

Introduction

Darwinian Triumphalism



Despite the protests of fundamentalist parents, the theory of evolution, as presented by Charles Darwin, and with its accompanying modern modifications, is widely taught in public and private schools and colleges. When I was attending a Catholic high school, back in 1962, and we came to the chapter in our biology text that dealt with evolution, the brother who was in charge of the class dismissed any religious objections we might have had by saying that as Catholics we were obligated to believe that God created man and woman. The method of creation was, as is proper, left to the sole discretion of the Creator. We were also, naturally, obligated to believe in the fall and redemption of mankind. (In 1962 we understood that mankind included womankind as well.) This kind of religious accommodationism is foreign to the thinking of many fundamentalists, and yet they have a valid point. It is possible to accept the findings of biology and its branches, including paleontology; it is also possible to accept the findings of Biblical scholarship and deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. It is possible to accept many things that deny traditional faith. It is possible to be so accommodating in our faith that we are left wondering if we have any faith left. The fundamentalist at least recognizes this.

Darwinism, with its rejection of teleology, was just one of many things in the nineteenth century that created a challenge to a traditional religious faith. This religious faith may be described as a belief in the literal interpretation of the Bible and the grudging acceptance, largely by ignoring their implications, of theories in astronomy, geology, "Higher Criticism," and other fields that appear to challenge Biblical authority and the traditional interpretations of the Bible.

Darwinism, however, was not the only explanation of evolutionary phenomena. There was also Lamarckism. This doctrine is usually interpreted as not just the inheritance of acquired characteristics, but also the active acquisition of these characteristics by species through an exercise of the will by individuals within that species. This second part is largely, I believe, erroneous. It is, however, the interpretation that Samuel Butler and George Bernard Shaw put on Lamarck. These two writers, and their response to Darwinism, will be dealt with later. It is important to recognize that they were not alone in preferring the doctrine of Lamarck to that of Darwin. Nietzsche also preferred Lamarck to Darwin, and began two aphorisms in the notebooks that were later published as *The Will to Power* with the phrase "Anti-Darwin." It is from these aphorisms that the title of this study derives.

Lamarckism is a warmer doctrine, emotionally, than Darwinism. As popularly interpreted it means that we can lift ourselves from the primal ooze by our own efforts. This is in keeping with our hopes for social and physical progress. Lamarckism is the Pelagian heresy applied to biology. Darwinism is cold and austere. Everything is left to chance and our own efforts to determine our fate are subject to the whims of chance and statistical variation. Darwinism is a Presbyterian form of biology.

And yet, unfortunately, it appears that Darwinism is true. At least it is truer than Lamarckism. Lamarckism comes up against the fact that there is no mechanism by which in the normal course of events characteristics acquired by the parent can be passed on to the child. There are, it is true, drugs and chemical substances that can have effects on parents and which in turn affect the progeny of the parents. The drug DES, for instance, was administered to women and their daughters are now being found to have higher incidences of certain forms of cancer. However, the normal course of events, say the acquisition of increased muscle mass in

the biceps and the brachialis, is not passed on to the children. Nor are the effects of surgical procedures inherited. The removal of tonsils in parent does not prevent the occurrence of tonsilitis in the child.

There is a difference between the cells of the body and the cells of the sperm and the ovum. If the procreative cells were created out of the body (soma) cells, then Lamarckism could be true. This does not happen. The reproductive cells are produced in special loci and are not derived directly from muscle, bone, or other organs.

So Lamarckism is false. There was a time when it did seem that it could be correct. It is also possible that there could be other answers to Darwinism. Some individuals may have accepted the challenge to faith and found a new way to integrate their faith with the findings of science. It is also possible that some found Lamarckism to be a substitute for their lost faith. Some may have reacted by probing the depths of nihilism and may have seen in that very act a cure for nihilism.

We want to examine some of the ways in which writers responded to Darwin and the crisis his doctrine brought about.

Overview

I do not want to give a history of evolutionary thought within the nineteenth century. Writers such as Loren Eiseley have already written on that topic, and the interested reader, if there is one, may consult the bibliography at the end for a list of books on the topic. I am also not concerned with the truth or falsity of any position within this field. What is important is what was believed before Charles Darwin postulated natural selection, and what was believed after his postulate became known. The effect of the intellectual turmoil is traced in several authors, primarily British and German.

The first chapter concentrates on establishing an intellectual model for the religious status quo prior to Darwinism. This model may not be valid for all individuals that lived prior to Darwin; its sole purpose is to establish an intellectual framework to demonstrate how Darwin's ideas could be opposed so vociferously.

The second chapter concentrates on the arguments over design. It was the contention of the natural theologians that the existence of creation revealed details about the nature of the creator. It is the position of the author, who can be described as a devout Catholic-agnostic-mystic, that the existence of objects, while implying the existence of a creator tells us nothing about the nature of the creator.¹ Such attributes as are assigned to the makers of various objects, when based on the objects themselves, tell us more about the person making the assertions than they do about the makers.

The third chapter examines the reaction of three German philosophers to Darwinism. Schopenhauer is given the briefest treatment because he wrote very little about Darwinism and evolution. Strauss is included largely because of Nietzsche's reaction to him.

The fourth chapter is devoted to Samuel Butler, this chapter and the next derive in good part from the author's work on Butler and Shaw as part of his doctoral dissertation. The prose has been altered to be less academic.

The fifth chapter is devoted to George Bernard Shaw. Shaw has fallen out of favor with academics. (The last convention of the Modern Language Association, or MLA, featured one paper on Shaw.) His plays are

1. I acknowledge the contradiction. I have been a cradle Catholic, a Buddhist, a Hindu, an atheist, a radical political activist, a conservative, and have changed opinions more often than I care to count. As William Blake says "The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, and breeds reptiles of the mind." Far be it from me to allow the reptiles in. Also the agnosticism referred to is more in line with St. John of the Cross's belief that faith is so intense that it is darkness to the intellect. There is, it seems to me, an epistemological difference between the objects of faith and the objects of knowledge. Further, it should become obvious that the agnostic stance applies to certain things and not to others. The perceptive reader may discover for himself just what this agnosticism refers to.

Dauncing and Light Feet

still read by the general reader and are still produced by colleges and high schools and local theater groups. Here I argue that Shaw's socialism is a fatal flaw in his philosophy and that his failure to recognize the validity of markets led to his rejection of unlimited free speech. When this rejection of markets was coupled with Shaw's belief that he knew the final purpose of society and of evolution, then he could support the purges and the concentration camps.

The sixth chapter looks at the Scopes trial. This is actually outside the scope of either Europe or the nineteenth century. It is included here for several reasons. First, it is an attempt at what Toynbee refers to as necromancy, the resurrection of dead forms of belief. Second, it anticipates the current concerns over the imposition of state supported beliefs within the educational system. Third, to make the book more sellable to an American publisher and audience.

Dauncing and Light Feet

Nietzsche believed that philosophy should be done with a certain lightness and deftness of touch. Nietzsche ranks, with Plato, as one of the most readable philosophers. While I do not hope to rank with Nietzsche and Plato,² I do hope to avoid gravity, which is "A mysterious carriage of the body to conceal defects of the mind." To that end I have tried to avoid academic jargon and to make the prose readable and enjoyable.

The process of learning to write academic prose, which is essentially the process taught in our graduate schools, is, frankly, poisonous. The only hope a young person has is to avoid the rigors of graduate school for a few years, work in a non-academic environment, where he will find people who think Derrida is somebody with a heavy accent saying "The rider." This liberates one from the necessity of having to take the latest nonsense emanating from Paris as gospel and gives the perspective to see a spade as a "bloody, unprintable shovel." After he, or she, has seen that the great mass of people have no aspirations to live in a classless society, but are simply beset with envy over the fact that others have more than they do, and that their greatest aspiration is to have more, then he can legitimately turn to Marxism as a form of chiliastic longing to be out of the world as it is. Until then, however, his Marxism is illegitimate.

Literature is a personal thing. There is no such thing as a national literature; there is only that written by individuals who are part of a nation. Likewise, the author is not, contrary to Barthes, dead, but very much alive. The writer, as he writes, embodies himself in the act of writing, but the ideal, at least the ideal taught in graduate school, is that the critic should remain behind the scenes. Our response to literature is, and should be individual and personal. The urge to throw a book across the room at least shows that the reader is responding to the author in some fashion. It is as a reader who is engaged (*engage* in the fashionable French existentialist jargon of my youth) that this is written. If the best thing the reader can do with the book, after spending his money on it, is to throw it into the fire, then he should feel free to do so. A more hopeful sign, however, is to argue with the book and tell it (since I intend to remain safely incommunicado) why it is a piece of dreck.

2. Obviously a polite lie.

