

THE RELIGIOUS EVOLUTION OF DARWIN

Sunday School Edition

Denis O. Lamoureux DDS PhD PhD

St. Joseph's College, University of Alberta

Introduction

- Born 12 Feb 1809, dies 19 April 1882
- Mother & younger sister religious
- Father & older brother skeptics of religion
- Attended Anglican day school
- Grandfather Erasmus famous Deistic Evolutionist
 - Deism: impersonal God
 - Theism: personal God (Traditional & Non-Trad)

Theology at Cambridge University (1828-1831)

- I did not doubt the strict literal truth of every word in the Bible. *Autobiography of Charles Darwin (1876)*, 57
- I was not able to annul the belief that each species had been purposely created. *Descent of Man (1971)*, 61

HMS Beagle Voyage (1831-1836)

- The one hand has surely worked throughout the universe. A Geologist would suggest that the periods of Creation have been distinct & remote the one from the other; that the Creator rested in his labor.
 - ☐ accepts progressive creation *Diary*, 348
- The scenes which are deeply impressed on my mind, none exceed in majesty the Brazilian forests. They are temples filled with the varied productions of the God of Nature. No one can stand unmoved in these without feeling that there is more in man than the mere breath of his body. *Diary*, 388
 - ☐ accepts intelligent design in nature

1ST Period of Religious Reflection and the Formulation of Theory of Evolution (1836-1839)

- During these two years I was led to think much about religion. *ACD*, 85
- I gradually came to see the Old Testament had a false history of the world, with the Tower of Babel [Gen 11], the rainbow as a sign, [Gen 9] etc. *ACD*, 85
 - ☐ Darwin accepted Scientific Concordism he assumed the Bible reveals scientific facts
- I came to disbelieve in Christianity as a divine revelation. *ACD*, 85
 - ☐ but definitely still believes in a Creator
- One is mistaken if he says that the innate knowledge of the Creator has been implanted in us by a separate act of God, and not as a part of his most magnificent laws, which we disrespect if we think that God is not capable to produce everything around us. *Notebook M (1838)*, 135-136
 - ☐ Rejects divine intervention in origins aka God-of-the-Gaps
- How much more simple and majestic to let animals be created by fixed laws of generation. *Notebook B (1837-8)*, 101

Origin of Species (1859)

Famous book on theory of biological evolution
7 positive references to the "Creator"

Embryology-Evolution Analogy

- Leading scientists [progressive creationists] seem to be satisfied with the view that each species has been independently created. To my mind, it aligns better with what we know of the laws impressed on matter by the Creator, that the production and extinction of the past and present species should be due to secondary causes [ie, natural laws] like those determining birth and death of the individual. *Origin of Species (1859)*, 488
- If God does not intervene miraculously in embryology, Then neither did He intervene in evolution

Final Sentence

- There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone on cycling according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved. *Origin of Species (1859)*, 490
- In 2nd to 6th editions adds:
 - ... having been originally breathed by a Creator

2ND Period of Religious Reflection (1860-1861)

Intelligent design in nature the central issue.

Def: Belief that beauty, complexity & functionality in nature point to an Intelligent Designer

Letter to Asa Gray

- I had no intention to write atheistically... my views are not at all necessarily atheistical.
- But I own I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and goodness on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world.
 - ☐ pain & suffering against God's existence eg, wasp that lays eggs in caterpillars
- On the other hand, I cannot anyhow be contented to view this wonderful universe, and especially the nature of man, and to conclude that everything is the result of brute force.
- I am inclined to look at everything as resulting from designed laws, with the details, whether good or bad, left to the working out of what we may call chance... all these laws may have been designed by an all-knowing Creator.
 - ☐ responds to pain & suffering in the world with an intelligent design argument

To Gray (22 May 1860) *Life & Letters*, II: 311-312

Autobiography of Charles Darwin (1876)

Darwin's mature views on religion

Has section entitled "Religious Belief"

gives an argument against God, then takes it away

gives an argument for God, then takes it away

- ends up as an agnostic (not sure if God exists)

Against God's Existence: Problem of Suffering

- What advantage can there be in the suffering of millions of lower animals throughout almost endless time? This very old argument from the existence of suffering against the existence of an intelligent first cause seems to me a strong one. *ACD*, 90

Counter Argument: According to my judgment happiness decidedly prevails...most sentient beings enjoy an excess of happiness over misery, although many occasionally suffer much.

ACD, 88-89, 90

For God's Existence: 1st Intelligent Design Argument

- The most common argument for the existence of an intelligent God is drawn from the deep inward conviction and feelings which are experienced by most persons. Formerly, I was led by such feelings while standing in the middle of the grandeur of a Brazilian forest. *ACD*, 91

Counter Argument: But now the grandest scenes would not cause any such convictions and feelings to rise in my mind. It may be truly said that I am like a man who has become colour-blind.

ACD, 91

For God's Existence: 2nd Intelligent Design Argument

- Another source of conviction in the existence of God, connected with the reason and not with the feelings, impresses me as having much more weight. This follows from the extreme difficulty, or rather impossibility of conceiving this immense and wondrous universe, including man with his capacity of looking backwards and far into the future, is a result of blind chance.
- When thus reflecting I *feel* compelled to look to a First Cause having an intelligent mind in some degree similar to that of man; and I *deserve* to be called a Theist. *ACD*, 92-93

COMMENT:

Note that this is 1876 and Darwin is using the present tense for the verbs "feel" & "deserve"

- Darwin a theist (non-traditional)

- This conclusion was strong in my mind about the time, as far as I can remember, when I wrote the *Origin of Species*; and since that time it has very gradually with many fluctuations become weaker. *ACD*, 93
 - Darwin believed in intelligent design & God when he wrote his most famous book!

Counter Argument: But then arises the horrid doubt--can the mind of man, which has, as I fully believe, been developed from a mind as low as that possessed by the lowest animal, be trusted when it draws such grand conclusions? *ACD*, 93

COMMENT:

What did Darwin just do? Used his mind (which he does not trust!) to make this counter argument.

- self-referential incoherence

Darwin counter argument against ID fails

Conclusion

- The mystery of the beginning of all things is not solvable by us; and I for one must be content to remain an Agnostic. *ACD*, 91

The Final Years (1879-1882)

- It seems absurd to doubt that a man may be an ardent Theist and an evolutionist.
- I may state that my judgment often fluctuates. In my most extreme fluctuations I have never been an Atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God. I think that as I grow older, but not always, that an Agnostic would be the more correct description of my state of mind. To J. Fordyce (7 May 1879) *Life & Letters*, 1:304
- In talking about observations that Darwin had made regarding wonderful machine-like structures for certain purposes in nature, I said to Dr. Darwin that it was impossible to look at these without seeing they were the effect & expression of a mind. He looked at me very hard and said, "Well, that often comes over me with overwhelming force; but at other times," and he shook his head vaguely, "it seems to go away." *Life & Letters*, 1:316

Conclusions

1. Charles Darwin was NEVER an atheist.
2. Darwin's religious views evolved over time
Christian → Non-Traditional Theist → Mostly Agnostic
Assumed Scientific Concordism & rejected Bible
3. Darwin impacted by Intelligent Design
Evidence for the reality that God reveals thru nature
4. Intelligent Design & the Problem of Suffering
Design offers an adequate response--ID outweighs suffering in the world → God is in control
5. Embryology-Evolution Analogy
God used natural processes to create life

Bibliography

Charles Darwin, *Diary of the Beagle*, N. Barlow, ed. (1986)

_____. *On the Origin of Species*, 1st ed. (1859)

_____. *Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, N. Barlow, ed. (1958)

Francis Darwin, ed., *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin* (1887)

Note: Some quotations have been modify in order to make them easier to understand.

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