

AN EXAMINATION OF THEISTIC EVOLUTION

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While there are many who propose some doctrine called theistic evolution as a compromise between evolutionism and Biblical Christianity, it is by no means easy to find out what that doctrine is supposed to entail. In this article the author investigates the doctrine, with reference to scientific evidence. In fact, theistic evolution may be divided into several varieties, some of which merge with atheistic evolution or with progressive creation. None of the variations, however, is really supported by the scientific evidence; and powerful objections may be brought against each variety. The doctrine of supernatural creation in a short time is supported by the scientific evidence.

Introduction

While there have been those, such as Nilsson,¹ who rejected organic evolution just because the scientific evidence was against it, most of those who have taken a stand against it have done so because it was in conflict with the record of Creation.

There is nothing unscientific in such action. Few, if any, scientific questions can be settled with scientific evidence alone, if by scientific evidence is meant that obtained by scientific investigation and experiment. It is always necessary to use some more general information. The general information, of course, should be as reliable as possible; and the creationist believes that in the Scriptural record of Creation he has such reliable information.

Readers will, no doubt, be most familiar with the work of creationists who are Christians. There are Jewish creationists, of course;^{2,3} and Modern Creationism should be, it would seem, a logical view for a Moslem.

Theistic Evolution

As is well known, not all of those who are called Christians have taken a stand for Creation. Many, even in high places, just go along with evolution. Or, if the disagreement of evolution with Christianity becomes too sharp to be ignored, many look for some compromise. And often the compromise is called Theistic Evolution.

There is a difficulty in attempting to discuss theistic evolution, in that it is hard to get a clear statement of what is really entailed. It seems, however, to be the view that evolution happened, much as is claimed under atheistic evolution, but with the added statement that God was involved somehow.

On this basis, it is possible to divide theistic evolution into varieties, or branches.

Epicurean Theistic Evolution

Some, who call themselves theistic evolutionists, say that God was present, but are unwilling to allow that He did anything. To put it bluntly, such people hold that things evolved, while God sat and watched them. This view is rather like that ascribed to the Epicureans of old. So it might be called the Epicurean branch, or variety, of theistic evolution.

As far as scientific evidence goes, the Epicurean theistic evolution is indistinguishable from atheistic evolution. For nobody would expect that God's presence, if He actually did nothing, would be shown in the fossils, or in any other kind of scientific evidence.

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Likewise, this brand of theistic evolution is open to exactly the same objections as the atheistic kind. These objections have been discussed before; it will suffice to note one at this point. The Epicurean, like the atheist, must hold that things came about by chance and natural selection. But it has been shown that the improbability that the present state of affairs could have come but by chance is enormous.^{2,4-5} So the Epicurean, like the atheist, is in conflict with all probability; and can hold his view only by claiming to believe in things which have been shown to be so improbable that they may as well be called impossible.

Intervention

Other theistic evolutionists, perhaps rightly dissatisfied with the Epicurean position, say that evolution was the means by which God created things. If God used means, He must have done something—He intervened. So those who hold this variety of theistic evolution might be called Interventionists.

Actually, the statement of what is meant here is still not very clear. Those who hold it, however, seem to mean that they believe that living things changed from one kind to another, over a considerable period of time, in the way which is claimed by atheistic evolutionists. But the Interventionists do not think that the changes from generation to generation came about by chance; they hold that God intervened to cause them.

Thus the Interventionist is logically better off in one respect, at least. He is not committed to belief in improbable events, at least not so simply. For very improbable things can happen under direction, and God is considered to have intervened to direct things.

Since the actual changes are supposed to have been the same as those which atheistic evolutionists allege, and since there is a diversity of opinions among the latter, it is necessary to split this variety of theistic evolution once more.

Gradual Intervention

To the Gradual Interventionist (to invent a name), evolution is framed to agree with what seems to be the commonest view held by atheistic evolutionists. That view is, that living things changed slowly, even imperceptibly, from generation to generation, until completely new kinds of creatures had arisen.

The objection which can be advanced against gradual intervention is that there is absolutely no evidence for it. The fossil record does not show any slow, gradual, continuous change from one kind to another. Nor is any such thing happening among creatures living

today. Neither is there a continuous variation between kinds; a continuous merging of the horse kind with the cow kind, for instance, as would be expected if those kinds had arisen gradually from some common ancestor.⁶

There are other objections. Consider the origin of birds,⁷ or more generally of flying creatures, from organisms which could not fly. If this came about gradually, there must have been many generations of creatures, neither one thing nor the other, which were not suited to any way of life, either on the ground or in the air. Of course, God could have intervened to sustain these misfits miraculously. But there are no fossils of misfits, nor evidence that the alleged misfits ever existed at all. And certainly there are no whole races of misfits being miraculously preserved today.

Again, consider the light and dark moths, so often alleged to provide evidence of evolution. Presumably, the gradual interventionist would have to maintain that God has been intervening gradually, over many years, to turn the moths dark. But now there seems to be some evidence that, pollution from smoke having decreased, the moths are becoming again predominantly light.⁸ Is it to be said, then, that God, having started a project to have dark moths, has now changed His mind?

If, on the other hand, the interventionist should say that this matter of the moths was not God's doing, but just depended on chance and selection, the atheistic evolutionist would mutter something about Ockham's Razor, and say that if the explanation without God is adequate here, it is likely so in other cases.

The Hopeful Miracle

Of course, some evolutionists, who were not theistic, have recognized the force of these objections to gradual evolution. Probably Goldschmidt is the better known; and his proposed solution, which has been called the Hopeful Monster, is also well known. It is commonly stated in the form: "once a reptile laid an egg from which a bird hatched".⁹ It is not very clear whether that statement is intended to be taken literally; but nobody seems to say how it is to be taken if not literally. In theistic evolution, such a happening would surely be a miracle; thus in that context the concept might well be called the "Hopeful Miracle".

The first thing to be noted about the "Hopeful Miracle" is that proponents have really left off being strictly evolutionists. The outlook has merged with what has been called progressive creation, at least as far as the scientific evidence is concerned.

Those who hold progressive creation believe that God indeed created things, possibly the various kinds after their kinds; but that the creation was done from time to time over a long period, certainly not in six days. Thus they hope to reconcile the Scriptural account with the alleged geological time.

Now the fossil of an animal, even supposing it to be the first of its kind, would clearly not show whether, if God created it, He created it out of nothing, or out of lifeless material, or out of the egg or embryo of some other kind of creature. So the hopeful miracle variety of theistic evolution, and progressive creation, are scientifically indistinguishable.

Objections on Scientific Grounds

There are several objections, on strictly scientific grounds, which may be brought against either of these views. First of all, it is unlikely that anyone would try to hold such ideas, if he did not believe that the Earth is very old. If it is admitted that the Earth is only a few thousand years old, creation in a short time, say six days, is the most reasonable view. Now in fact, there are many lines of evidence to show that the Earth is, in fact, far younger than is alleged by uniformitarians.¹⁰ This evidence is not well known, because of the difficulty of publishing anything which conflicts with uniformitarianism.

Another point which must be considered is the occurrence of symbiosis.¹¹ There are creatures which live together, which depend absolutely on each other. And they are often of quite different kinds. One may even be an animal, and the other a plant. This is true, for instance, of figs and wasps,¹² or of yucca and the yucca moths.¹³ Now if progressive creation is given the same order of origin as is held by evolutionists, in most cases one member of the above pairs existed long before the other. How, then, did the earlier member survive? Or, if it was able to live independently, how was symbiosis established later?

Another objection is that, in trying to make everything agree with the fossil record, progressive creationists, or others having similar views, may be leaning on a broken reed. For there are places in which fossils are in the wrong order, according to uniformitarian interpretations.

The excuse offered has been that older rocks were overthrust over younger rocks, although there was no independent evidence to show that any such event ever occurred. Besides, there are good reasons for believing that such overthrusting would be mechanically impossible.¹⁴

It would appear, then, that creatures did not, in fact, come into being in the order in which evolutionists say that they did. So the progressive creationists are trying to explain a situation which in fact has been falsely assumed to exist.

A Scriptural Objection

I have tried, so far, to discuss theistic evolution strictly in terms of scientific evidence. As for progressive creation, however, with which one variety of theistic evolution was seen to merge, there is also a Scriptural argument to be considered.

Those who believe in progressive creation commonly maintain that creation, from time to time, over perhaps many millions of years, can be made to agree with both the Scriptural record of six days and with the uniformitarian interpretation of the fossils. But in fact, the fossil record does not agree well with the alleged evolution and diversification of living beings from the so-called simple to complex. Dr. John N. Moore has prepared charts, which, along with a commentary, are given immediately after this article, showing just how poorly the fossil record agrees with the alleged evolution and diversification of living things. But now consider also the point from Scripture.

As it is usually interpreted, the fossil record shows, not only that new creatures came into being from time to time, but also that some kinds disappeared. The dinosaurs, for instance, are considered to have become extinct rather suddenly. If, then, the hopeful miracle, or progressive creation, is to be ascribed to God's intervention, it is surely logical to ascribe the disappearance of creatures to the same Cause. In other words, one should then ascribe to God progressive creation and annihilation. (Or would the annihilation be retrogressive?)

Now there is no mention of any such annihilation in Scripture except in one case: the Flood. But to make progressive creation agree with evolutionary thinking would surely require a half-dozen or so annihilations, of which there is no hint in Scripture.

Maybe the last statement should be qualified slightly. There are, it is true, those who believe that another annihilation is hinted at in Scripture: the gap which some think comes between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. But be that as it may, nobody has ever claimed that there are a half-dozen or so gaps.

Besides, it has been shown that one Creation, along with one annihilation, that which occurred at the time of the Flood, are enough to account for the fossil record and the other evidence. The proper scientific attitude to take, then, is to apply Ockham's Razor, which is the principle that causes should not be multiplied needlessly. One Creation and one annihilation will account for the evidence; why strive to invent more?

Conclusion

It has been shown that of the varieties of theistic evolution, one, the Epicurean, coincides with atheistic evolution as far as the scientific evidence is concerned. Another, the Hopeful Miracle, is synonymous with pro-

gressive creation. For some of the varieties which have been proposed there is really no evidence, and there are strong objections to all variations. This is true even on scientific grounds, and it is highly unlikely that anyone would even think of theistic evolution on primarily theological or Scriptural grounds. So the most believable account of the origin of things is the Scriptural one, of Creation in a relatively short time, a few thousand or so years ago.

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DOCUMENTATION OF THE ABSENCE OF TRANSITIONAL FORMS

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Clear documentation of the position that there are no transitional forms, and no diversification and branching from general to special, is available in the 1967 publication, *The Fossil Record* (A Symposium with Documentation), jointly sponsored by the Geological Society of London and the Palaeontological Association of England. Attention to this thoroughly scientific work resulted from the suggestion of Father Vincent J. O'Brien, former science master at Castlenock College, County Dublin, Ireland, and past Chairman of the Association of Irish Teachers of Science.

In this research volume, some 120 scientists, all specialists, prepared 30 chapters in a monumental work of over 800 pages to present the fossil record for plants and animals divided into about 2,500 groups. Also these specialists prepared 71 highly instructive and authoritative charts that are included throughout the chapters of the book. (See Charts 1 and 2.)

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Acknowledgement is made in the Introduction of Part II (p. 158) of the fact that some zoological specialists attempted to indicate possible limited "connections", but such tenuous relationships always involved possible "connections" *within* major divisions of animals, viz. Porifera, Brachiopoda, Mollusca, Agnatha, Amphibia, Aves, Mammalia. No such limited "connections" were recorded by any botanical specialist.

However, a conclusive generalization drawn from these charts is as follows: Each major form or kind of plant and animal is shown to have a separate and distinct history from all the other forms or kinds!!!

Groups of both plants and animals *appear suddenly* in the fossil record. For example, most mammals appear suddenly in the so-called Eocene division, and are as diverse then as researchers find them to be today. Whales, bats, horses, primates, elephants, hares, squirrels, etc., are all as distinct at their first appearance as they are now. There is not a trace of a common ancestor, much less a link with any reptile, the supposed