

ATHEISM'S GREAT COSMOGENIC MYTH

"[C]ontrary to what is widely assumed by evolutionary biologists today, it has always been the anti-evolutionists, not the evolutionists, in the scientific community who have stuck rigidly to the facts and adhered to a more strictly empirical approach...

...

"Ultimately, the Darwinian theory of evolution is no more nor less than the great cosmogenic myth of the twentieth century..."

Dr Michael Denton¹

Darwin's theory of evolution is not a scientific theory at all. It is a philosophical one. The idea that reality is not stable but in constant process took root in the mood that spread after the Protestant revolt. The germ of the idea is to be found in the Nominalism of the English Franciscan, William of Ockham² who rejected the moderate realism of the mediaeval scholastics. It is no accident that Martin Luther was influenced by Ockham. The groundwork for a modern 'process' philosophy was established by René Descartes' with his shift away from objective reality 100 years or so after Luther.

Traces of the evolutionary idea may be found in the works of Rousseau and in the studies and writings of Goethe. It owes much to the thought of the German idealist, Hegel. The English philosopher Herbert Spencer [1820-1903] posited evolution as a universal law before Darwin published his *The Origin of the Species* in 1859. Spencer refined his thought in *First Principles of a New System of Philosophy*, a book published in 1862, where he wrote:

"Evolution is an integration of matter accompanied by a dissipation of movement, during which matter passes from an indefinite homogeneity which is incoherent, to a definite heterogeneity which is coherent..."³

Spencer had, like all modern philosophers, to address the two dilemmas Descartes left as legacy: 1) how one could be sure of anything beyond what the senses showed; and, 2) where to place the balance between reality and personal perception. Spencer was an agnostic but his thought provided the groundwork for a systematic atheism. This Darwin effected in his application of the theory of evolution to science.

The modern natural scientist is, thus, the unwitting heir of a philosophy determined by the influence of Protestantism. Protestantism is not, contrary to belief, a religion, but a turning away from God under a guise of religion. At root, it is atheist. Now, atheism cannot flourish where the formal and final causality demanded by realism dominate intellectual life. It was inevitable, then, that under Protestantism's influence these would be suppressed.

¹ *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, London, 1985, pp. 353-4 and 358

² William of Ockham [1288-1348] Nominalism, ie 'name-ism', asserts that the names we give to the various works of nature have no correspondence with any fixedness in the things, their universal natures. The names we give are only human conventions.

³ Herbert Spencer, *First Principles of a New System of Philosophy*, 1862, § 145; quoted in F. J. Thonnard, *A Short History of Philosophy*, transl. Edward A Maziarz, Desclée, New York, 1956, p.791

One of the strains that flowed from Descartes' subjectivism led to Hegel's idealism: the other led to empiricism, a preoccupation with the evidence of the senses coupled with a denial of the worth of intellect and of its immaterial activity and eventually to materialism, the philosophy which denies any causality but the material. Darwin applied this materialism to science.

Darwin's evolutionism had fundamental moral implications. In undermining the need for any formal or final causality, he removed the need for any guiding mind or ultimate maker and conserver of reality: he removed from men's minds the need for God.⁴ Once do away with God and you are free of moral demands and the need to account for your actions. This sense of non-responsibility is the practical evil Darwinism has worked in the world over the last 150 years. It is the reason the average modern citizen sees no wrong in contraception, in the fertilisation *in vitro* of human embryos and their abuse in stem cell research, and why he is prepared to tolerate the killing of the unborn in abortion-on-demand.

The Lack of Metaphysics

The philosophical understanding of the modern scientist is limited to the material. He views each natural thing as an accidental collection of characteristics rather than an instance of a determinate nature with fixed properties. Notwithstanding the evidence of his senses which show this fixedness and determinacy—with such rigour that whole sciences can be built on their foundations—he prefers to regard the natural thing as changeable; in flux; on the way to becoming something else. He thinks his approach at the forefront of rational thought when it is nothing but a return to the follies of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus⁵.

The scientist will, as he sits at his computer, tacitly concede the fourfold causality of the machine in front of him: the matter from which it is made—its *material* cause; the intricate formality according to which the matter is designed and constructed—its *formal* cause; the inevitability of a maker, or makers—its *efficient* cause; and, the reason for its existence, an instrument to aid men in their considerations and works—its *final* cause.⁶ Yet when he turns to his proper subject, the causes of the elements of the natural world, he will deny the existence of any but the *material* cause and pretend that factors which are not causes at all, time and chance, are sufficient to make up for any lacunae in logic. His attitude to the natural world may be consistent with Darwinian materialism but it is incompatible with life in the real world. Whether wittingly or not, he is intellectually dishonest.

He is unaware just how radically materialism limits his world view, how blinkered is his attitude to life and to living things. He will hypothesise on the development of life, but he is utterly incapable of explaining how life first came to exist. Nor is he

⁴ Darwin's wife, Emma, saw this clearly. Cf. *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, pp. 53-4; and the entry in wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_darwin#Overwork.2C_illness.2C_and_marriage

⁵ Heraclitus [c.545-480 BC] taught that nothing ever remains the same with itself for an instant, that "we never step into the same river twice". In other words, reality is nothing but pure change, pure become.

⁶ This analysis applies to every work of human artifice.

able to specify what it is that constitutes life. New Zealand molecular biologist, Dr Michael Denton, has challenged the scientific establishment with his books *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, and *Nature's Destiny*⁷. Yet he shares the difficulties of his fellow scientists.

“If the cosmos is uniquely fit for life of the carbon-based type that exists on Earth, and if the whole pattern of evolution was indeed written into the cosmic script, then it seems reasonable to suppose that the origin of life—the transition from chemistry to the cell—might be also written into the cosmic script... [But] it has to be admitted that at present, despite an enormous effort, we still have no idea how this occurred, and the event remains as enigmatic as ever.”⁸

The scientist may concede the obvious, that all living things are automotive (they move themselves), but his materialism prevents him acknowledging what is equally obvious, that living things fall into three categories, the vegetative, the sensitive and the intellectual. Dr Denton again—

“[T]he idea that life might be fundamentally a discontinuous phenomenon, runs counter to the whole thrust of modern biological thought. The infusion with the spirit of continuity has been so prolonged and so deeply imbibed that for most biologists it has become quite literally inconceivable that life might not be a continuous phenomenon.”⁹

Why there are Three Modes of Life

There are three factors, and only three, that determine any operation: the **end** for which the operation is performed; the **form** according to which the operation is performed; and its **execution**. The three modes of living things correspond to these three factors, as St Thomas Aquinas explains:

“[A] thing is said to live in so far as it operates of itself and not as moved by another. The more perfectly this power is found in anything, the more perfect is the life of that thing. In things that move and are moved a threefold order is found. In the first place the **end** moves the agent; and a principal agent is that which acts through its own **form**; and sometimes it does so through some instrument that acts by virtue not of its own form, but that of the principal agent, to which instrument it belongs only to **execute** the action.”¹⁰

He first deals with vegetative life:

“Accordingly, there are things that move themselves, not in respect of any form or end naturally inherent in them, but only in respect of the **executing** of the movement—the form by which they act, and the end of the action, being alike determined for them by their nature. Of this kind are plants, which move themselves according to their inherent nature, with regard only to executing the movements of growth and decay.”¹¹

⁷ *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, London, 1985; *Nature's Destiny: How the Laws of Biology reveal Purpose in the Universe*, The Free Press, New York, 1998.

⁸ Dr Michael Denton, *Nature's Destiny*, op. cit., pp. 292-3

⁹ Dr Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, op. cit., p. 353. Sir David Attenborough illustrated this idea in a television program entitled “The Song of the Earth”. Cf. *Decoding David Attenborough* at http://www.superflumina.org/decoding_DA.html

¹⁰ *Summa Theologiae* I, 18, 3; emphasis added.

¹¹ *Ibid*, emphasis added.

The *nutrition* of the plant operates according to a determinate process; its *growth* occurs not at random, but to a determinate size and shape; the *generation* of its species occurs through innate mechanisms. Thus the **form** of the plant's operations is determined not by itself but by its nature, and the **end** of these operations, the conservation of its own life and of that of its species, is likewise determined by its nature. Thus, in the plant, life signifies automotion but only at the level of **execution**.

St Thomas goes on to delineate the contrasting characteristics of sensitive, ie, animal, life:

"Other things have self movement in a higher degree, that is, not only with regard to **executing** the movement but even as regards the **form**, the principle of movement, which form they acquire of themselves. Of this kind are animals in which the principle of movement is not a naturally implanted form, but one received through sense. Hence, the more perfect is their sense the more perfect is their power of self-movement. Such as have only the sense of touch, as shellfish, move only with the motion of expansion and contraction; and thus their movement hardly exceeds that of plants. Whereas such as have the sensitive power in perfection so as to recognise not only connection and touch but also objects apart from themselves, can move themselves to a distance by progressive movement. Yet although animals of the latter kind receive through sense the form that is the principle of their movement, nevertheless they cannot of themselves propose to themselves the end of their operation, or movement; for this has been implanted in them by nature; and by natural instinct they are moved to any action through the form apprehended by sense."¹²

When the fox chases the rabbit, it runs hither and thither, because it sees the rabbit, which is potentially food for it, changing its direction to avoid it. Not only does the fox move itself to **execution** of the action, but it moves itself according to a **form**, knowledge of the rabbit (and of its erratic flight) due to the powers of sight, smell and hearing with which it is endowed. In the same way the rabbit flees the fox, **executing** the action according to a similar **form** of knowledge of the fox (and of its pursuit), perceiving the fox through the same senses of sight, smell and hearing, as a danger to its life and, so, something to be avoided.

But neither animal determines the **end** of its action, whether of pursuit or of flight. We acknowledge this in common speech when we say that each acts according to instinct. The fox chases the rabbit that it may eat, and so live. *It does not choose this end.* The rabbit flees the fox that it may save its life: *no more than the fox does it choose this end.* In each case the end is determined for the animal. In pursuit, as in flight, each animal is acting for its own preservation. It is the same with the act of generation done for the preservation of its species. Here too, the animal operates at the level both of execution and of form but it does not determine the **end** of its action, the maintenance of its species. Again, it acts according to instinct. Accordingly, animal life involves automotion not only at the level of **execution**, but also at the level of **form**.

¹² Ibid, emphasis added.

St Thomas then turns to the third, and most significant, of these three levels:

“[S]uch animals as move themselves with respect to an **end** they themselves propose are superior to these. This can only be done by reason and intellect whose province it is to know the proportion between the end and the means to that end and duly coordinate them. Hence a more perfect degree of life is that of intelligent beings; for their power of self-movement is more perfect. This is shown by the fact that in one and the same man the intellectual faculty moves the sensitive powers, and these by their command move the organs of movement.”¹³

In contrast with plants and animals, man moves himself not only as regards the **execution** and the **form** of his acts, but also as regards their **end**. He needs food to sustain his life. His internal organs emulate those of the plant in transforming it into living tissue in *nutrition*. Like the plant, *growth* in his body occurs to a determinate size, shape and proportion. He pursues appropriate food, like the brute animal, according to the form of sense knowledge. But, distinctively from the brute, he chooses the end of this action—to eat this, rather than that; to eat less, rather than more; or to refrain according to a rational motive from eating at all. He is not determined by his nature to an end but chooses that end for himself. The same goes for generation. He is not determined like the brute animal, but free to choose the partner with whom he will bring into the world new members of his species.

Darwinian Evolution’s Shortcomings

‘Life’ when said of a human being, then, signifies something radically different from that word when said of a brute animal. The difference in meaning is even more fundamental than the difference in meaning of that word when said of a plant and when said of an animal. For only those creatures endowed with intellect can choose the end of their acts. And only man is so endowed. So great is the difference between man and the brutes that Aristotle says somewhere in his works: “The least degree of intellect in one is greater than the whole of the rest of living being.” No matter how refined sensitive (ie, animal) life may be, it can never lift itself out of its nature to the level of the intellective, for the intellective operates at a level infinitely higher than the sensitive.

Because of the limitations of the materialism in which it is grounded, Darwin’s theory of evolution asserts no more than a quantitative shift among the kinds of different living things. But the difference between plant and animal is not one of quantity, it is one of quality; it is not one of degree, but of kind—of *specification*. A being limited to act only at the level of **execution**, can never raise itself to act at the level of **form**. It is prevented from doing so by its design. One might as well say that a line could change itself, without the assistance of its draftsman, into a plane figure. Even if the theory of evolution was true within the category of plant life—and one plant could somehow be transmuted into another by some quantitative shift—it could never lift itself out of its category of the singly automotive into that of the doubly automotive, the category of animal life.

¹³ Ibid, emphasis added.

A fortiori, even if the theory of evolution was true within the category of animal life—and one animal could somehow be transmuted into another by some quantitative shift—it could never lift itself to the level of the trebly automotive, the category of human life. Again, it is prevented from doing so by its *specification*. One might as well say that a plane figure, a plan, could change itself without the assistance of a builder, into a three dimensional figure! Moreover, man, free to choose the **end** of his operations, does so in virtue of a principle which is not only qualitatively different from that according to which the brute animal operates, but is not even material. Not even the wildest exponents of evolutionism would allow that matter could somehow transmute itself into the immaterial.¹⁴ Their materialism prevents them even admitting the existence of the immaterial.

The Scientific Dreamtime

The formal cause of anything, whether natural or artificial, is *that which makes it be what it is*. In each natural thing this form follows rigorously one of a number of patterns variously called its ‘nature’, ‘essence’ or ‘quiddity’.¹⁵ These patterns are fixed and determinate. In living things, the formal cause is its soul, the vital principle which not only makes it *be* (ie, exist), but makes it *live according to its kind* (plant in its species; animal in its kind; or man) for, as Aristotle said, “among living things to live is the same as to be”¹⁶ and living things exercise the act of living in one or other of these three categories. In natural things these forms are determined by their author. The forms of artificial things, in contrast, are determined by man but there is no material effect man can produce which is not simply some modification of one or other of the works of nature.¹⁷ Whatever is of nature is received: the root *na-*, found in the words nature, native, naked, natural, signifies ‘given’.

The scientist may hypothesize that some day in the future man will create life, but he has no idea how this will be achieved. Like so many of the assertions in Darwinian evolutionary theory, this one is grounded in wishful thinking. Man is not the author of nature, or of anything in nature¹⁸; nor will he ever be: he is himself a part of nature. The assertion that man will one day create life is reminiscent of the descendants of Noah—reported in *Genesis* chapter 11—striving to build a tower that would reach to heaven. There is only one who is able to endow a thing with life, just as there is only one who is able to give the living thing *esse* (be, or existence); and that is God, as St Thomas Aquinas shows.¹⁹ He teaches that God cannot communicate to

¹⁴ Though there is an attempt to do so in the maunderings of Teilhard de Chardin.

¹⁵ ‘Essence’ signifies what IS; quiddity’ signifies WHAT is; ‘nature’ signifies how the thing operates. The natural is that which proceeds from an intrinsic principle without knowledge of end but with knowledge of end presupposed in its author.

¹⁶ *De Anima* II, 37

¹⁷ The artificial is that which proceeds from an extrinsic principle in accordance with inclination of the subject.

¹⁸ To respond to one objection that might be raised to this, man is not the author of his offspring in the act of generation. He acts merely as instrumental cause. The end of his act, the new living human being, is determined, not by him, but by his author. The author of any effect knows the effect he produces in all its detail, yet a man never knows the character of his offspring until well after he is born.

¹⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 45, a. 5

another the ability to create because it requires infinite power—the power to produce something from nothing—and only God has this infinite power.²⁰

All that human science has ever been able to do with living things is to modify what already exists. The growing of cells or their modification *in vitro* is nothing but experimentation with existing vegetative or sensitive life.²¹ Bereft of any sense of metaphysics, and immersed in the spirit of atheism which circumscribes the age, it was inevitable that in his experimentations with living things the scientist should cross the boundaries of morality.

Materialism's Problems

Insouciance about causes: A cause is that which exercises influence unto the 'be' (the *esse*, or existence) of a thing dependent in regard to its be. There are four causes of any effect in the real world²². The least of these four is the material cause: the least because it hardly serves the effect save as the substrate in which the effect is produced. Materialism's denial of any causality apart from that available from matter then, inclines its followers to deny the existence of any causality at all.

This is the reason its exponents think that the observation of an alleged sequential train of natural forms on earth is sufficient for them to take it as certain that the same will recur in any other hypothetical material continuum in similar conditions. It is the reason materialists have no difficulty accepting that influences which are not causes at all, time and chance, are sufficient to explain the evolutionary thesis. It is the reason they think that once the disposing conditions are present, the existence of life is inevitable. It is the reason they are desperate to find life elsewhere than on earth.

Confusing thought with reality: Descartes' initiative in turning his back on reality in the early 17th century has had profound effects on intellectual life ever since. One notable effect occurs in the realm of logic, the inability of the thinker to distinguish between the categories the logicians call 'signified act' and 'exercised act'; in other words, the confusion of mental being with real being. This is inevitable when a philosopher begins his study of reality by conceding that the first thing he knows is not reality but his own perceptions. The defect manifests itself especially in Darwinism whose proponents will with one breath concede that evolution is a theory, and with the next insist that it is a reality.

Confusing agent with principal: The souls of living things are beyond the consideration of the scientist whose discipline it is to consider their properties, not their underlying substance. In a sane world the scientist would acknowledge the

²⁰ “[W]e see that a saw, in cutting wood, which it does by the property of its own form, produces the form of a bench, which is the proper effect of the principal agent. Now the proper effect of God creating is what is presupposed to all other effects, that is, absolute being. Hence, nothing else can act dispositively and instrumentally to this effect, since creation is not from anything presupposed, which can be disposed by the action of an instrumental agent. Therefore it is impossible for any creature to create...” Ibid.

²¹ Cf., Dr Michael Denton, *Nature's Destiny*, op. cit., ch. 14 *The Dream of Asilomar*, pp. 321 et seq.

²² Cf. *God Is Not Material*, at http://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/Godisnotmaterial.pdf

existence of the soul of the living thing from its effects. Under the present dispensation he admits the effects, but denies the cause. Consistent with this, he attributes the effects not to the soul of the thing with its powers but to its organs. So he confuses the organ of sight with the power of sight; the organs of locomotion with the power of locomotion; the brain with the intellect²³.

Just as the soul of the living thing is beyond science's discipline, so is the act the soul exercises—*life*. Life is not a property of the living thing, something added to it. It is something substantial, of the very essence of the thing: it is something that involves its very existence, for "in living things to live is the same as to be".

Subjectivism triumphant—once again

The frequent visitor to this website will be aware of the attention given here to the curse of the modern world, subjectivism, the attitude that what matters is not reality *but what the thinker thinks reality should be*. He will realise that Darwinian evolutionism is yet another—perhaps the most successful—instance of the triumph of subjectivism in the world.

Modern man prides himself on his knowledge: it is a knowledge which has come at a price. All the advantages materialism has wrought for mankind cannot outweigh the spiritual losses he has suffered as a result of the revolt against God initiated by Martin Luther almost 500 years ago.

Michael Baker

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²³ Because he thinks there is nothing real in sight beyond the eye and its connectivity to the brain, nothing real in locomotion beyond legs or other material means of self-movement, nothing real in intellect beyond its material organ, the brain.