

The History of Life

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It has often been claimed that the evolution-creation controversy is a conflict between science and religion. This is given as a primary reason for keeping the creation alternative out of the science classroom. But the two powerful ideas of evolution and creation cut across the academic disciplines of science, religion, philosophy, and history. Both are built on the findings of scientists and are appropriate subjects for science classes. But both go beyond the capabilities of science and require a measure of faith from their proponents.

Although there are variations in both the evolutionist and the creationist camps, the controversy can be simplified to state that either evolution is true or creation is true. To eliminate one is to confirm the other. Many writers have concentrated on exposing the fatal weaknesses of the evolutionist position, thereby showing that creation is the superior scientific model. But rather than follow this same approach, I would like to provide a positive statement of the creation alternative and give you some of the evidence supporting it. I'll frame this in two somewhat simplified statements, one about the origin of life and one about the origin of species.

Origin of Life

The origin of life had to be by supernatural creation, because life is too complex to arise through natural processes.

The living cell is, in some ways, like a chemical factory, but more complex than any designed by humans. Hundreds of chemical reactions are simultaneously going on in each cell. And the cell is not just a bag of chemicals. It is subdivided into many compartments, just as a human factory is divided into areas with different functions. Both the physical design of the cell and the chemistry in it are clear examples of intelligent design.

There have been many attempts in the laboratory to show how life could originate through natural processes. Scientists have succeeded, usually using extreme measures, in simulating tiny steps of the total process of life. Anyone who expresses satisfaction with these attempts shows us one of two things. Either they have a poor understanding of life or they have an incredible amount of faith. In spite of headlines about the creation of life in a test tube, scientists are nowhere near being able to demonstrate a natural procedure for the origin of the first cell.

Origin of Species

A large number of different organisms had to be created supernaturally, because the processes of biological change are not capable of significant innovation.

Let's consider first the processes that produce change in individual living things. Then we'll look at a process that produces change in populations of living things. Both creationists and evolutionists agree that mutations are the only source of new genes. These are genetic mistakes, errors in transmitting the information of inheritance from one generation to the next. Mutations are almost always harmful or neutral in their effects. However, the evolutionist believes in mutations as the source of all the diversity of life on earth today. This would require the production of untold numbers of beneficial mutations. That the same handful of examples is always offered is again testimony to the faith of the true believer.

One of the favorite examples of beneficial mutations is the ability of bacteria to change so that they are resistant to antibiotics. Of course, that is beneficial only to the bacteria, not to the humans they infect. Insects, similarly, undergo mutations that make them resistant to insecticides. These resistance mutations are very beneficial to organisms confronted by these poisons. However, they do not produce the kind of change that is needed to convert one type of creature into another.

There are some beneficial mutations that produce large changes. Charles Darwin, during his voyage around the world, discovered wingless beetles on the island of Madeira. These beetles had undergone mutations causing the loss of wings, a good idea on a windy island. A similar example would be the blind fish that inhabit caves. Here mutations have eliminated organs which have no use in the dark. These changes are indeed significant, but notice that they involve the loss of existing structures. No one has ever seen a species undergo mutations that produce brand-new wings or eyes.

There is, however, another process by which individuals can vary. Recombination explains why children look different from their parents. This shuffling of the genes can produce superior combinations of different genes. However, because we see that mutations are incapable of supplying useful variation, the useful genes that are there to be shuffled must have been created at the beginning.

We have mutation and recombination as the processes by which individuals can change. But the history of life is primarily the story of populations. What causes populations to change?

Charles Darwin correctly described natural selection as a powerful process in the history of populations. If some gene combinations have an advantage over others, their owners will leave more offspring for future generations. And this will cause a shift in the genetic makeup of the population. But Darwin thought that because a little change was possible with natural selection, any amount of change could result. One reason for his mistake was his ignorance of genetics. It is interesting that, during the 1850s, when Darwin was doing his research, Gregor Mendel was discovering the principles of genetics. While Darwin was building a case for unlimited change, Mendel was finding an unchanging pattern of inheritance. What does natural selection accomplish? Using the genes provided by the Creator, natural selection makes it possible for populations to survive changes in their environments. It may also allow a population to migrate into a new environment. Finally, natural selection also prevents change as it eliminates or minimizes the effects of harmful mutations.

With these basic statements about the origin of life and the origin of species, let's try to put the history of life into a meaningful framework.

Prototypes: First Kinds

According to the creation model, each basic type of living thing was supernaturally created. Can we identify the basic types today? It is obvious that some species are related, so species can't be the unit of creation. The higher taxonomic categories (genus, family, etc.) are subjective and can't serve this purpose. A new term is needed, and it has been useful to employ the word prototype (first kind). A prototype can be defined as the descendants of a single created population. So each prototype has its beginning at the creation, and unless extinct, continues to exist today in its descendants.

After the creation, each prototype population grew and subdivided as it spread over the earth. The processes of recombination and natural selection in new environments in many instances caused the members of the same prototype to divide into separate races and species. A question that arises is whether a small original population could provide all the variability seen today in that prototype. An example that suggests a positive answer is the inheritance of skin color in the human species. Humans come in many different shades of color, but it is genetically

possible that the First Couple could have been the same color, had children the same color as themselves, and yet produced the entire rainbow of humanity. All this would have been possible without the necessity of mutations being involved.

There are many examples of multiple plant species that have come from the same prototype during historic times. Animals are harder to determine in this regard, but it is possible that the horse, donkey, and zebra are descendants of one prototype. The same may be true of the big cats: lions, tigers, etc.

Archetypes: Ancient Designs

To appreciate fully the living world around us today, we need to have another word in our vocabulary, archetype (ancient form). This refers to basic designs used repeatedly by the Creator. There is an endless variety of examples known to biologists. One of the most fundamental archetypes is the living cell, the building block of all life. An example seen in most biology text books is the front limbs of different back-boned animals. The evolutionist believes that this is evidence of common ancestry, but it is just as logically evidence of the same Designer. Architects today will use similar materials and techniques in several buildings, varying the basic design for the needs of the particular client.

Summary

With the above concepts about the origin of life and the origin of species, all the history of life and the great diversity of life today can be understood and appreciated. The known processes of beneficial change (recombination and natural selection) are capable of taking a group of created populations and developing them into the richness of life on earth. It is unnecessary and unreasonable to resort to unknown and unlikely processes, such as mutations, as the sources of variation that could change simple cells into all we see alive today.

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