

Evolutionary Pretensions

by

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I've always been troubled by evolution. Not by science, but by evolution. I have no problem with the scientific method, as it is a useful tool for naturalistic enquiry. To be amenable to scientific enquiry, something must be observable, measurable, testable, and repeatable. It doesn't take much effort to populate a list of things that are important factors in human existence which are, in fact, not amenable to the scientific method. Things like love, mercy, beauty, art, happiness, existence, pain, revulsion, and horror.

Moreover, the standard of proof for science is quite high. In the area of scientific enquiry this standard of proof is necessary. Yet this standard of proof is too high to be applicable to life in general. Much of life operates under the legal/historical burden of proof. In a courtroom, people are convicted of crimes which were not observed and for which there is no scientific proof. Notice I said no scientific proof, not scientific evidence. Forensic evidence uses the tools of science, to be sure. Since science demands a thing be observable, testable, and repeatable, and since we cannot re-murder an individual, the inferences and theories derived from the forensic evidence are clearly *not* scientific, no matter their probative value.

We can say that person X has a specific fingerprint, that a fingerprint matching person X was found in a specific place, and therefore that person X was at that specific place. Notice that the major and minor premises of that syllogism can be said to be scientific, but that the conclusion is not. There are other explanations which are perhaps less reasonable, but reasonableness is scarcely scientific. Moreover, there exists an unscientific chain of inferences based on fingerprint evidence leading to the conclusion that since person X was at a specific place, person X committed the crime. This chain of inferences is not based on the scientific method, and the guilty verdict is not based on scientific proof.

True or False: Abraham Lincoln was the 16th president of the United States. True, of course. The Illuminati are the masterminds behind world events. False, of course. Yet if I was to try and prove either of these propositions scientifically, I could not. The existence and life work of Abraham Lincoln is a matter of historical record. Likewise the existence of a secret society called the Illuminati is a matter of historical record, but the evidence that they mastermind world events is not. We cannot frame these propositions in such a way as to make them amenable to the scientific method, and we can no more scientifically prove the existence of Abraham Lincoln than we can scientifically disprove that the Illuminati control the world.

There is one standard of proof for scientific inquiry, and another for the courtroom and of history. We can use the tools of science to show that patient X has evidence of a coronary obstruction, but the

evidence of science is not science itself, and the diagnosis is in no way scientific. Moreover, there are multiple treatment options, and the doctor must choose one: a choice based on training, experience, and judgment. Despite the doctor's best efforts, suppose patient X dies. The doctor is sued for malpractice. The question before the court as to whether the doctor performed adequately is simply not scientific. After the fact, the court is asked to determine whether the outcome would have been different if the doctor had chosen a different course of treatment. The court is being asked to play God, in a sense: given different scenarios, to determine their probable outcomes and then to determine blame. The court's task is not scientific; the arguments presented in court are inferential and circumstantial at best, and yet we allow the court to determine the truth of the matter. Science has nothing to say about it: the matter is outside the realm of scientific enquiry.

Most of our lives, in fact, are lived completely outside the realm of scientific enquiry. Should I ask Alice or Becky to the prom? Is Austin University better than Boston College, and which of them should I attend? Am I in love with Alice, and is she in love with me? Should we marry? Should we move to Albuquerque or Boston? Should I take the job with A & B, Inc.? None of these are scientific questions. Moreover, we can observe the outcome of these decisions, but we have no basis for measuring the outcomes; we cannot observe, test, or repeat any of our choices, let alone compare them against the alternatives. How do we define success: by what standard do we measure it, using what scale, to what order of precision, and incorporating what measure of error?

Evolution is an ideology, and as an ideology, it is not amenable to the tools of scientific enquiry. One cannot observe evolution in action—that is to say, the change of an organism from one type to another. In biology classrooms, many schoolchildren have performed experiments on fruit flies. Similar experiments have been performed on generation after generation of fruit flies, yielding all manner of strange mutations. Yet no one has ever managed to evolve a fruit fly into something that is manifestly *not* a fruit fly. Quite the opposite, in fact. In the field, we have observed the morphology of finches changing as environmental conditions change, but we have never observed finches becoming anything other than finches. What we have observed are changes within a species or genus, but we have never observed one genus changing into another genus. And having not observed it, we cannot measure it; and since we cannot measure it, we cannot test it; and since we cannot test it, we cannot repeat it; and since we cannot observe, measure, test, or repeat it, we cannot prove it scientifically.

Suppose someone, somewhere was successful at evolving a fruit fly into organism X. Would this be scientific proof of evolution? Certainly we could measure the changes in the morphology and genetic structure, and we could devise tests to demonstrate the divergence between the fruit fly and organism X, and those tests could perhaps be repeated to confirm their validity. Would this constitute scientific proof of evolutionary theory? Absolutely and unequivocally not. All it would prove is that the fruit fly changed into organism X. An alternative explanation would be that intelligence was at work in changing the fruit fly into organism X, thus giving evidence that existence itself is the result of some form of intelligence at work. Neither of these propositions would be scientific.

A tautology is an unnecessary repetition of meaning, using different words that mean essentially the same thing. Or to put it succinctly, saying the same thing twice. Evolutionary theory is fundamentally

tautological. Stephen Jay Gould writes in *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory*: "Organisms enjoying differential reproductive success will, on average, be those variants that are fortuitously better adapted to changing local environments." "Differential reproductive success" is simply another way of saying "fortuitously better adapted"; thus this statement is a tautology masquerading as a fundamental evolutionary truth.

I find Stephen Jay Gould's statement ironic. He speaks of organisms "enjoying" differential reproductive success as being "fortuitously" better adapted. But this is not the language of science. The Roman goddess Fortuna was the personification of luck—usually good, but sometimes bad—and could be implored or placated. Gould has let the cat out of the bag, so to speak, by implying that evolutionary success could be attributed to luck instead of to certain genetic advantages. Gould has unwittingly uncovered a principle that Solomon described so long ago, but that evolutionary theory conveniently ignores: that time and chances happen to us all.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them. (Ecc 9:11-12)

But Gould is not alone in using spiritual language to describe what is supposed to be a natural process. As David Berlinski writes in *The Devil's Delusion*, "Darwin depicted natural selection as a force 'daily and hourly scrutinizing' the biological world—a description that would equally designate the activities of the Holy Ghost." In describing natural selection as a force, Darwin is attributing to it some form of motive power, a force that selects one species for preservation and consigns another to the fossil record. We seldom pay any attention to the full title of Darwin's *On The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. A favored race—say the white race—that is more successful must therefore be higher on the evolutionary ladder, so to speak. From this type of thinking springs forth all manner of mischief.

In fact, evolutionary theory is not science at all, but a metaphysical construct (and a poorly constructed one, at that.) Let's take, for a moment, the famous quote from Carl Sagan: "The universe is all that is or ever was or ever will be." Really? Can you find one scientific fact in that statement? Carl Sagan is actually promulgating a statement of belief, what is known in religious circles as a creed. Sagan states as fact something that cannot be shown to be true by any standard of proof we know of: scientific, legal, or historical. It certainly does not succumb to the scientific method, as it cannot be observed, measured, tested, or repeated. Sagan's statement certainly would not pass muster before the bar, as there is no evidence. By that same standard, Sagan's statement cannot be proven to be historically accurate. And a metaphysical construct, Sagan's statement is full of holes.

Richard Dawkins, writing in *The God Delusion*, makes the following hypothesis: "Any creative intelligence, of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution." This is a remarkably obtuse premise, as it automatically

excludes any point of view suggesting the opposite. It presumes (as Dawkins makes clear) that anything that cannot be proven with the tools of science is therefore untrue. As Carl Sagan himself once noted: "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." Simply because the tools of science cannot determine anything beyond the universe does not mean nothing exists apart from the universe. It could simply mean the tools of science are inadequate for the job.