

FRONTIER SCIENCE/SOCIAL CHANGE

by Paul Von Ward

"Creationism vs. Evolutionism: Competition for Power"

Media attention on this issue generally focuses on fragments of evidence for one theory or the other. Most writers, including this one, get caught up in the search for physical proof. Not much noticed, the debate actually represents more a battle for control of human minds than a search for truth. The creationism/evolutionism struggle, only 150 years old, grew out of the 16th century European Renaissance's renewal of a perennial conflict.

For millennia humans have vacillated between two approaches in relating to the universe: The Natural versus the Supernatural. Accepted "truth" for the former requires observable evidence. In the latter, "truth" requires belief in unverifiable assumptions. Natural Science and Natural Religion demand that assumptions be tested by critics as well as believers. Supernaturalism (in religion and science) assumes a reality beyond the mind's capacity to fathom it. This is different from the Naturalist saying "we just don't understand it yet, but with more information we can." Supernaturalism says we can never understand it because our god, or whatever, is beyond us.

In contrast to most scholars, I believe the first human tendency was the natural approach. My interpretation has support in quantum physics and consciousness studies. The so-called "primitive animism" of early humans, ascribing spirits or consciousness to all objects and aspects of nature, corresponds to what David Bohm and others have labeled nonlocal or universal consciousness. Physical, subtle energy, and consciousness research now confirms early human beliefs in connections to and communications with all species. I further believe that Supernaturalism developed relatively recently in human history, but that's another story.

Whatever its origins and earlier manifestations, history records that Supernaturalism reigned supreme in the West from approximately 300 CE to 1,600 CE. An earlier bastion of Naturalism, exemplified by the Golden Age of Greece and Alexander the Great, was weakened by the Roman Empire and Emperor Constantine's 4th century appropriation of the budding Christian Church. Roman Catholic dogma and other mysticisms held sway throughout the so-called Dark and Middle Ages. Naturalists hid in esoteric schools and secret societies, a necessary practice due to church persecution and the Inquisition that began in the 13th century.

A rebirth of the naturalistic approach animated Copernicus, Bruno, Galileo, Newton and others in the 16th and 17th centuries. The impact, rooted in Natural Science, was a renaissance of individuals, institutions, and society.

For three hundred years Natural Science saw successes in astronomy, anthropology, archaeology, physics, and biology. Its adherents were beginning to win battles against Supernaturalism (Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, and smaller sects) and many wanted to deliver the final blow. Defeat the core idea of a heavenly Father personally creating the universe and humans. They saw Charles Darwin's speculative theory of random mutations and natural selection as the silver stake that would pierce the heart of Supernaturalism. In the emotion of the struggle, scientists ignored their own dictum to "follow the evidence" and asserted a hypothesis as "truth" before they had the requisite data. This antagonistic investment of emotions fueled the debate.

Another energy contributing to the persistence of this premature assertion, I believe, was the turn-of-the-century co-optation of Natural Science by titans of the Industrial Age. They saw the inner-based values of religion (Natural or Supernatural) as a threat to a materialistic, consumer-oriented society. They allocated resources to support the advocates of "evolutionism" in education, research, and the media. It became an icon of the struggle between industrial materialism and spiritual values. The perennial Naturalism versus Supernaturalism evolved into Industrial Science versus Supernatural Religion. (Neither considered Naturalism a relevant threat.) Both parties, motivated by their desire to prevail in the bipartisan struggle for intellectual control, could not see the larger picture. A century later they cannot admit natural truth appears to lie somewhere between their positions.

The recent Kansas Board of Education decision to remove knowledge of macroevolution from statewide student tests re-ignited the media debate about the "fact" of evolution versus the "truth" of creationism. But the search for understanding of tangible evidence is lost in the cacophony of sound bites. The scientific establishment and religious fundamentalism, symbolized by the National Academy of Science and the Institute for Creation Research, mix facts with their "yearnings." Both institutions selectively interpret the evidence for their own ends.

The strict creationism view is well known: The Christian God directly created the universe and modern humans in less than a week about five thousand years ago. The conventional scientist's belief is that all life initiated from a singular chance event on Earth 4 billion years ago, then evolved by random mutations from single cell bacteria to more and more complex species. The Academy's 1998 teacher guideline reads, "There is no debate within the scientific community over whether evolution has occurred and there is no evidence that evolution has not occurred."

That statement artfully overlooks the lack of evidence proving it did occur and ignores the opposing views of many scientists. In fact, the information quoted to counter the lack of fossil evidence is circumstantial and very illusive (tables of genetic similarities and amino acid sequences). With impenetrable logic, most scientists take the fact of a

hierarchical order in nature as evidence for their randomness/selection theory. (The obvious order among species could just as likely -- or perhaps even more logically -- point to an unfolding of inherent patterns.)

What's wrong with each side's argument? While there is evidence that life forms adapt to diet, climatic, and other physical changes (microevolution), there is no direct evidence of adaptations that result in new speciation (macroevolution). For example, bacteria can become resistant to antibiotics, but that does not result in different types of organisms. While there is evidence of natural selection in the survival of individual characteristics within a species, there is no evidence that such strengths lead to new types of plants or animals.

Darwin himself said that in the absence of transitional forms (his 1850s hypothesis was based on the assumption they would soon be discovered) his whole theory would be invalid. In fact it may be impossible to fill that gap as fossils can never disclose whether they were ancestors of anything else (per Colin Patterson, British Museum of Natural History). Unknown to Darwin, and most scientists today, is the existence of imprinted genes that control the timing sequences of all cell processes. Called carpenter genes by author Lloyd Pye, their control of timing is crucial to normal development. Mutations to these species-specific genes result in cancer, developmental defects, or the embryo's death. This mechanism appears to lock a species into its own spiraling path of development (microevolution).

The creationist falls in the face of evidence (carbon dating, tree rings, ice cores, etc.) that a living Earth has been around for a long time and that homo sapiens have at least a 250,000 year-old history (evidenced by fossils and mitochondrial DNA). The increasing evidence that life (including highly evolved beings) exists elsewhere in the universe also undermines the strict creationists who see humans as their God's special creatures.

What are the tangible facts? Organic life remains have been embedded in the earth for at least a few billion years. The plant and animal kingdoms comprise intricate hierarchies, from simple life forms to more complex ones. The fossil record does not show transitional forms (between two distinct species) and it shows no introduction of major new groups since the Cambrian Explosion of 530 million years ago. The record reveals that species appear full blown, remain fundamentally unchanged, and become extinct for any number of reasons.

The human history of social and technological progress does not square with the long slow process of evolution. Shortly after humans appear on the scene, there is evidence of their activities around the globe. Many historical accounts credit advanced beings (AB's) with involvement in the creation of plants, animal, humans and the Earth within the universe. The evidence supports parts of both theories.

Actually, there are plausible theories that better fit the evidence. One is the "Seed-bed Earth" which assumes life is pandemic in the universe. It posits that some, if not all, planets are born with inherent energetic patterns for multiple life forms, ready to spring

forth under the right conditions. (An analogy is that one human cell has the potential -- with the DNA instructions -- to create all parts of the body.) As scientists discover more evidence of extraterrestrial life forms, water which supports life, and other physical conditions conducive to life, this possibility becomes more likely. "Panspermia," another common theory, says live spores in hardened casings (from comets, meteors or asteroids) fertilized all of the Sun's planets and blossomed on Earth. Two theories involve the postulation of off-planet AB's as carriers. In one, the AB's would have initiated life here, while in the other, the AB's (or gods) would have only intervened in its development.

Why are such alternatives dismissed? Stephen Jay Gould, representing the establishment view, said (Time, August 23, 1999), "...we can call evolution a fact...a proposition affirmed to such a high degree that it would be perverse to withhold one's provisional assent." Religious fundamentalists assert their "facts" even more baldly. Quoting Shakespeare, "(they) doth protest too much, methinks!" How does one explain why people remain so hard-line when new evidence indicates otherwise?

Each side has boxed itself into a corner. Clarence Darrow, at the 1925 Scopes trial in Tennessee, said, "If Evolution wins, Christianity goes." The Supernaturalist creationists fear that outcome. Industrial Science believes the obverse: "If Macroevolution falls, then Science will be undermined." When deep needs for personal identity and psychological security are entangled with vested economic interests, the hammerlocks of the protagonists are difficult to break.

I believe scientists would better fill their role if they rid themselves of the out-dated millstone of evolutionism. Unfortunately, secular institutions, like religious ones, who build their authority on dogma put themselves in a take it-or-leave-it position. Unquestioned beliefs are essential to their strategies for control of human thought and behavior. Both would lose out in a synthesis of opposing views that defines a new reality. For me, escape from this stalemate lies in a revival of two faces of the same coin: Natural Science and Natural Religion.