



Opinion

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Religious Doctrines, Darwinian Evolution, and Scientific Research

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***Corresponding author:** Malcolm L Cross, Independent Researcher retired from Tarleton State University, the United States.**Received Date:** February 25, 2025**Published Date:** March 07, 2025**Abstract**

Using religion to try to refute a scientific theory may sharply limit one's ability to develop an understanding of both religion and science. But seeing religion and science as not mutually exclusive may lead to a greater appreciation and understanding of both. Prominent faith-based theories about Darwinism show both the dangers and benefits of using religion to study science.

Introduction

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection (or descent with modification) has provoked intense debate among Christians, and between Christians and those of other faiths, or no faith at all, since the publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Darwin's religious detractors have long argued that Darwinism undermines the authority of the Bible and encourages crime, racism, eugenics, fascism, and communism. To discredit Darwinism they have developed several faith-based doctrines, including Scientific Creationism and the Theory of Intelligent Design (ID).

But other Christians and those of other faiths nonetheless see no contradiction between Darwinism and Christianity or religion in general. The doctrine holding that belief in Darwinism is compatible with religious faith is frequently called Theistic Evolution or Evolutionary Creationism.

Each side insists its respective approach to Darwinism enhances an understanding of the science of the origins and development of life on earth. But while those who use religious doctrines to conduct research must make their findings conform to predetermined faith-based conclusions, those who see Darwinism (or science in general) as being complementary rather than contradictory are

free to conduct research without predetermined outcomes.

Discussion

At the core of the dispute between religious opponents and religious (and secular) supporters of Darwinism is a dispute over the very concept of "science" and how scientific research is to be conducted. The National Academy of Sciences says:

Science is a way of knowing about the natural world. It is limited to explaining the natural world through natural causes. Science can say nothing about the supernatural. Whether God exists or not is a question about which science is neutral [1].

Darwinism's religious critics claim that the failure to consider a role for God in the creation of life on earth implies that God is either irrelevant or non-existent and encourages the development of a wide range of social pathologies. Typical of such beliefs is the statement of Henry Morris, a leading critic of Darwinism, who wrote that as a result of such thinking:

Everything has seemingly been turned upside-down, and the older standards of right and wrong have been almost completely interchanged. Observe the symptoms: [H]uge nuclear arsenals in the great

nations, developing nuclear capabilities in many smaller nations, the imminent AIDS pandemic, chemical and biological weapons ready to be unleashed, the unknown dangers of genetic engineering looming ahead, the terrors and conflicts generated by world communism (not to mention Nazism, racism, imperialism, and other evil systems), the wide resurgence of paganism and occultism, the inexorable spread of the cancerous drug culture, giant crime syndicates in the capitalist nations, pan-Arabic aggression in the Islamic nations, and a world-wide breakdown of personal and governmental morality [2].

To counter and refute Darwinism, Morris helped develop Scientific Creationism with the hope it would be used in American public high school biology classes as an alternative to the teaching of Darwinism and otherwise erode public support for Darwinism. Defining the basic tenets of Scientific Creationism, the Institute for Creation Research, of which Morris was the founder and long-time head, says:

The physical universe of space, time, matter, and energy has not always existed, but was supernaturally created by a transcendent personal Creator who alone has existed From eternity.

The phenomenon of biological life did not develop by natural process from inanimate systems but was specially and supernaturally created by the Creator.

Each of the major kinds of plants and animals was created functionally complete from the beginning and did not evolve from some other kind of organism...

The first human beings did not evolve from an animal ancestry, but were specially created in fully human form from the start...[3]

Morris claimed that Scientific Creationism was not religious. In his book, *what is Creation Science?*, he wrote:

Scientific Creationism is not based on Genesis or any other religious teaching. There is not a single quotation from the Bible in the entire book! Neither is any other argument based on Biblical authority or doctrine [4].

Nonetheless, the application of Scientific Creation severely limits what conclusions its adherents are allowed to reach. The ICR says:

Our research is conducted within a biblical worldview, since ICR is committed to the absolute authority of the inerrant Word of God. The real facts of science will always agree with biblical revelation because the God who made the world of God inspired the word of God [5].

The “real facts” include the creation of all things “in six literal days” by “a living Creator [6]”. Whatever contradicts the “real facts” is by definition wrong and must be rejected.

But attempts to include Scientific Creationism in public school curricula were declared unconstitutional by the U. S. Supreme Court in the 1987, prompting the development of the theory of Intelligent Design (ID) by the Discovery Institute, a conservative think tank headquartered in Seattle, Washington. The Discovery Institute, like Henry Morris, decried the impact of Darwinism. Its prospectus out-

lining plans to develop ID to refute Darwinism says:

The proposition that human beings are created in the image of God is one of the bedrock principles on which Western civilization was built. Its influence can be detected in most, if not all, of the West's greatest achievement, including representative democracy, human rights, free enterprise, and progress in the arts and sciences.

Yet a little over a century ago, this cardinal idea came under wholesale attack by intellectuals drawing on the discoveries of modern science. Debunking the traditional conceptions of both God and man, thinkers such as Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud portrayed humans not as moral and spiritual beings, but as animals or machines who inhabited a universe ruled by purely impersonal forces and whose behaviour and very thoughts were dictated by the unbending forces of biology, chemistry, and environment. This materialistic conception of reality eventually infected virtually every area of our culture, from politics and economics to literature and arts.

Finally, materialism spawned a virulent strain of utopianism. Thinking they could engineer the perfect society through the application of scientific knowledge, materialist reformers advocated coercive government programs that falsely promised to create heaven on earth [7].

But though the Discovery Institute's critique of Darwinism and its impact was similar to the critique presented by Henry Morris, it nonetheless has maintained that the theory it has developed to try to refute Darwinism is not another religious doctrine. It says:

The theory of intelligent design is simply an effort to empirically detect whether the ‘apparent design’ in nature acknowledged by virtually all biologists is genuine design (the product of an intelligent cause) or is simply the product of an undirected process such as natural selection acting on random variations...Unlike creationism, the scientific theory of intelligent design does not claim that modern biology can identify whether the intelligent cause detected through science is supernatural [8].

But contrary to what the Discovery Institute says, ID does seem to be a religious doctrine. After all, the Discovery Institute also says that it wants “to replace materialistic explanations with the theistic understanding that nature and human beings are created by God [9].”

And attempts to introduce ID into public school curricula were declared an unconstitutional promotion of religion by federal district court judge John E. Jones III, who declared that ID was merely an updated form of Creationism. He further noted that a content analysis of *Of Pandas and People*, the text ID's advocates urged children to read, showed it was actually a copy of an old Scientific Creationism text indicating “that the intelligent designer was God [10].”

But even if no such finding had been made, it can still be argued that the application of ID to scientific research would limit what could be concluded. A central tenet of ID is the concept of irreducible complexity: Some biological systems involving the eye, or blood clotting, were simply too complex to have evolved naturally.

Biochemist Michael Behe, who developed this concept, wrote:

By irreducibly complex I mean a single system composed of several well-matched, interacting parts that contribute to the basic function, wherein the removal of any one of the parts causes the system to effectively cease functioning. An irreducibly complex system cannot be produced directly (that is, by continuously improving the initial function, which continues to work by the same mechanism) by numerous, successive, slight modifications of a precursor system, because any precursor to an irreducibly complex system that is missing a part is by definition nonfunctional. An irreducibly complex system, if there is such a thing, would be a powerful challenge to Darwinian evolution. Since natural selection can only choose systems that are already working, then if a biological system cannot be produced gradually it would have to arise as an integrated unit, in one fell swoop, for natural selection to have anything to act on [11].

The implication is that if an “irreducibly complex system,” such as the eye, could not have evolved naturally, it had to have been created by the Intelligent Designer—presumably God. Indeed, Behe makes the point explicit in discussing the results of his own research: “[A] loud, clear, piercing cry of ‘design!’ [12]” But as cell biologist Kenneth Miller pointed out at length in refuting Behe with numerous examples, systems Behe called “irreducibly complex” could nonetheless be seen as evolving from simpler anatomical and physiological structures and processes [13]. To fail to explore the issue further seems to reflect yet another limit placed on research to avoid a scientifically valid naturalistic conclusion.

As noted earlier, Darwin’s religious critics maintain that science is hostile to religion since the scientific method makes no mention of a role for God in conducting scientific research. But the National Academy of Sciences also says:

Most religions of the world do not have any direct conflict with the idea of evolution. Within the Judeo-Christian religions, many people believe that God works through the process of evolution. That is, God has created a world that is ever-changing and a mechanism through which creatures can adapt to environmental change over time.

At the root of the apparent conflict between some religions and evolution is a misunderstanding of the critical difference between religious and scientific ways of knowing. Religions and science answer different questions about the world. Whether there is a purpose to the universe or a purpose for human existence are not questions for science. Religious and scientific ways of knowing have played, and will continue to play, significant roles in human history.

No one way of knowing can provide all of the answers to the questions that humans ask. Consequently, many people, including many scientists, hold strong religious beliefs and simultaneously accept the occurrence of evolution [14].

To accept that science and religion need not be in conflict is, at the very least, to liberate oneself from the trap set by religious doctrines presented to refute Darwinism. As noted, the doctrine of Scientific Creationism rejects any findings that contradict Genesis, while ID rejects any finding that shows that an “irreducibly complex” biological system is not so irreducibly complex after all.

But for true scientists, whether or not they are religious, there are no arbitrary and preconceived limits to what can be found through honest and competent scientific research.

And believers in Evolutionary Creationism (or Theistic Evolution) go further. They see Darwinism not just as a valid scientific theory, but as the actual means by which God continues to create His world and all its life [15], [16], [17]. Moreover, Evolutionary Creationists believe that they have been given both the ability and the responsibility to explore God’s world, and science is the means by which to do so [18]. Religion imposes no limit on what can be concluded. Science is the means by which to expand our knowledge of God’s creation, and possibly see evidence of God’s work. The Big Bang, the “fine tuning” of universal constants such as gravity or the rate of universal expansion, and the intricacies of DNA are but a few of the discoveries by which Evolutionary Creationists see the hand of God and His works [19], [20], [21]. Granted, they cannot prove that the phenomena they see are absolute proof of God, but then again, nobody can prove otherwise.

Conclusion

All Christians, as well as those of other faiths, believe the Universe, the Earth, and all life on it are part of God’s Creation. Believers in Scientific Creation and Intelligent Design believe that science can undermine God’s authority and therefore its conclusions must be rejected if they disagree with the doctrines developed by Darwinism’s religious critics. Evolutionary Creationists, however, see science not as a threat to God’s authority, but as the means by which God’s creation can be explored, understood, and exalted. If God does indeed exist, which approach better honors Him and His creation—the rejection, or the acceptance, of what one can learn through science?

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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