

CHAPTER 1

HOW DID LIFE BEGIN?

This is a vast question. But is it really important today? Absolutely. Knowing the truth about our origins is essential because it affects our attitudes toward ourselves and the way we treat other people. For example, if we are indeed the end result of billions of years worth of chance biochemical reactions, as evolutionary theory tries to explain, then human nature, and even the value of human life, is quite different than if we are actually the result of an intelligent Creator who designed us.

The truth about our origin also has an impact on our concept of God, even our interaction with God. If humans are actually the accidental by-product of biological mutations, it's a count against there actually being any super-human power. But if we're the craftsmanship of a God who personally planned and designed humans and other creatures, then this is someone we may want to know more about.

Sorting out answers to the truth of our origins involves some fascinating work, and touches on the fields of cosmology (study of the universe), chemistry, physics, statistics, biology, genetics, paleontology, and archeology.

Finding the truth also involves a certain amount of objectivity and emotional insulation, for some people's strongest passions are kindled by this issue.

DARWIN DEFINED

For starters, let's be clear about what we mean by evolution. Prior to the mid-1800s, most people on earth believed that all living things — each type of

animal, plant, and microorganism — were directly created by God, and had changed very little, if any, since that time. With few exceptions, most of the great scientists of the 17th and 18th centuries who actually invented the many disciplines that scientists practice today, believed that humans and all other creatures had been designed by a supernatural Creator.

Then in 1859 Charles Darwin published his book *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, also entitled *The Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* or *Origin of the Species*, for short. Darwin impressed the world with the proposal that all life began from a single cell, and that over millions of years living creatures have continually changed and adapted, becoming more complex and varied.

DARWIN: A CLOSER LOOK

Charles Darwin's father and grandfather were physicians, and Charles initially sought to follow in their footsteps. In spite of being a less-than-sterling student, he entered Cambridge University in 1828, and eventually graduated with a degree in theology. After Cambridge, Darwin planned to enter the ministry somewhere in the English countryside.

One day he received a letter from Captain Fitzroy, a decorated seaman who commanded the sailing vessel *Beagle*. Darwin was offered the position of naturalist on an upcoming five-year, round-the-world ocean voyage. He accepted. During the voyage, he made copious notes of his observations, especially of the varieties within species. In particular, Darwin noticed as many as 13 varieties of finches, a small tropical bird.

Years after returning from the *Beagle* voyage, Darwin began to form his philosophy of origins. He suggested that varieties within species (such as finches) occurred spontaneously. In the struggle to survive in a harsh world, some varieties were better suited than others. Those who were superior lived and reproduced, while those who were weaker died off. He proposed that this process of spontaneous variation and “survival of the fittest” continued over millions of years, and resulted in the tremendous varieties of life we find today.

Darwin was initially praised by some as a marvelous thinker. His evolutionary approach impacted many fields, including biology, astronomy, ethics, religion, psychology, and philosophy. In stark contrast to his theological training, Darwin later demonstrated enormous contempt for anything Christian. He wrote:

The Old Testament, from its manifestly false history of the earth, was no more to be trusted than the sacred books of the Hindus, or the beliefs of any barbarian. The New Testament is a damnable doctrine. [I can] hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true.¹

The world rapidly accepted Darwin as an authority and adopted his explanation as fact. Within 50 years, most of the scientific community, and indeed much of the western world, had confidence in his leading.

Darwin's theory of evolution today remains the most widely held explanation for the origin of life. In short, it says simply that all living things arose randomly from an inorganic, inanimate world. In this theory, all living things are interrelated. Humans and apes, for example, are believed to have begun from a single animal five to twenty million years ago. Likewise, primates (which include men and apes) are believed to have begun from a single animal approximately seventy-five million years ago.

Similar connections are imagined throughout the entire animal and plant kingdoms. The study of these hypothetical relationships is called *phylogeny*, and they can be illustrated by a so-called phylogenetic tree.

Evolution, as it is commonly understood today, depends upon four factors. Evolutionists (people who have confidence in the theory of evolution) explain them in this way:

1. **Spontaneous generation.** This means that life arose from inanimate (dead) material. In a pond or other moist environment (referred to as the pre-biotic soup), a perfect combination of carbon-based molecules happened to be present at the same instant. Denying all scientific logic, a DNA code, nucleus, cell wall, and energy-generating apparatus — the minimum requirements for a living cell — were all somehow present, each having randomly come together on its own. This first cell reproduced itself and the first life was off to a start.

2. **Random mutation.** Minor changes in the DNA code are thought to occur spontaneously within a creature. Most of these are attributed to “accidents” that happen when the creature's genetic code is copied at the time of reproduction. Outside radiation and chemicals are also thought to play a role.

The result of these random mutations is a new creature, slightly different from the first. Most importantly, it will either be better or less well

prepared to live in its environment. Most mutations are harmful to a creature. So, a high number would be necessary to increase the chances of a positive mutation taking place.

3. **Natural selection.** Darwin realized that many more creatures were born than actually survived well. He observed a struggle for existence in which the stronger creatures survived and the weaker ones died off. This process is called natural selection.

Any random mutation that results in a “weaker” creature, evolutionists reason, would cause the early elimination of that plant or animal. By contrast, any random mutation which increased the strength or fertility of a plant or animal would give it an advantage in the struggle for existence.

4. **Time.** Random mutations do not occur very often, and most mutations are damaging. Yet many positive mutations are necessary to give rise to a new creature. What is needed to make the process work is time, and lots of it.

The accumulation of many small but favorable mutations over time is evolution’s explanation for converting a microscopic bacterial cell into a human being. Yet even over many millions of years, as explained later, such a process would never have enough time to occur.



Natural selection (survival of the fittest) is a key part of evolution.

TINY CHANGES DON'T COUNT

It's also important to point out what is *not* considered to be evolution. Evolution does not refer to changes or adaptations within a particular basic type of plant or animal. Rather, evolution — sometimes specified as “*macroevolution*” — refers to one basic type transforming into another. Textbooks often describe adaptations that have taken place in biology — small changes within certain species. This process of adaptation is sometimes called “*microevolution*.” This is an actual occurrence — a fact on which all scientists agree. A common error is made in scientific reasoning, unfortunately, when these adaptations (or microevolution) are used to assume that “macroevolution” (evolution from one basic type of living creature into another) also takes place.

Each basic type of living creature has its own unique gene pool or genetic code. Basic types of animals are fairly readily recognized, and include the dog/wolf type, the elephant type, the chimpanzee type, the rat type, and so forth.

All humans belong to the basic “human” type. Tiny variations may occur within our type, such as differences in eye color, hair distribution, and skin color in the case of humans. In the case of corn, varieties seem to have arisen over the years, including starch corn, flint corn, sweet corn, pod corn, popcorn, and dent corn. Macroevolution does not refer to such limited changes, changes which do not lead to a new basic type of plant or animal.

What the theory of evolution does say is that dogs and cats arose from a common ancestor; an ancestor that over time diversified itself into mammals of different basic types. The theory also postulates that sparrows, finches, parrots, and blackbirds all came from a common forefather, such as an ancestral reptile; one who through the ages transformed itself into new basic types.

Some will refer to the subtle changes within basic types (for example, eye color among humans) as evidence of evolution in progress, that many such tiny changes could eventually lead to a new basic type. The critical evidence for evolution, however, lies not in proving tiny changes, but in proving the transformation of one basic type into another.

BREEDING AND ARTIFICIAL SELECTION DON'T COUNT

Sometimes evolutionists point to artificial selection of plants and breeding of animals as evidence for evolution. They say that such breeding is