



Creation & Evolution

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Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology

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Creation & Evolution

Abstract:

This book deals with the vexed and vexing question surrounding the topic of Creation AND Evolution. We basically recognize both creation AND evolution (while not necessarily subscribing to the entire Darwinian theory) separating us from both the evolutionists and the creationists. Much is tied together in this topic. There is the recent statement of Pope John Paul II (1996) which goes beyond anything Pope Pius XII said in *Humani Generis*. What does that statement mean? How far ought we to go in trying to reconcile evolution and creation? What are the ramifications of this issue set on Faith/Science dialogue?

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Foreword:

At the beginning of the meeting essayist, Michael Behe, quoted Cardinal Ratzinger as follows:

It’s the affair of the natural sciences to explain how the tree of life in particular continues to grow and how the branches shoot out from it. This is not a matter for faith. But we must have the audacity to say that the great projects of the living creation are not the products of chance and error. They point to a creating reason and show us a creating intelligence

This quote set the tone for the Workshop. Each of the essayists, in his or her paper and remarks, returned explicitly or implicitly to the ideas quoted above. The essayists and the participants treated the evolution creation debate in the context of the faith-science encounter. In other words, the linkage of the one debate with the other was apparent.

Michael Behe continued:

He [Cardinal Ratzinger] seems to be making the point that, if we think that the world was created, that it was intended, then, perhaps, we should look for physical reasons and evidence to support that belief. We may or may not find it; we should at least look. Fortunately, in the second half of this century, we’ve been given many reasons for thinking that the natural world points to a creating intelligence.

Behe gave several examples of living systems where there seems to be an “irreducible complex” system, i.e., one in which we need several or many parts to get the function of the system. Is the Darwinian theory capable

of explaining such systems or is there the implication of intelligent design? In brief, does blind chance or random variation and slow gradual change solve the problem presented by such systems?

Father Walter Macior posed these questions:

What is science and what is religion? Is religion a code of belief and behavior in regard to ultimate reality? Is it something else? Many scientists will say, "It's something we do with our mind when we have nothing better to do." Others might say, "Well, we don't need it, so why bother?" Can science be a religion? Some people in religion will say that. It's a religion which has beliefs with no proofs. Other people will say that science has only one dogma; namely, nature works according to law.

Sister Joan Gormley, in her essay, makes the following observation:

Its [fundamentalist Christianity] insistence on a literal reading of the creation accounts in Genesis ensures that the controversy [evolution/creation] will remain a burning one, at least for the immediate future But another reason why the question of creation and evolution has not been laid to rest is the crucial importance of the issue of human and cosmic origins, an importance which makes it imperative that it be dealt with, not just by the natural sciences, but also by philosophy and theology. . . Bruce Vawter . . . has accented the need for contemporary theologians to address the issues raised by science, and the ramifications they have for the whole social order.

As Sister Joan points out:

The creationists, in their tenacious adherence to the literal sense of the Bible, actually bow in the direction of science in treating the Bible as that which it makes no claim to be, a book of science, as though this were the only form of discourse worthy of acceptance . . . [S]ome non-fundamentalist Christian theologians pay similar homage to science inasmuch as they abandon the concepts which are integral to their discipline, including those which come from the Scriptures, "the soul of theology," adopting instead the language of modern science.

The Reverend Steven Kuhl refers to Daniel Dennett in treating the faith and science aspects of the evolution/creation issue:

Dennett, however, is not really interested in fighting this [creationist] war. He thinks, not without justification, that the creationists have already been defeated intellectually (that is, on the basis of scientific fact) if not yet culturally and politically. Rather, Dennett is concerned about fighting the "peace" (the "AND" in the title of this ITEST Workshop), the many believing scientists and philosophers who "declare that their idea of God can live in peaceful coexistence with, or even in support from, the Darwinian framework of ideas. While Dennett very much affirms the "evolutionary synthesis" of the 1940s (that ongoing process of melding together the concerns of various scientific disciplines with regard to evolutionary findings), he sees no place for theology proper in this synthesis.

That is certainly one way to handle the ongoing faith/science effort.

Monsignor Paul Langsfeld remarks:

Theology in the modern era has not always fared well in relationship to science. Since science became the unquestioned arbiter of all truth during the Enlightenment, theology always found itself on the defensive when trying to establish itself as a true source of knowledge. Science set the terms for any possible debate by establishing the criteria of truth, so that whatever theology had to say about evolution was framed in relationship to science. During the modern period, this involved three possible reactions on the part of theology: rejection of science; a kind of declaration of neutrality; and the accommodation of theology to the findings of science.

This brief excursion into the essays shows the broader faith/science orientation of those assembled for this workshop. The discussion showed that many had difficulties with Darwin's formulation of the debate although few had a problem with evolution itself. The "survival of the fittest" was a point in question. Who are the fittest? The survivors, by definition, are the fittest. That this is hardly true of humans is almost beside the point. What the definition implies is that the phrase basically means the "survival of the survivors" – a tautology at best. Who are the survivors – those, according to some, who pass on their genes. It is the gene that survives – the only teleology that most "pure" evolutionists admit. Everything, according to these people, is ordered so that the gene survives.

In medicine, genetics and science in general we seem to be working against the notion of the survival of the fittest – at least in part. We are keeping the weak alive, and even allowing the "weak" to propagate – against the demands of Darwinian survival. Moreover, it is finally ironic that humans – purposive creatures that we are – should be the present (at least) highest product of evolution. At least in the case of humans Darwinism leaves some terribly important unanswered questions.

Several of the participants noted that science has limitations. First of all, science is not as objective as we might perhaps think or like. Science has its orthodoxies as does religion. Just because they are "scientific," these positions are no less "right teaching." Evolution, in the minds of many scientists, is one of those orthodoxies. Often enough, it is simply assumed to be the bedrock of biology. No counter arguments need apply.

The question remains. Can creation and evolution be joined? Against the advice (nay, demand) of the pure evolutionists, most of group continued in their belief that, indeed, one can simultaneously hold both positions. The odds against Darwinian evolution seem to be growing. The theory or the concept of evolution itself is changing under the impact of discovery. Biochemistry and molecular biology have raised questions that the Darwinian theory seemingly cannot address. The notion of evolution continues to be strong and enduring. The explanation, the old science if you will, will probably be revised – maybe even to include a notion like a beginning.

Creation from nothing (*ex nihilo*) requires faith. We believe in "creation," we cannot know it; we cannot prove it. Without faith, creation from nothing is not a viable theory. The same is true of any predictive aspect. Without faith, the future of creation remains unknown, unknowable, unprovable. Without faith, none of us will survive. Survival really is at the heart of all of it. Will we survive as a gene or as a person – and more?

One thing is certain. We answered no questions; we arrived at no set conclusions. In fact, I am not certain that we even agreed on the nature of the problems involving creation and evolution. The meeting was most productive nonetheless. Issues were raised and discussed. People formed their own ideas and left to continue their lives. I believe that every participant left with things to think about, questions to be answered. The meeting was a success in that we got together, expressed our ideas and thought about the issues. More than that, we all got along together – maybe that was the most important part of the Workshop.

Robert Brungs, SJ
Director: ITEST
March 1, 1998



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