

Evolution, Science, Religion: Part 2

Last week's bulletin article began to take up the topic of the physical sciences and in particular that of evolution and whether or not evolution has disproved the creation accounts in Sacred Scripture and, in fact, disproven the existence of a Creator and thus of God. Last week's article presented some general considerations about the physical sciences, especially its limitations: the physical sciences can deal only with material things and hypotheses that are testable in tangible ways. This article will begin to take up specific questions about the theory of evolution.

The conclusion that many evolutionary biologists seem to jump to (as far as I can tell anyhow – it is a little hard to follow the “reasoning,” if there is one) is the development of all species can be explained by “evolution” and thus there's no need to claim there is a Creator; every living thing evolved from a single living cell and that's it, no Creator. Let's, for the moment, assume that's true and start with the simplest (and most confounding) question: how did it become *alive*? There was no life (no self-sustaining activity, capable of reproduction) and then all of a sudden there was. Now here, seriously committed atheists start saying some downright strange and even humorous things, including “scientists.” As I recall, one early claim was that “lightening” hit some sort of magical primordial soup and then there was life. I'm sure there were people who tried to reproduce that and... failed. One scientist that Ben Stein interviewed in his documentary: “Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed,” said life may have come from crystals; *crystals*, ok – how did *that* work, is it a testable hypothesis, can you reproduce it? “I don't know,” and “no,” are the answers to those questions. Richard Dawkins, another well-known avid atheist and evolutionist, said that maybe technologically advanced aliens seeded life on earth – yes *aliens*; those doggone little green men that just keep haunting mankind. Anything but God of course! Incidentally, note that Dawkins is actually acknowledging that some outside, intelligent being may have created life on earth. I don't think he realized how close he was to saying that maybe God did it. It shows how hard it is to escape the reality of God. But let us return to the claim – aliens. Is this testable? Is there *any* evidence for it? If so, where is it? If not, then, like the crystals, it's not a *scientific* claim. When “scientists” speak on some particular topic, it's important to distinguish between actual scientific claims versus personal opinion or even wild, unfounded speculation. In the area of evolutionary biology, then, one point that we have to come to is that clearly, *clearly*, it has no, *no*, material explanation of how life began. To close the book and say we've accounted for everything in terms of material causes is simply false. Some might say: well you just have to give science time and it will figure out and prove how life actually started, in terms of purely material causes. No, it won't, but the point here is that that claim is being made *now* and it's not only false but *completely* without evidence; the book of life is still open as far as the physical sciences are concerned.

How life itself began is only *one* question unanswered by modern science. A single cell is far more complex and intricate than even the most advanced computer. How did all of this intricacy come together? What caused it? The “explanation” that is given is: chance. Is that reasonable? Well, suppose you were doing some excavation and you unearthed an old house with furniture in it. You're awestruck by this discovery. After you're all done you look over at cousin Joe-Bob who had been helping you and Joe-Bob says: isn't it something how all of this just fell into place by itself. You would then surely have to wonder if Joe-Bob had been out hitting Uncle Willie's hooch-mill again. This didn't just all fall into place by “chance,” you say to Joe-Bob, somebody *obviously* built it, some intelligent being (*somebody*) caused it. So what about a single cell that is far, far more complex than a house with furniture? How did it come to be as it is (much less become alive)? The answer always given is: chance. If you can't believe Joe-Bob about the house, then how can this be believed about even a single cell? The use of “chance” as an explanation, as a cause, is one of the biggest errors in the area of evolution or any science. What is chance? Chance is *not* an explanation, it's not a cause, it's a *lack* of explanation. If we say something happened “by chance,” what we really mean is: I don't know what caused it, all I know is that I didn't do it or control it or plan it. However, *something* caused it, or several things combined caused it; something *had* to have caused it. There *are* things which, from our perspective, do happen “by chance” but chance per se did not cause them because chance is not a cause or an explanation, it's the *lack* of an explanation of cause; that's what the word means. Do not be drawn in by any argument or “reasoning” that treats chance as an explanation; it is inherently and invariably false.

There are a number of other problems in evolutionary theory, even on a natural basis. Evolutionary theory concerns itself with the development of species, speculating that every species developed from some preexisting species, with all living things ultimately evolving from one cell that *somehow* became alive. It is postulated, for example, that man descended from apes through small gradual changes. If that is so, then where are those continuums today? Where are the part-ape, part-man type creatures that are becoming more and more like man? You cannot just say: well, I'm pretty sure that's my neighbor down the road or the pastor of this pastorate. Although either or both may be poor excuses for human beings, they are still human beings. So again – where are these forms, *today* – the ones that are becoming more and more like man? You have probably seen the pictures showing monkeys, and then more and more upright and taller beings, until finally you get to man. Where are all of those in-between forms today? Someone might say: they just became extinct. That doesn't settle the issue; that's not a sufficient answer. Certainly some species might have become extinct over time but if mutations with small effects and subsequent selection is the process that brought about man from apes, then either the starting material (apes in this case) would have to be extinct or the process itself (mutation and selection) would have had to stop in order for the “in-betweens” not to exist at all. We still have apes and monkeys so did the process stop? There's no reason to think that genetic mutation is any different today so we are still left with the question of why are these forms not here today? Poachers? Did the aliens come and take them back? Did the crystals dry up? Where are they? It is a serious question that demands a serious answer; and if it is to be a truly scientific answer, it must be based on physically testable hypotheses.

Some might say that the development of one species from another wasn't small, gradual, accumulated changes over time; no, rather there were exceedingly rare mutations (that's why we don't see the in-betweens now) with big effects that resulted in big steps that were favorably selected (it would have to be pretty rare or somewhere in recorded history it would have been observed). The first question is: well which is it? Small mutations selected over time (like the ubiquitous pictures of man descending from apes suggests) or is it rare, large mutations? Hand-waving past these questions as if to say: well *somehow* it happened, is not sufficient and is certainly not scientific. The “rare mutations with large effects” theory also has some difficulties. One is that the vast majority of (known) mutations are harmful to survival, not to mention reproduction. But the bigger problem is that this exceedingly rare mutation with a big effect would not only have to occur twice but twice within a given individual's life span, producing a male once and a female the other time, and that male and female would have to meet and reproduce. How likely is all of that? If that did occur, then could the mutation be considered exceedingly rare? But if we back off much from “exceedingly rare,” then we're back to the question of “where are the in-between forms today.”

For those involved in agriculture (animal or plant), one reason the claims of evolution might seem compelling is because you can actually see the changes in the species you work with over time. It is undeniable; corn, dairy cows, etc., all yield far more now than 50 years ago and this is due in no small part to selective breeding. Cows even look different today. Furthermore, selection experiments (under controlled conditions) have demonstrated that selection does indeed change a population. **But** these are changes *within* a species, not development of a new species from an existing one. This is a *critical* distinction. Darwin did not write a book called: changes within a species over time; he wrote a book called: *The Origin of Species*, which is what we have been talking about in discussing the grossly unanswered questions of evolutionary biology. Dairy cows look different and produce more milk but they're still cows; even *intense* (artificial) selection did not make a new species. In fact, is there even a single instance of man witnessing the development of a new species? Think about how long dogs have been selectively bred; yet not once in the known memory of man has this resulted in a new species. This makes perfect sense. All selection means is that only certain chosen individuals are allowed to reproduce the next generation, namely the kind of individuals you want (like begets like). What selection does (which has been understood for almost a century) is simply change the frequency of genes in a population – increasing the frequency of genes that produce what you want (say greater yield) or that promote survival, and decreasing the frequency of genes that result in (say) less yield or less survival. It does not create or cause new species.

What are the implications of all this? Does it disprove “evolution?” We will have to take that up next week.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.