

EDITORIAL

THE POTENCY OF PREVAILING CONCEPTS

In a recent public discussion on a state university campus in the eastern United States, a genetics professor who teaches the basic course in evolution at that institution stated that the developments in molecular biology have established that Charles Darwin was wrong in the mechanism he proposed for an evolutionary development of life. This professor went on to say that although there is at present no evidence that clearly supports an origin and development of life by naturalistic processes, there is no justification for saying that an evolutionary or non-theistic explanation for life is incorrect; the task facing the scientific community is to find new explanations concerning how evolution did occur, not to abandon the concept.

Three aspects of these comments deserve consideration. First is the recognition that despite what are often strong claims to the contrary, the accumulation of scientific evidence has been increasingly unfavorable to mechanistic evolutionary concepts of origin. Professor D. E. Green of the Institute for Enzyme Research at the University of Wisconsin and Dr. R. F. Goldberger, chief of the Biosynthesis and Control Section, Laboratory of Chemical Biology, U.S. National Institutes of Health, in their book *Molecular Insights Into the Living Process* say that "...the macromolecule-to-cell transition is a jump of fantastic dimensions which lies beyond the range of testable hypotheses. In this area all is conjecture. The available facts do not provide a basis for postulating that cells arose on this planet."¹ Dr. John Keosian of the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, at an international conference on the origin of life held in Barcelona, Spain, in June 1973, said "...the simplest heterotrophic [obtains food from outside sources] cell is an intricate structural and metabolic unit of harmoniously coordinated parts and chemical pathways. Its spontaneous assembly out of the environment, granting the unlikely simultaneous presence together of all the parts, is not a believable possibility."²

Professor Marcel P. Schützenberger of the University of Paris has stated "that there is a considerable gap in the neo-Darwinian theory of evolution, and we believe this gap to be of such a nature that it cannot be bridged within the current conception of biology."³ In a presidential address to the Linnaean Society of London, Errol White, Fellow of the Royal Society, stated: "We still do not know the mechanics of evolution in spite of the over-confident claims in some quarters, nor are we likely to make

much further progress in this by the classical methods of paleontology or biology....”⁴

Thus, as stated by L. Harrison Matthews, F.R.S., in his introduction to the 1972 edition of *The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin, “Belief in the theory of evolution is thus exactly parallel to belief in special creation — both are concepts which believers know to be true, but neither, up to the present, has been capable of proof.”⁵

The second aspect of these comments that deserves consideration has to do with the nature of scientific evidence. The inability to obtain incontrovertible support for a proposition does not eliminate that proposition as a possibility. As an example it may be noted that failure to establish guilt does not guarantee the innocence of an individual charged with crime. Overwhelming evidence for the *possibility* of an evolutionary development of the living forms known today would not guarantee that these organisms are the consequence of such a process. Nor would lack of such evidence prove the contrary.

Science is more effective in showing an idea to be incorrect than in establishing its correctness. Consequently a theory is considered to be more suitable for scientific purposes if it is vulnerable to experimental disproof. In this respect the popular theory of progressive evolutionary development of organisms is being increasingly recognized as a defective scientific concept, since much of it has become irrefutable, regardless of the nature of the data input.⁶ Creation theory, it must be noted, from a scientific viewpoint suffers the same defect.

At the level of molecular biology, evolutionary theory is subject to experimental refutation. A naturalistic theory of origins must reasonably account for a transition from relatively simple inorganic compounds to complex biologically active molecules, and for the assembly of a vast array of such components into a functioning cell structure. The understanding of chemical reaction dynamics, allowable primitive earth characteristics, and molecular biology has reached a level that precludes these basic steps in a naturalistic process of evolutionary development. While it is correct to say that the lack of supporting evidence does not *disprove* an evolutionary process as the correct explanation for the origin of the organisms now found on planet Earth, it does indicate a need for an alternate explanation. The above quotations from Schützenberger and White show it to be now well established that a purely evolutionary explanation of origins that does not go beyond the properties presently exhibited by matter is virtually impossible. The evidence favors intelligence, rather than inanimate matter, as the first cause.

Finally, the professor’s remarks which stimulated this editorial illustrate the elements of faith and personal preference that enter into views regarding

origins. For many the evolutionary explanation is held regardless of the evidence for or against — it is accepted with faith that rivals the faith associated with the most devoted adherents to abstract religious concepts.

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ENDNOTES

1. Green DE, Goldberger RF. 1967. Molecular insights into the living process. NY: Academic Press, p 407.
2. Keosian J. 1974. In: Oro J, et al., editors. *Cosmochemical Evolution and the Origin of Life*. Dordrecht, Holland: R. Reidel, Dordrecht, Holland. Vol. I, p 291.
3. Schützenberger MP. 1967. Algorithms and the neo-Darwinian theory of evolution. In: Moorhead PS, Kaplan MM, editors. *Mathematical challenges to the neo-Darwinian interpretation of evolution*, p 75. The Wistar Institute Symposium Monograph Number 5.
4. White E. 1966. A little on lung-fishes. *Proceedings of the Linnaean Society of London* 177:1-10.
5. Matthews LH. 1972. Introduction to *The origin of species* by Charles Darwin. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, p x.
6. Bethell T. 1976. Darwin's mistake. *Harper's Magazine* 252(1509):70-75.