

Does Darwinian evolution conflict with belief in God?

Great Question! But let me first ask you a couple of questions. Would you be deeply offended if I said to you that the genocide and killings in Darfur are justified? Or would your feelings be hurt if someone who claims to love you very much refused to marry you solely on the grounds that you are unable to reproduce? Hmmmm? Hold on to these questions for a minute.

It is true that often today Darwinism and belief in God are assumed to be in necessary and irreversible conflict. Take for instance a recent article in the NYT entitled "Nearly Complete 'Missing Link' Skeleton Found in Ethiopia (Sept. 20, 2006). The first line of the article read, *In a discovery sure to fuel an old debate about our evolutionary history, scientists have found a remarkably complete skeleton of a 3-year-old female from the ape-man species represented by "Lucy."*

What debate? And is it a debate between Darwinism (science) and faith, or something else?

Take for instance the conversations that I have had with the many scientists that have attended CPC over the years. I think it safe to say that they would all agree that the *only* knowledge they really know *as modern scientists* is that which can be verified by the scientific method. But then if I were to ask them, not just as a scientist but as persons, do you believe the *only* knowledge that you can know is that which is derived from the scientific method? They would all say unequivocally, "no." Why do you think they would say this? Isn't it because if we stop and think about it, we all know that every day we live and make decisions based upon things we know, but that can't be known by the scientific method? I "know" I love my wife and children, even that this "love" is so real, such irrefutably "fact," that it would empower me to die for them even. And yet, I can't put this love into a test tube in order to empirically verify its existence. Moreover, I know that individual persons have such incredible intrinsic worth as to warrant an amount of money and/or sacrifice that far exceeds a cost analysis relative to their utilitarian significance to society or even to the survival of the human race, yet I can't prove this "worth" by empirically verifiable evidence or some infallible rational argument or syllogism. There IS a kind of knowledge that is just as much a "fact" as any I could want to know, but I can't empirically verify it or syllogistically prove it! There is evidently some other apparatus inherent to myself that enables me to know it. (c.f. "How Can I believe in God?")

My point is this: If the scientific method is *a* method for discerning facts, it is not the *only* method. And as evidenced by the scientist at CPC even, the conflict between "faith" and "science" is really not a conflict between faith and *pure* science at all, if by "pure" we mean the belief that some facts can be known by the scientific method. Rather, the conflict is between "faith" and the modern enlightenment premise that says *all* true knowledge is *nothing but* that knowledge than can be verified upon the *foundational* premise of either an irrefutable syllogism (*rationalism*) or a reproducibly verifiable observation (*materialism*). But of course the premise of modern *foundationalism* (as it is sometimes called) can't be proved according to the very rules of

foundationalism itself. What then is the basis for *foundationalism*? And perhaps more to the point, can anyone actually live based on modern *foundationalism*? Consider then the issue of Darwinism.

We should observe that there really is no fundamental conflict vis-à-vis belief in God and Darwinism per se. Rather the conflict is with faith in God and what Alvin Plantinga has described as “*unguided* Darwinism.” Notice then how Plantinga frames the question of Darwinism and belief in God:

Does the scientific theory of evolution include, not merely the idea that the living world has been produced by a process in which natural selection is the chief mechanism, but the vastly more ambitious idea that this process has been unsupervised, unplanned, unintended by God or any other intelligent agent? That hardly seems to be an appropriate part of an empirical scientific theory. It looks instead like a metaphysical or theological add-on.

And there we have it. The supposed conflict with pure science and faith in God is really no conflict at all, but rather a conflict between two separate metaphysical systems of belief as it were-- between *faith* in God and *faith* in “nothing buttery scientism” (yes, I made the term up to describe what amounts to an empirically unverifiable premise that there is no true knowledge except that knowledge known by empirically verifiable observation!). “Nothing buttery scientism” is in fact a category of “faith” because if true, it can’t be proven by its own assumptions but on assumptions based on ??? At best then, faith in God is in conflict with faith in *nothing buttery scientism*, and as both are founded in “faith,” neither can be proved by the scientific method.

So then, if you confuse Darwinism with *unguided* Darwinism, you will see science and faith in God in conflict. But if you distinguish Darwinism from *unguided* Darwinism, you will see faith in God in conflict only with the “nothing buttery scientism” that is inherent to *unguided* Darwinism. And so the real question is— which metaphysical system makes most sense—the system we call “faith in God” or the system we call “faith in *nothing buttery scientism*?” Back then to the two questions that I posed in the beginning of this discussion.

The sum effect of both questions was to get at whether or not you can discern a kind of knowledge that *transcends* the kind of knowledge one would expect according to faith in *unguided* Darwinism? Concerning the question on Darfur: if *unguided* Darwinism is true, then human identity does not in fact transcend its utilitarian value relative to the survival of the human gene pool. The “offense” of Darfur would be groundless based upon an anthropology that is “nothing but” the evolution of strength over weakness! In fact, why wouldn’t we even rejoice in it for the sake of a stronger strain of human race as the end result? However, if human nature is more than the sum total of our biology, as to involve a human “spirit,” and if this “spiritual” aspect of humanity is in fact related to the infinite and perfect spirit being of God—then my intuitive response to Darfur makes total sense. Faith in God is indeed reasonable, if not something we can “prove” by a rational syllogism or by the mechanism of the scientific method! For what makes the most sense of how we feel when we see images of the genocide in

Darfur, belief in *unguided* Darwinism (which is NOT pure science), or belief in guided Darwinism and the belief in God? And what does it say about us that we “know” that there is something about the people we see suffering in Darfur that warrants outrage even? (By the way, my intent here is not to say anything one way or another in terms of the purely scientific credibility of Darwinism- as this would exceed my office and training. My point is merely that there is nothing about Darwinism per se [vs *unguided* Darwinism] that is in conflict with belief in God.)

As for the second question, would it not likewise offend your sense of “love” if your inability to procreate would in itself cancel out the power of your lover’s sense of love? How romantic is that? And yet we all believe in *romance*, even if it is somehow related to the mystery of love (and by mystery I mean that it can’t be contained in a test tube)! I suspect that if we really love someone, we would act on that love even if the act itself would cancel out the survival of our own genetic code in successive generations. Does this make sense if we are “nothing but” the survival of our human biology? Is there a transcendent “romance” that makes sense of our otherwise impractical (humanly speaking) romantic actions? Romance is itself one of the great forces of human nature, both in terms of human flourishing, if not also the cause of great historical conflicts. Romance is a fact, but it is not a fact I can know by the scientific method. It is reasonable, and even more so if we are made as objects of a greater romance with an infinitely romantic being? But I will leave this for another day!

So the bottom line is this: there is *no* conflict between belief in God and *pure* science. But there is a conflict between faith in God and faith in the impure science of *unguided* Darwinism (science joined with a metaphysical [meta-modern science] add-on that believes the only knowledge we can have is the knowledge that can be empirically verified.) The above two issues of human worth and human love both suggest that faith in an *unguided* Darwinism doesn’t adequately explain the living reality of what we can know! As nicely summarized by Alvin Plantinga in response to Richard Dawkins’, *The Blind Watchmaker*, “faith” in a blind watchmaker (*unguided Darwinism*) defies “all appearances to the contrary!” But perhaps even more problematic, the above two issues of human worth and love illustrate, frankly, why I wouldn’t *want* to live in the world of *nothing buttery scientism*. Such a world is one wherein human behavior is reduced to the mere mechanisms of nature, as if there is nothing about us that is inherently “super-nature,” which again not only defies all appearances to the contrary, but is an offence to the kind of humanity I want to be! I want to justifiably own the human passions of “anger” that I feel in relation to Darfur, and “romance” that I feel in relation to my wife—all of which presuppose that I am not just the sum total of my biology, but the sum total of my “spirit” which transcends my biology. Lesslie Newbigin summarized it this way:

Science (the nothing buttery version) acknowledges no objective world of values in the light of which human purpose could be judged right or wrong... Man is left under the control of whichever is the strongest impulse of his nature. He becomes, in fact, an agent of nature. Man’s mastery of nature turns out in the end to be nature’s mastery of man.”¹

¹ Can the West Be Converted? P. 16.

Pure science is a great thing. Even Darwinism, in so far as it explains the material mechanisms for biological existence, is a great thing. But pure science is not the only great thing! Modern science IS limited by its own scientific method!² There are other things to be known and understood that beg for another method of knowing. What is faith, and what is the method of possessing faith are valid questions in their own right, precisely because I believe there is a kind of knowledge that transcends science! I will leave this to another day (c.f. “ How can I believe in God?”). For in so many words, Princeton Geologist John Suppe posited an apt summarization of the intent of this Q&A,

*The gospel of Jesus Christ is the same for scientists as for anyone.
Evolution is basically a red herring.*

² C.f. *The End of Science : Facing the Limits of Knowledge in the Twilight of the Scientific Age (Helix Books)*, by John Horgan