

EVOLUTION — AN ENLIGHTENED VIEW

by

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“Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind,” said Albert Einstein (1954). Can science, which attributes human origin to evolution and religion which attributes human origin to special creation ever agree on the subject of humanity’s genesis? They can if they recognize a transcendent perspective which embraces and reconciles them. It is found in enlightenment traditions. And note: without necessarily endorsing any particular religion, that perspective nevertheless provides a *rational* basis for *religious* faith.

Human evolution is characterized primarily by our ascent in consciousness to ever-greater degrees of intelligence and noetic power. Cro-Magnon, for instance, are distinguished from Neanderthal not so much by physical body design as by their greater intelligence which resulted in the world’s first art, statuary, engravings, music, personal ornamentation and star charts. Their superior tool-making ability gave us the bow and arrow. They were the first to domesticate animals, invent fishing as a food supply, create calendars, and bury their dead with funerary objects. (Neanderthal were the first to simply bury their dead.) Anthropologists also infer that Cro-Magnon had more highly developed social systems. Altogether, they showed a superior degree of consciousness and qualify to be called a newer species.

Homo sapiens succeeded Cro-Magnon. But evolution has not stopped with us, enlightenment traditions say. Higher forms of humanity await future emergence. Our race is evolving to a godlike condition, marked by states of consciousness which include the intellect and rationality of Homo sapiens but go beyond that with new, presently underdeveloped, faculties and depth of intelligence.

In the strict scientific sense, evolution means a process by which life arose from nonliving matter and subsequently developed as a succession of types, entirely by natural means — i.e., no supernatural factor was involved.

On the basis of my reason, research and personal experience with enlightenment traditions, I reject the part which prohibits supernaturalism. From the perspective of enlightenment, all is divine and everything in the cosmos is the work or play of God the Creator-Spirit — what America’s founders, in the Declaration of Independence, called “nature’s God.” nature is God in material form; God or what might be called Supernature infuses and

pervades all of nature.

That means evolution is a divinely driven process by which God as Spirit expresses itself through the production of evermore complex forms. Natural processes are really acts of God. The process of change in nature from a lower, simpler or worse state to a higher, more complex, better state (which is how Mr. Webster defines evolution) does not happen because blind forces and random events propel it on the basis of mere chance. They happen because God wills it intelligently, creatively and lawfully — that is, according to first principles and laws.

Science has recognized some of the laws of the cosmos, but has not yet recognized the lawmaker. God is the motive force of evolution. God is the origin-source of all life. God is the creator-artist behind the entire panorama of the cosmos. Yet God is not a mythic deity or anthropomorphic figure. God is the Ultimate Reality of all existence, which is Consciousness, and thus the sages say it is infused with intelligence.

Some Christians reject the theory of evolution on the basis of their understanding of the Bible. They maintain that each species is a special creation by God rather than an evolutionary emergent, "brought into existence by acts of a supernatural Creator using special processes which are not operative today," according to Dr. Duane T. Gish in *Evolution: The Fossils Say No!* (1978). They point to alleged flaws in the theory of evolution arising from Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and call their position "creation science." Their position, as expressed by Dr. Jonathan Sarfati in *Refuting Evolution* (1999), is this: "A God who 'created' by evolution is, for all practical purposes, indistinguishable from no God at all" (p. 22). He adds, "Evolution is a philosophy trying to explain everything without God" (p. 91).

Creation scientists seek to refute Darwinism because they see it, and science in general, as (mis)guided by a philosophy of atheistic materialism which holds that life arose from a chance arrangement of matter. They are correct in that perception, although it would be more accurate to call that philosophy scientism, not science. (Integral philosopher Brad Reynolds has defined scientism as "the view that only science understands the truth.") However, from the point of view of enlightenment traditions, all that is irrelevant. Darwin may be wrong, partly or even totally so, but evolution does not rise or fall upon his theories.

Evolution, per se, is what the Declaration of Independence would call "self-evident truth" derived from "nature's God." Everywhere we look in nature, there is development and growth through sequenced and invariant stages, and that growth/development is always unidirectional. Moreover, the fossil record shows that the history of life — what science calls macroevolution — is a history of older, simpler forms being succeeded by newer, more complex forms. Precisely how the newer, more complex forms emerge is perhaps still to be discovered by science, but their emergence itself is inarguable. (Mammals, for example, are not found in the fossil record prior to fishes and amphibians, nor

is *Homo sapiens* found in the fossil record prior to other less advanced hominin forms.) Creation science acknowledges that, claiming the newer, more complex forms are special creations, including the various human forms, rather than emergents arising through Darwinian natural selection.

I have no problem with that creationist claim. From my perspective, it doesn't matter whether the various human species were natural mutations or special creations. There is another view which allows that. Specifically, it says that evolution is divinely initiated, divinely guided and divinely destined. God is the motive force of all history, including evolutionary history. So evolution is really another mode of God's action in nature. That does not change, whether Darwin is ultimately proven right or wrong, i.e., whether natural selection, mutation or special creation eventually supplies the mechanism by which new species arrive on scene. From the point of view of enlightenment, science's godless chance "mutation" is actually God's "special creation" occurring through processes which simply are not yet fully perceived and understood by science.

That means official science doesn't yet see the hidden hand of Supernature in nature. It means operational science doesn't yet see intelligent design behind apparent randomness. It means natural science doesn't yet see divinity working behind the awesome display of life in all its variations and changes. It means normal science doesn't yet see the universe is orderly, rational and lawful because God is so.

It also means, however, that creation science doesn't yet see that special creation may occur through natural laws presently unrecognized by science or unknown to it (but which are becoming apparent through noetics — the study of consciousness—and, in a deliciously ironic manner, through the ongoing efforts of "godless" science itself, despite what some scientists do to deny it). It also means that creation science's conception of God is fundamentalist anthropomorphism — an immature, mythic understanding of the divine which must be outgrown through mystical ascent in consciousness to attainment of the splendid vision of God as Spirit in action, operating lawfully throughout nature in ways which science has rightly described, but only in part.

A simple analogy illustrates this. A 3-D print can present a perceptual challenge to viewers — specifically, an optical challenge. What the viewer sees printed on paper is a 2-D layout. The print is an arrangement of small figures in a geometric configuration. Embedded in the print is a hidden 3-D picture. Viewers know this; the challenge is to shift their perception so that the hidden image reveals itself. It isn't easy but is not impossible. By relaxing their gaze, by experimenting with viewing angle, viewing distance and lighting level, the 3-D image can be seen to stand out from its embedded background and reveal itself in full dimensionality. Once that occurs, the viewer can become more skillful at perceiving it, even though his or her normal gaze continues to see the flat, 2-D embedding arrangement. Moreover, the viewer then knows on the basis of personal experience that his previous perception, while valid, is

nevertheless partial and he can never again *not* see the true depth of the print or at least deny its presence. (The hymn "Amazing Grace": "'twas blind but now I see.")

This is the visible equivalent of the Zen student who is told to identify the sound of one hand clapping. The testimony of Zen meditators over centuries assures others who have not yet engaged the koan "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" that the seemingly irrational question can be answered by the meditator who changes his or her consciousness — from rational to transrational. The rational is not negated; it is simply subsumed in a larger perception of the metaphysics of the cosmos.

The ancient *rishis* of India put it succinctly and wisely: *Knowledge is structured in consciousness*. The key to understanding reality is changing consciousness — i.e., recognizing in principle that higher states of consciousness exist and what that means for human knowledge, especially self-knowledge. In the words of the *Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad*: "By understanding the Self all this universe is known."

Science is essentially based in ego consciousness. That is not wrong in and of itself; in fact, science is one of the high points of development for the egoic state of consciousness. But it tends to reject what is higher or otherwise beyond ego, and that is indeed wrong. It is what misleads science into scientism — namely, declaring that atheism and materialism define reality. For example, scientism's rejection of the parapsychological evidence for postmortem existence of human consciousness says, in effect: when you're dead, you're dead — that's all there is to it. But when examined outside the perceptual boundaries and blinders of scientism, the evidence provides — as mentioned at the outset of this essay — a rational basis for religious faith.

Enlightenment traditions provide a larger, more inclusive perspective on existence. Science can supply the answer to "how" evolution works, but not "why." Anthropomorphic theology / religion provides answers to "why" which are not so much wrong as immature, reflecting an archaic state of consciousness which has been outgrown by enlightenment traditions.

When I say "special creation," I am not conjuring up images of a Deity Watchmaker creating a complex timepiece — or of a human being born in Eden. Rather, I am indicating that with the human being we have a creature who can activate the *interior* evolution of consciousness unlike any other creature we know of. The human species has transcended-and-included all other lower life forms but *added* something truly "special" so that we can accurately see them — see us — as being a unique creation in nature, one that cannot be fully accounted for by natural selection and genome manipulation alone — or by mere chance. That is how it seems to me (and countless others). Some rely on their religion to explain this great "jump" in evolutionary potential. Others simply see it as part of the "divine creation" of the universe, the natural unfolding of Spirit-in-action. This is what my intuition, as well as reason, makes clear to me.

Think about it: the many special abilities of human beings which make us unique in the animal kingdom truly are not necessary for survival alone. Monkeys do fine in the jungle, for instance, without having to build cities (or computers). Indeed, when one considers that *all* of human civilization (that is, since writing) has taken place in only 5,000 years or so, it defies mathematical odds. Thus, there is no logical reason to dismiss a divine telos or purpose behind this stage of evolution: the evolution of human consciousness. It really can only be explained as a divine miracle — or more simply: a "special creation." Hence, it follows logically that we can also evolve into something even more special than what we have reached so far. I am suggesting an entire human race endowed with Christ Consciousness or the enlightened state as being a universal potential and realization for the entire human race.

So my own stance could be described as meta-Darwinian: noetic evolution or the evolution of human consciousness through intelligent design and special creation understood from the perspective of enlightenment. The issue, rightly perceived, is not a question of science vs. religion. Saying that either science or religion is right does not apply when God is understood as Spirit in action. God is the motive force behind both. (See the works of integralist Ken Wilber for elaboration on this idea, especially *Integral Psychology*. See also the works of physicist Amit Goswami, especially *Creative Evolution* and political philosopher Steven McIntosh's *Integral Consciousness and the Future of Evolution*.)

Enlightenment sees the paradoxical coexistence of both perspectives: Spirit in action, working through the laws of nature as science comes to understand them. There is intelligent design to be discerned behind nature, including human nature. A wiser interpretation of intelligent design means seeing God as Ultimate Reality, as the foundation of all existence. From the perspective of enlightenment traditions, there is also special creation because the hidden hand of God extends, via grace-given mystical experience, to create a new species, one member at a time, but in an accelerating fashion which assures eventual dominance by the emerging new noetic breed.

With reference to the human species, the term "special creation" should be understood by Christians in the sense given in the New Testament: the creation of the new creature or "the new man" by "the renewing of your mind in Christ" or noetic evolution — i.e., higher human development to enlightenment. As St. Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." That "new creation" is characterized by noetic change, by a change of consciousness to a higher state — called Christ consciousness or cosmic consciousness or nondual consciousness — which sees God directly and therefore sees that all creation is an expression of the Divine Creator.

Evolution is the journey and enlightenment is the goal for both the individual and the human race. Imagine a society of people who have attained enlightenment or put on the mind of Christ. For Christians, that would be the

kingdom of heaven — on Earth. To quote St. Paul again: through Jesus, God “let us know the mystery of his purpose, the hidden plan he so kindly made from the beginning in Christ” (Ephesians 1:9).

Thus the bottom line for me is what has been called evolutionary theism but which I prefer to call evolutionary spirituality or Spirit in action throughout all of nature, including human nature. As I stated in *The Meeting of Science and Spirit*, “Human history is a process of ascent to godhood. That process is best described, individually and collectively, as evolution.”

The End

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