

Darwin's Dilemma - "The Horrid Doubt"

by Charles Leiter

In the century and a half since Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* was first published, evolutionary theory has gained widespread acceptance. In fact, it is usually thought of as just another of the certainties of life—like the roundness of the earth or the existence of viruses. "Intelligent" people never dream of questioning it.

This is a remarkable state of affairs for more than one reason. From the scientific standpoint, evolutionary theory faces formidable, even insuperable, difficulties in such areas as mathematical improbability, the problem of spontaneous generation, irreducible complexity, and the presence of systematic gaps between the various forms of life found in the fossil record—to name only a few. But leaving aside such scientific difficulties, evolutionism is still riddled from within by profound and unanswerable objections of a philosophic nature. Years before his theory began to be carried to its logical conclusions, Darwin himself was troubled by some of evolution's implications. The reason for Darwin's dilemma should be apparent to any student of modern biology.

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The basic tenor of Darwin's thought was naturalistic. That is, it attempted to give a "natural" explanation for the various forms of life we see around us, as opposed to the "supernatural" explanation which said that these forms were directly created by God. Thus, the origin "of the species" was to be sought in the "laws" and physical processes of nature, not in the will of a Divine Creator. Darwin's followers were quick to extend his speculations to include the origin of life itself as well as the origin of the species. Accordingly, present-day biological theory teaches that life came into existence "naturally" when the right molecules of non-living matter happened to combine in the "pre-biotic soup" of the early earth. Nobel Prize winner Jacques Monod calls it the "central concept of modern biology" that "pure chance, absolutely free but blind, (is) at the very root of the stupendous edifice of evolution." "The universe was not pregnant with life, nor the biosphere with man. Our number came up in a Monte Carlo game."

In summary, life "arose" by pure chance from the non-living primordial soup; it then became diversified into the multiplicity of plant and animal species that we know today through the avenue of pure chance and "natural selection." What this means concerning the origin of man is stated succinctly by leading evolutionist G.G. Simpson: "Man is the result of a purposeless and materialistic process that did not have him in mind. He was not planned. He is a state of matter, a form of life, a sort of animal, and a species of the Order Primates, akin nearly or remotely to all of life and indeed to all that is material."

Morals — "But man can do his duty."

It is at this point that the far-reaching implications of evolutionary theory begin to become apparent. In the first place, if man is only a "state of matter," "the result of a purposeless and materialistic process that did not have him in mind," the dignity and morality of human existence disappears. Man's moral aspirations, as well as his moral actions, are nothing more than mechanistic products of chance. Darwin himself apparently sensed that without God man had no basis for morality, and yet he advocated that man should go ahead and "do his duty." It is not enough, however, to build morality on a foundation suspended in mid-air or to tell men to "just pretend" that morals exist, even if they don't. If man is a cosmic accident, then clearly, the value and pur-

pose of human life are gone.

Knowledge — “The horrid doubt.”

But to come this far is not yet to reach the depths of Darwin’s dilemma. There is a still deeper darkness awaiting the man who discovers that even his own thoughts cannot be trusted, that reason itself is an illusion. For what is the human brain? It is a clump of matter, a chance conglomeration of molecules. And what is human thought? It is a by-product of that chance conglomeration of molecules. But, obviously, chance-produced thoughts are meaningless thoughts. A quotation from Cornelius Van Til may help to illustrate this point: “Suppose we think of a man made of water in an infinitely extended and bottomless ocean of water. Desiring to get out of water, he makes a ladder of water. He sets this ladder upon the water and against the water and then attempts to climb out of the water. So hopeless and senseless a picture must be drawn of the natural man’s methodology based as it is upon the assumption that time or chance is ultimate. On his assumption his own rationality is a product of chance. On his assumption even the laws of logic which he employs are products of chance. The rationality and purpose that he may be searching for are still bound to be products of chance.”

Or, to look at it another way: Man’s thought is an illusion caused by the movement of molecules in his physical brain. In the words of Cabanis, “the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile.” There is, of course, no “soul,” no “spirit,” no “person,” no “center of thinking” in man that stands above and apart from the matter in his skull. (If there was no personality in the “pre-biotic soup,” then there is still none now that this “soup” has come together by chance to form “man.”) Man’s deepest convictions are a product of non-rational chemical reactions in his head; his every thought is mechanistically determined. Thoughts are neither true nor false: they are simply bodily events—somatic secretions—”on the same plane as any other bodily event, like digestion or breathing.” (A. Hoover)

Or, from still another angle but with the same disastrous results, there is the approach of Darwin himself: “But then with me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey’s mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?” Here the sword has swung full circle, for man’s mind cannot be trusted for anything, not even for the theory of evolution itself. All knowledge slips into the void and “man” passes completely out of existence.

Thus, twenty-first century humanistic man flounders hopelessly in the net of his own folly. It is a net of self-contradiction, self-frustration, and self-condemnation. “I will be free,” he says, “free from God and all His restraints; free from the outmoded morality of the Bible; free from the ‘unscientific’ ‘myth’ of creation.” “Free to know all and be all; free to shape my own destiny.” “Free to determine for myself what is good and what is evil, what is true and what is false.” And so the journey begins in high-handed self-sufficiency. Man declares his independence from God. He owns no Creator and he owns no Lawgiver.

But the journey ends in quite a different manner. It ends with “the horrid doubt.” It ends with man screaming and insane. It ends with all morality vanquished, with every aspiration crushed, with reality itself unknown and unknowable. The one who would know all, now finds that he knows nothing. The one who would climb to the stars, now finds himself being hurled headlong into the black abyss of chance from which he sprang.

R.J. Rushdoony says it well: “Wherever man asserts his independence of God, saying in effect, that, while he will deny God, he will not deny life, nor its relationships, values, or society, its science and art, he is involved in contradiction. It is an impossibility for man to deny God and still to have law and order, justice, science, anything, apart from God...Every atheist is an unwilling believer to the extent that he has any element of justice or order in his life, to the very extent that he is even alive and enjoys life.”

No Escape

Modern man is inexcusable for his unbelief. He knows that he is more than the energy particle extended. He knows that truth and beauty, rationality and morality, are not an illusion. He can't even live from day to day without betraying his confidence that knowledge is possible and duty inescapable. Yet rather than acknowledge the One who so obviously created him, he chooses as a desperate expedient to bow before the god called “Chance.” Anything is better than submitting to the word and will of his Creator.

The Bible declares that God has made man “in His own image.” (Genesis 1:26.27; James 3:9) Man, therefore, cannot look at himself without seeing the reflection of God's own likeness. He knows God, His existence and character, simply by knowing himself. Though it has been terribly marred by sin, the image of God is still the essential ingredient of his humanity and testifies unflinchingly to him that he is more than a product of chance. Man has an immediate awareness of God, which he cannot escape as long as he remains “man”—as long as any spark of sanity or morality remains within him.

So you too find God's image stamped indelibly on your heart. However far you may have drifted from the morality of the Bible, still you know that right and wrong exist, that you are a sinner and stand condemned by even your own poor standards of goodness. And, however much you may try to suppress it, there still comes welling from deep within you the cry that you are not an animal, nor a machine, but a person. You didn't get this from the dinosaur; you got it from the God who created you and calls you to Himself. Why not throw down your arms of rebellion and return to Him? To serve Him is true liberty and to know Him is life eternal.