

# A Perspective on the Theory of Evolution for Christian Scientists

The Institute for Christianity

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## I. Why Evolution Science for Christians?

A Christian's view of science is highly dependent on whether one believes that this universe created by God is for the growth of the human spirit through experience and discoveries, or for the random amusement of God at the expense of human suffering and imperfections. We should believe that God is love, human suffering has purpose, and knowledge supports our spiritual growth. Then, Christianity is for science conducted with the inspiration offered by the Holy Spirit and the faith that all knowledge will converge to God's truth when complete. We know that God's will is to help us understand His patterns of creation. Our inability to grasp His ways is a result of our rational arrogance as oppose to the Creator's deceptions.

In this context, the Theory of Evolution as formulated by Charles Darwin is good science but incomplete science. To understand why the science is incomplete and why the incompleteness has led to philosophical differences between scientists with faith and without faith, we must carefully separate the scientific evidence from scientific theory. Further, we must question the degree of credibility for different pieces of evidence and examine the different conceptual ways in which God's pattern of creation can be most accurately described. Our goal by this means is to figure out the real issues in the evolution vs. creationism debate and why

Christians have been so unable to use the incomplete knowledge acquired through evolution science to further their spiritual understanding about the work of God.

## II. Scientific Evidence Pertaining to Evolution

Initiated by Darwin and supported by over a century of additional observations, we now have substantial data to indicate that species of life on Earth change in their internal and physical characteristics based on genetic changes between generations. This is most noticeable in bacteria and viruses where the organisms seem to be constantly trying to genetically change to find best characteristics for survival in new environments. However, changes in higher order life in response to changing environmental conditions such as reduced food supply, harsh terrain conditions, and new predators can also be observed. Paleontological fossil evidence further indicates that such changes within species have occurred for millions of years and that the similarity between species creates enticing patterns of change to suggest *transmutation* – species changing into other species. In the age of genetics, the identification of common gene segments and traceable patterns of gene change between species further support the notion of transmutation and the evolutionary concept of *common decent* for groups of species. Despite such evidence, transmutation has not been directly observed in the span of experimen-

tal observation. Also, the acceptance of paleontological evidence hinges on the faith that we are not tricked with that remains of life that never existed, and the acceptance of genetic evidence hinges on the faith that we are not fooled with statistical anomalies such as the emergence of related genetic patterns without common historical association.

In studying the characteristics of many species, scientists further noticed that all the characteristics observed thus far tend to serve a useful purpose in the survival of the species. This suggests that species change is governed or highly influenced by the need to improve individual and group survival under a process termed *functionalism*. In the manifestation of functionalism, species that suffer high rates of attrition from environmental threats tend to survive by having many offspring in the process of *struggle for existence*. Among the offspring, the process of *natural selection* (survival of the fittest) then weeds out the weak so that the best adapted of each generation will carry on the process of evolution. Natural selection in lower animal species is supported by extensive zoological evidence on animal behaviors such as predators eating the weakest of their prey. Even when species have achieved social organization to protect individual members the force of natural selection is still at work in determining the survival of entire species. Paleontological history reveals many events of species extinction reflecting either the emergence of more evolved new species or evolutionary dead ends in the advancement of life.

The need to adapt / improve to survive is so great that species behavioral patterns in mating respond to it. Experimental evidence has repeatedly shown that animals tend to be drawn to the fittest of their kind for mating thus ensuring that the best genes are more frequently passed on. In humans, experi-

mental evidence does show that we respond to standard characteristics of physical health, fertility, and mental acuity in sexual selection. However, humans also respond to deeper essence of being that is reflected in caring, loving, and sacrificing behaviors. The ability and willingness to be a supportive spouse, protective parent, and helping friend is not absolutely determined by human genetics, but such qualities of the human essence is still valued in the advancement of human life. In Darwin's later work, *The Descent of Man*, he emphasized this form of human evolution based on our capacity for free will over the competition to prove physical superiority.

### **III. The Theoretical Aspects of Evolution**

Based on identified evolutionary processes, many scientists currently believe that all the species of life on Earth stem from progressive generations of extinct parent species (common descent) traceable all the way to the point where life started as a single celled organism. This use of evolutionary processes to explain the origins of all the species and perhaps the origin of life is thus the controversial theory that has troubled Biblical scholars for many years. While many extinct parent species have been discovered to support the theory that common descent is a prevailing phenomenon across all life on Earth, there are no complete trails of evolutionary data to prove this fact. Because the actual observation of full transmutation still remains elusive even though species can be artificially hybridized, scientists tend to believe in the process of slow change, *gradualism*, in evolution. However, there is very little evidence to show that fast change, major single generational genetic shifts, is not possible. If fast change does occur periodically in the course of evolution, it would make the establishment of evolutionary paths and the determination of evolutionary control mechanisms far more complex.

The mechanism for evolutionary behavior is the weak link in research. Darwin initially considered the idea of *pangeneses* where the environment instructs the genome on how it needs to change. Pangenesis would explain how evolutionary paths have made so relatively few dead ends in the course of achieving modern species. If the mutation of genome is strictly by either *random change* or a *gradual drift* of DNA sequences as proposed by reductionist biology, then such a blind single step control scheme should lead to magnitudes more dead end paths of evolution. Fossils of failed adaptations should be everywhere even when just evolving from species A to species B, but they are not. This is particular true when considering the complexity of higher order life. The rejection of pangenesis thus creates a biological mystery with potentially a spiritual component.

The complexity of life and the accuracy in which life is able to achieve such complexity does appear to contradict the narrow view of genetic determinism that dominated biology over the past decades. However, with arguments by leading scientists such as Paul H. Silverman who advocated the human genome project and more recent scientific results, scientists are starting to reconsider traditional genetic determinism. It seems that there may yet be poorly understood trans-genetic mechanisms in the cells that provide it with much more intelligent adaptability than previously believed. Some of these mechanisms may lie in the histone structures of the chromosome, the potential role of RNA as additional genetic reference frames, and the activities of proteins. However, scientists of faith must further question whether God completely instilled the controls of life within biophysical elements or whether God established a tie between the physical cell and the spiritual matrix that

sustains life. The existence of this spiritual matrix, which in human is the everlasting soul that is in the image of God, has been incredibly hard to prove through science. But, there are those working in fringe scientific areas that have generated sketching results in anomalous behaviors associated consciousness to suggest that there is an energy component to life. What is important in all this discussion is that once scientists yield on the belief that they know exactly all the forces in the evolution of life, Christianity and science can begin to dialogue about the truth.

#### **IV. Converging Christian Understanding with Evolution Science**

Given the strong evidence supporting evolutionary processes within the species life, the almost undeniable evidence that the universe went through billions of years of change after the big-bang event, and the theoretical leaning for scientifically discovered processes to be the exclusive explanation for all of existence, Christians are faced with two rational debates. The first debate is whether scientific knowledge can converge with the Biblical description of the six day creation cycle by God. The second debate is how God uses the process of evolution. The first debate determines whether Christians can live in the current human society formed by the endeavors of science and the second debate determines whether Christian scientists can resolve the feud between creationism and evolution.

The heart of the first debate is our understanding of time and rates of change in the universe. *Young Earth Creationists* in the Christian community clearly believes that creation occurred in six human days as determined by the rotation of the Earth, and thus rejects all scientific evidence. However, just because creation occurred in six days does not mean that God is prevented from

conducting all the changes discovered by science in a highly accelerated manner. Thus, scientific evidence could still fit into young earth beliefs, but the scientific assumption that the physics of change in the universe down to the motion of the atoms as being constant must be adjusted. On the first day of creation, everything in the universe would have moved at hyper speeds. Then the atoms moved slower and slower until creation is complete. Instead of adjusting the laws of physics to accommodate a human interpretation of days, Christians can read Genesis and very easily see creation as in the days of God which is not governed by time but by how much work God has done before a break. This view which aligns with the beliefs of *Day Age Creationists* in the Christian community resolves the first debate and allows Christians to explore the world of science.

The second debate of how God uses the processes of evolution yield a range of rational possibilities that contrast with the argument that evolution is so complete a natural process that there is no evidence of God. This latter atheistic view known as *Philosophical Material Evolution* is a non-Christian belief and not a scientific conclusion. Though this belief may have been strengthened by Christian attacks on scientific endeavors, Christians can never allow it to be taught as truth within science in secondary schools and universities. With God using the processes of evolution, the options include: 1.) God preferring to use direct powers of life creation that is outside of evolutionary patterns (*Progression Creationism*), 2.) God preferring to control evolutionary processes to achieve complexity (*Intelligent Design*), 3.) God being constrained to only influencing the process of evolution (*Theistic Evolution*), and 4.) God starting the process of evolution and then relinquishing control (*Methodological Material Evolution*).

The Biblical support for God being able to easily work beyond the bounds of evolution and rules of physics is affirmed through the powers of Jesus as he spontaneously created thousands of fish to feed the masses, turned mud into the components of a man's eye, and commanded the weather. But, science cannot accept this observational history unless such powers can be demonstrated today or that the source of such powers can be measured / detected. So until the return of Jesus or the validation of spiritual energy, the acts of God in directly shaping the body of man are based on faith not science. Faith is exactly what God wants man to have and science cannot disprove this faith in God's supreme power.

Jesus' miracles showed, however, a preference for using existing genetic patterns such as that of a fish caught in Galilee to spontaneously create new life. This preference and the scientific knowledge of evolutionary processes lead us to question why genetic courses are so important to God. The answer may in part lie in the fact that God has made all of physical creation reflect the process of human spiritual growth over the centuries. So the evolution of the species constantly reminds us of an evolution of human spiritual branches where:

1. Spirits with great promise of producing powerful offspring such as that of Abraham are guided to flourish.
2. Spirits which could have offspring that advance beyond the limitation of the parents are allowed to continue.
3. Spirits with great levels of maturity and / or purity such as that of Paul and God's other servants or that of children and the innocent are sometimes led to depart from the evolutionary path.
4. Spirits which could not have offspring that advances toward the will of God are

barred from evolving or even cut down as in the people of Sodom.

Knowing that human spirits are evolving under the guidance of the Lord, Christians empowered by awareness must struggle continuously to improve the spiritual qualities of love, faith, and hope in themselves, their children, and others. If physical struggles to improve and adapt encourage our spirits to grow, then evolution science and Christianity will have a level of connectivity. However, it would always be far easier for God to control the evolution of the species to create the body of man than to control the evolution of man's spirit to create His coming kingdom.

If God can work beyond evolution, then God can control evolution in a variety of ways. On the seventh day of creation when God rested, the Lord may literally have allowed His process of evolving the body and the spirit to run for awhile without intervention to concur with Methodological Material Evolution. Throughout most of the evolutionary processes however, the God that looks after every hair on our head would likely have controlled every part of evolution for the needs of man so that the results match the argument of Intelligent Design. Finally, in these last days before the coming of God's kingdom, the free will and self-evolution of the human spirit may be so important that God's efforts have remained in the framework of evolution to support the notion of Theistic Evolution. No matter how God has chosen to work in the course of human development, Christian faith tells us the omnipotent and omniscient God knows exactly how His creation will turn out along every step of the way to His kingdom. And, the fact that the Lord's plan is perfect is far more important than how the plan is carried out.

When the Lord chooses to let evolution run or to nudge evolution within its understood frameworks, His presence and ways are nearly impossible to detect by means of science. When the Lord decides to work beyond the bounds of evolution and physics, then only Christian awareness through the Holy Spirit can lend insight into His ways. Thus, it is only when the Lord is actively controlling evolution that we can hope to detect His efforts by scientific means. To do this, Christians and scientists must work together and recognize that many times the debate is about how God works and not whether there is God. Intelligent Design marvels at God's control but Methodological Evolution marvels at God's initial design which may include building intelligence down to the genetic level. Both may be valid considerations. In detecting God's control mechanism, researchers must focus on the connection between the spiritual and physical. Until that connection can be made, the process of Intelligent Design can only be regarded as a scientific conjecture. By accepting the conjecture status of Intelligent Design, Christian scientists can then move ahead into a new realm of scientific exploration.

## **V. Evolution Research Guided Faith**

Forms of energy and matter in science are identified by measuring effects on the surround world. In the Christian realm the spiritual presence of God is affirmed as it touches Christian spirits. However, scientists who are far from a spiritual relationship with God cannot accept the observation of Christians as measurements of merit. Therefore, a scientific endeavor to connect the spirit with the physical on the issue of evolution must focus on the observation of patterns of change that defies any possible physical mechanisms and on the behavioral characteristics of spiritual energy. The first challenge of identifying patterns of challenge

has been engaged by some advocates of Intelligent Design, but the conflict between these advocates and scientists has in many cases resulted in a lack of scientific rigor by the Intelligent Design researchers and an unwillingness to explore this potential branch of science by other researchers. This feud must be resolved.

On the challenge of modeling the behavioral characteristics of spiritual energy, scientists must question the nature of God in ways that Christians may have never dared to explore. Though Christians understand that no one can fathom the full nature of God, we also know that God does want us to know Him, rise above our fear of Him, and ask of Him for understanding. So, let us work with the methods of scientific inquiry and dare to explore the essence of God. As His children, we can help turn rationality into awareness and doubt into understanding. The key scientific question to ask in modeling the spirit is why would spiritual energy emerge in a basic concept of existence that is broader than just the material universe. A rational hypothesis is that the first element of existence cannot be matter even at the level of quarks or any known forms of energy because these components of the known universe have too many set properties / characteristics. The move from non-existence to existence must yield a far simpler element without the constraints of mass, volume, gravity, spin states, waveforms, propagation rate, and work equivalence. Because of this unfathomable simplicity, the first element that predates the universe should have the ability over the course of change to organize into an essence of ultimate complexity that transcends sentience. Thus, existence at the beginning would instantly challenge non-existence with an entity that even scientists must term God who moves across the sea of first elements. The force in non-existence that attacks the organization of God would

then be the ultimate essence of evil. The will of God in defeating non-existence by organizing all of the first elements in existence (spiritual energy) and creating the universe of matter and energy (the material world) on top of the first elements is the definition of good – God is existence and God is good. The will of God in creating other complex entities in the image of His own spiritual matrix to share in existence is the definition of love.

This scientific model for God that leads to an image straight out of Genesis does not in any way diminish His wondrous works and our relationship with Him. Instead, a theory that regards spiritual energy as a very real component of existence can bridge the divide between science and faith as well as evolution and Christian understanding of God's ways. The permeation of spiritual energy across all parts of the material universe would mean that the material universe, matter and energy, can be restructured through the manipulation of spiritual energy by the omnipotence of God and the power of God granted to His children. This mechanism of control, if it can be proven by measurement of effects, yields a scientific link to all the branches of creationism and forms an integrated concept of spirit and body. This integration given evolutionary processes would suggest that regardless of whether God evolved the worldly body of man from apes, the spirit of man could have been created by God in an Eden that existed between the material and spiritual realms. Therefore, the story of man is not necessarily traced along the path of the material body which could have stretched back to single-celled life but instead along the path of spiritual matrix formation and integration with a prepared material body. According to the Bible, humanity essentially began when man learned to farm and such a notion of what constitutes man in spirit and body is quite unique from

the species of homo-sapiens sapiens (physical man) that wandered the land for tens of thousands of years. In fact, the Bible talks of Cain encountering such people and being protected by God's mark.

## **VI. Scientific Priorities and Christian Priorities**

In the end Christians care about the spirit. The creation then growth of the human spirit does not conflict with the evolution of the species. It would be good if Christians can help scientists discover new ways to detect the effects of the spirit on the material world, and such accomplishments could answers many questions that still exist in evolution science. However, Christians must respect the rigor and methodologies of science even as they troubled by the often lack of faith and spiritual insight among scientists.

In the end scientists care about the verification of truth in the measurable world and

such activities should not conflict with faith in the activities of the spiritual realm. As long as scientists recognize that some truths might not be verifiable by current means and that the currently accepted truth can be overturned with new evidence, then the endeavors of science can greatly contribute to Christian understanding and help correct areas of Christian misunderstanding. However, scientists must respect the fact that despite their towering intellects, others may yet possess greater spiritual powers to feel the truth of creation directly from the Creator. Christian scientists walk between these two worlds and may be the most important players in our pursuit of the truth and will of the Lord. However, their journey must remain pure – pure in faith about the powers of the spirit and pure in thought that is uncorrupted by the arrogance of intellect.