

## **Darwin and the Evolutionary Concept of God**

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One day a zoo-keeper noticed that the resident orangutan was reading two books - the Bible and Darwin's The Origin of Species. Surprised on many levels, the man asked the ape, "Why are you reading *both* of those books?"

"Well," said the orangutan, "I just wanted to know if I was my **brother's keeper** or my **keeper's brother**."

Prior to the publication of Darwin's theory of evolution, the Bible was, for the Christian world, the final arbiter of humanity's purpose for existence, as well as the ultimate authority on and explanatory source of our origin. It also gave us a glimpse of the Divine Creator responsible for our birth—the heavenly parent-God who was to be our moral compass and the true north of all human consciousness. The stability of western culture, the foundation of our *very nation* depended upon a basic understanding of the Biblical premise that we are all God's children, created in His image, guided by the hand of His justice, living in this Garden of Eden that He created to serve our needs.

It is not hard to understand that any challenge to those grounding beliefs that heretofore defined who we were, where we came from, and the source of our conscience would not be greeted with enthusiastic open arms—for to question our own origin would be to question the very nature and existence of God, Himself. So, the first question we must ask ourselves this morning is this: **Can the traditional God of the Bible endure through the evolution of scientific revelation?**

Over the millennia, Biblical truths have oftentimes found themselves at odds with scientific discovery. Galileo's adamant challenge to the Ptolemaic cosmos that placed the earth at the center of the Universe, and thereby refuting what the Christian church believed to be as a Biblical fact of God's intentions, was a paramount example of the threatening power that ongoing scientific exploration had upon foundational religious beliefs. To preserve the nature of God and our very existence, the Church of the 17<sup>th</sup> century silenced Galileo. The reward for his heresy was house arrest for the remainder of his life and

the executive order that forbade him from further scientific inquiry. (In the late 20th century his church exonerated him and welcomed him back into full communion. I'm sure he was thrilled.)

In 1859, when Charles Darwin introduced his theory of evolution to the world, it began an ontological dispute of tsunamic proportions that continues to *lap upon the shores of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. The idea that we emerged from a primordial swamp, the stuff of cellular mutation, evolutionary natural selection, and bi-pedal apes does not remotely compare to the poetic literary emergence of humanity through God's divine intent as described in the Bible's Creation stories.

**For some**, the revelation of evolution seals the deal that the Biblical God is a human concept that no longer holds meaning in this era of scientific enlightenment. The God who **intentionally** created the earth as the center of the Universe; the God who **intentionally** populated the planet with creatures in His image; the God who **intentionally** allowed His humanity to suffer the consequences of fear, pain, hatred, greed, despair and death; the God who **intentionally** sent His only begotten son to die for the sins of humanity in order to restore them to their full glory and eternal bliss—**this** God has become obsolete in the minds of those who would use ongoing scientific discoveries as proof that Intelligent Design did not make us who we are. And so our second question to ponder this morning is this: **Has scientific discovery taken an omnipotent God and rendered Him impotent?**

Of course, there are many people around the world who are unwilling to give-up the Biblical father-parent-God *who smites enemies and at the same time brings compassion and healing into the world*. Among those who remain faithful to the traditional ambiguous images of the Biblical God, there are those Creationists who unequivocally deny evolution as the basis of our origin. For them, a selective and literal interpretation of the Bible is the only reality that they can claim as their truth. **To believe otherwise would mean the complete unraveling of their cosmological grounding**, and in turn would render them helpless and hopeless in a chaotic sea without a compass or rudder to guide them into eternal peace.

In his book, *Only a Theory: Evolution and the Battle for America's Soul*, Brown University Professor and evolutionary biologist Kenneth Miller (who

happens to be a devout Roman Catholic) tells us that *evolution is routinely rejected by more than half of the American people, who defiantly tell pollsters that they regard the very core of the biological sciences as a fundamentally erroneous concept.* (This shouldn't surprise any of us after the recent election.) Ken Miller continues, *A recent poll of attitudes toward evolution in Japan and thirty-two European countries demonstrated how exceptional the American rejection of evolution truly is. In this survey Americans stood next to last in their acceptance of evolution, above only the citizens of Turkey.*

Like those Christians of Galileo's 17<sup>th</sup> century tribunal, Creationists are too afraid to re-read their sacred scriptures in a different light that would allow for constantly emerging fact to interact with metaphor and allegory in order to reveal even more profound truths. What is tragic, in my eyes, is that **the fear of losing the God they know holds them back from exploring a more expansive, complex and infinitely more enlightening spiritual dimension to life, itself.**

What I find particularly interesting is that while Creationists believe to be the torchbearers of God's true identity and purpose, (and therefore our own), they are keeping their deity (and humanity) locked within the rigid confines of a *non-changing, uncreative, impossibly restrictive universe that denies any possibility for growth, change, and diversity.* For them, revelation is fixed. God is unchanging. Evolution is a demonic concept. And we are locked in a drama of supernatural checkmate.

The undeniable **fact** of evolution is that everything within the Universe is constantly changing. But I wonder...**I wonder if the rift between science and religious belief has to be an "either/or" situation? Does the pursuit of truth and meaning necessitate canceling one over the other?** Now we arrive at question number three for our consideration: *Has God been lost in our discovery of the evolutionary process, or has our concept of God itself evolved?*

Albert Einstein's response to the question of God was this. *The most beautiful and deepest experience [a person] can have is the sense of the mysterious. It is the underlying principle of religion as well as all serious endeavor in art and science. He who never had this experience seems to me, if not dead, then at least blind. To sense that behind anything that can be*

experienced there is a something that our mind cannot grasp and whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly and as a feeble reflection, this is religiousness.

*It was the experience of mystery, he goes on to say--even if mixed with fear--that engendered religion [in the first place]. A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, of the manifestations of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty, which are only accessible to our reason in their most elementary forms--it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute the truly religious attitude, [that constitute the concept of God that penetrates our human experience.]*

Indeed, there are those who believe that our relatively newfound insights into evolution have, in fact, brought about a **revolution** of spiritual awareness which draws us ever more closer to the God-Mystery. For them, the more the Universe reveals itself to us, the deeper our sense of connection to its Source.

This connection is dynamic, energetically increased through the transformative power of love and compassion and symbiosis within the miraculously interconnected web of all existence. Glimpses of its majesty can be seen unfolding in nature, in the arts and sciences, in the eyes of lovers, in the wonder and awe of children, and in the realm of emotional wisdom where forgiveness inspires healing, **where kindness and service to others offers comfort and joy**, where courage and selflessness bring about social change and justice. For them, it is precisely within all these layers of **life revealed** that the God-mystery is constantly emerging, evolving within our limited understanding, and raising us into a higher level of consciousness and being within the **All**.

*One might conclude, says Kenneth Miller, that the hypothesis of God puts the believer and nonbeliever at odds with respect to evolutionary cosmology, but this is not the case. Science draws its meaning and value from the search for truth about the natural world, and in this context it has told us, at least so far, that we are every bit the children of the universe that Desiderata assured us we were. Believers and nonbelievers can agree on this element of science, and then part company as to how it is to be interpreted.*

Quantum physicist Fritjof Capra sums it up this way, *Science does not need mysticism and mysticism does not need science, but [human beings] need both.*

In my own eyes, the God of Biblical definition has been liberated **because** of the revealed insights that evolution has proffered. No longer held hostage by mythological tales of Creation, no longer the reflection of our fears, needs and desires, the God of evolution raises us to a more profound level of awareness that reminds us that we are the stuff of stars. **It inspires us to bring a deeper meaning to it all.** It is that which continues to draw us ever more closer to a spiritual and physical connection with the One Breath, the Universal Source of Infinite Possibilities, the Dynamic Energy that moves in us and through us and propels us forward toward change and growth in profound and wondrous ways. **Call it what you will, but that which we are seeking is causing us to seek.**

Perhaps our ancient ancestors were correct when they believed that we, humans, could not look directly upon the face of God—so expansive and penetrating and brilliant would its light be that we could not handle its immensity. **The grandeur of science is that it allows us to “peek,”** and with each glimpse the higher truths of the Bible give us some tools with which to help us interpret it all. But they, in and of themselves, are inadequate for this journey. However, if scriptural literalism cannot be true—and it clearly cannot—then what the late philanthropist Sir John Templeton called “the humble approach” to truth must prevail.

When I was in college there was a popular poster of a brick wall with graffiti on it that said in the upper left hand corner, *God is dead*, signed *Nietzsche*. In the lower right hand corner it said, *Nietzsche is dead*, signed *God*.

**Science did not kill God and God is not dead. At the same time, God isn't locked within humanity's limited imagination, either. Neither parent-God nor anthropomorphic puppeteer, God isn't the Grand Inquisitor or the Ultimate Liberator.** We know what God isn't. Only with the revelations of our scientific exploration and the evolution of our own collective spiritual unfoldment can we even begin to know the Infinite Possibilities of that Great Undefinable Source of All-Being that is imprinted

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upon the DNA of the Universe. Wherever you lie on the theological spectrum, let us all agree that “the humble approach” to the search for truth must prevail.

AMEN and BLESSED BE