was a central figure in the field of evolutionary biology for his work in shaping the modern evolutionary synthesis

⁷ Michael Ruse and E.O. Wilson. “Evolution and Ethics” *New Scientist* 1985

⁸ Will Durant. “We are in the Last Stage of a Pagan Period” 1980. Chicago Tribune Syndicate

⁹ Hans Mohr “Leiden und Sterben als Faktoren der Evolution” Herrenalber Texte 1983 p 16-17, translated by Dr. Werner Gitt in *Did God use Evolution*. 1993 p. 51-52

¹⁰ James Rachels. *Created from Animals*. 1990 p.5 (Professor of Philosophy at University of Alabama)

¹¹ Gould, Stephen Jay, “Modified Grandeur,” *Natural History*, vol. 102 (March 1993), p20.

has even been seen to precede food sharing... Now if all the behaviours of the chimp species sound more than vaguely human, the reason may be simple. We share certain behavioral patterns because we inherited them from a common ancestor.”¹²

Meaning and Purpose in Life

“Evolution is a hard, inescapable mistress. There is just no room for compassion or good sportsmanship. Too many organisms are born, so, quite simply, a lot of them are going to have to die because there isn’t enough food and space to go around. You can be beautiful, fat, strong, but it might not matter. The only thing that does matter is whether you leave more children carrying your genes than the next person leaves. It’s true whether you’re a prince, a frog, or an American elm. Evolution is a future phenomenon. Are your genes going to be in the next generation? That is all that counts.”¹³

Impact on Western Civilization

“The social and conceptual revolution that we are now witnessing . . . can be traced back to Darwin. The cultural holists . . . are using evolutionary and ecological concepts to explain social conflict and social change. As revolutionary as their work may appear to conservative scholars, it is grounded in the evolutionary model that scientists no longer question”¹⁴

“As far as Christianity was concerned, the advent of the theory of evolution and the elimination of traditional teleological thinking was catastrophic. The suggestion that life and man are the result of chance is incompatible with the biblical assertion of their being the direct result of intelligent creative activity.... the fact is that no biblically derived religion can really be compromised with the fundamental assertion of Darwinian theory. Chance and design are antithetical concepts, and the decline in religious belief can probably be attributed more to the propagation and advocacy by the intellectual and scientific community of the Darwinian version of evolution than to any other single factor.”¹⁵

Conclusion

Right or wrong, the implications of evolution are profound and wide-ranging. They are much broader than simply affecting our understanding of Genesis. They inform our understanding of ourselves and the meaning of life. We dare not be lazy or ill-informed in approaching such an important topic and not understand the arguments used for advancing both evolution and those advancing creation/intelligent design. Then we will be in a knowledgeable position to develop our own informed beliefs on this vital topic. It is worth the effort. It is worth the fuss.

¹² Michael Alan Park, *Biological Anthropology*, 1996, p. 145

¹³ Cudmore, L. L. Larison, “The Center of Life,” *Science Digest*, vol. 82 (Nov. 1977), p 46

¹⁴ Beety Jean Craige. The Pursuit of Truth is inherently disruptive and Anti-Authoritarian. Chronicle of Higher Education 1993

¹⁵ Michael Denton. 1986. Evolution: A Theory in Crisis. p. 66