

Creation and evolution

Alan Fowler

Much media effort is put into promoting the idea that evolution by natural selection, as proposed by Darwin 150 years ago, can account for the origin of living things. This article provides an historical perspective on the development of evolutionary ideas and the inadequacy of these ideas to account for more than the current variations within species.

DARWIN'S *Origin of Species* was first published 150 years ago on 24 November 1859. This triggered a vigorous debate between those who believed that every species of plant and animal was separately created and those who followed Darwin in believing that evolution by natural selection could account for the origin of all living things. Neither side was prepared to admit that there might be some truth on both sides. In this essay I hope to show that, although the scientific evidence strongly supports creation, it also shows that living things have been endowed with the capability of adapting to changing circumstances, and that this process of adaptation could lead to the emergence of new species. I also hope to show that the language of Genesis 1 actually supports this 'micro-evolution' of species by natural selection.*

To appreciate fully how Darwin went so tragically astray it will help to get an historical perspective through brief surveys of the lives of the four men who shaped the evolution debate, namely, Malthus, Matthew, Darwin and Wallace.

Thomas Malthus

Thomas Malthus (1766–1834) was an English social economist. In 1798 he wrote an essay entitled *Essay on the Principle of Population*, in which he said that the realisation of a happy society will always be hindered by the tendency of population to increase faster than the means of subsistence. He claimed that unless we discourage large families by sexual restraint and by withdrawing



Thomas Malthus

social benefits, then the Biblical triad of wars, famines and pestilences will continue as the only other means of controlling world population. Given, as it was, in the so-called age of enlightenment, this pessimistic view of the future of human society came as a great shock.

That which applies to humans also applies to all living things, except that animals and plants have no ability to control their reproductive instincts, so their numbers can only be kept under control and in balance by the triad of predation, starvation and disease. It is a self-evident truth that those creatures that survive nature's cull will be the strongest or the cleverest. As we shall see, this principle of the 'survival of the fittest' was an essential engine needed to drive any theory of biological evolution.

Patrick Matthew

Patrick Matthew (1790–1874) was a Scottish landowner who specialised in fruit tree cultivation. He was also interested in the problem of the shortage of oak to meet the increasing needs of the British navy. He was concerned that the need for top-quality timber meant that the best oak trees were being felled, and that this artificial selection would lead to deterioration of Britain's oak forests.

In 1831 Matthew published a book on this problem entitled, *On Naval Timber and Arboriculture*. In an appendix to this book he turned his attention from artificial to natural selection, and wrote:

"As nature in all her modifications of life, has a power of increase far beyond what is needed to

* Here and throughout the article it would perhaps be more accurate to say that Genesis 1 does not exclude this suggestion. The same idea was proposed in *The Genesis Flood* by Whitcomb and Morris (1966), pp. 66-69, arguing that the Ark need only have preserved representatives of each Biblical 'kind', and that these subsequently diverged into the vast number of individual species found today.—D.J.B.

supply the place of what falls by Time's decay, those individuals who possess not the requisite strength, swiftness, hardihood or cunning, fall prematurely without reproducing—either a prey to their natural devourers, or sinking under disease, generally induced by want of nourishment—their place being occupied by the more perfect of their own kind, who are pressing on the means of subsistence”.

Here Matthew suggested that Malthusian competition for survival ensures that the less endowed and less perfect varieties will be eliminated. In this way Matthew regarded the ‘survival of the fittest’ as a mechanism for preserving the integrity of creation.

On the question of whether natural selection through the struggle for survival could result in *new* species, Matthew wrote:

“There is more beauty and unity of design in this continued balancing of life to circumstance . . . than in total destruction and new creation . . . the progeny of the same parents, under great difference of circumstance, might, in several generations, even become distinct species, incapable of co-reproduction”.

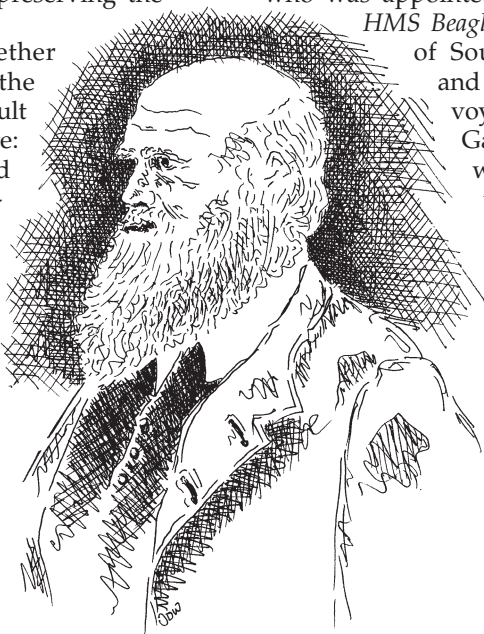
Here Matthew suggested that in changing environments the more adaptable variants will survive and might eventually give rise to new species.

At this point we need to emphasise that we are using the word ‘species’ as a biological term referring to groups of plants or animals that can successfully interbreed. Thus horses are a separate species from asses because, although they can interbreed, their progeny (mules and hinnies) are sterile. The different species belonging to the same family or genus share the same basic features; thus all the eighty-seven different species of kingfisher have spearlike beaks and dive for fish, and all the 200 species of woodpecker bore into old trees and have long, wormlike tongues that harpoon insects. *The micro-evolution of a new species does not involve the creation of new organs or structures. It only involves modifications of created designs.*

Although Matthew outlined the principle of natural selection and the evolution of new species nearly thirty years before Darwin published his *Origin of Species*, Matthew never accepted Darwin's creative macroevolution. Matthew regarded natural selection as essentially a means of preserving and possibly expanding God's original creation, whereas Darwin saw it as the means by which nature created itself.

Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin (1809–1882) was a typical free-thinking, upper-middle-class English gentleman who was appointed as honorary naturalist on



Charles Darwin

HMS Beagle, which surveyed the coast of South America between 1831 and 1836. On the last leg of the voyage the expedition visited the Galapagos Islands, where Darwin found an assemblage of unique reptiles and birds. The thirteen different finches and the four different mocking birds were clearly different from but comparable with the finches and mocking birds on the mainland. Even more significant was the fact that Darwin recorded that each of the mocking birds was found on a specific island. Darwin concluded that these findings suggested that the birds had originated from the mainland and subsequently diversified under differing environmental conditions,

thereby questioning the contemporary assumption that every species was separately created.

However, at this time Darwin had no idea as to how such evolution might have occurred. Enlightenment came after his return home, when, in October 1838, he read Malthus on *Population* and realised that, in the struggle for survival, favourable variations would be preserved, and that accumulated favourable variations might eventually lead to new species. Having understood the principle of natural selection, Darwin devoted the next twenty years to accumulating facts that he believed supported his obsession that all living things had evolved by the operation of natural selection.

What Darwin found on the Galapagos Islands is found worldwide. Oceanic islands tend to have unique species, a notable example being Madagascar, where eighty per cent of the plants and ninety per cent of the reptiles are unique. With our knowledge of the instability of the earth's crust it is a reasonable hypothesis that these unique species of island plants and animals result from separate development in the new environment created when the island broke away from the mainland.

The suggestion that different species could have evolved from a common stock is in harmony with Genesis 1, where we read that the units of creation were 'kinds'. The Hebrew word translated 'kind' is *mīn*, which is also used in Leviticus 11, where, in several instances, it refers to groups of similar species of clean and unclean animals. For example, "the heron after her kind" is not to be eaten. Since there are over sixty different species of herons, we can consider the possibility that an original 'kind' or genus of heron was created and subsequently diversified into different species. Genesis 1 tells us nothing about the method of creation. We are simply told that God said, "Let the earth bring forth" and "Let the waters bring forth" (vv. 11,20)—expressions that allow for the microevolution of new species from the created 'kinds'.

There are therefore biological and Scriptural reasons to suggest that God created the different 'kinds' (perhaps equivalent to genera) of plants and animals with the potential to adapt to changing environments and thereby give rise to different species. Darwin rejected the Bible because he assumed it taught literal hell torments and that the world was created in six literal days in about 4000 B.C.** So it is ironic that he entitled his book *Origin of Species*, a title that, understood biologically, is in harmony with the Bible. The tragedy of Darwin is that he was not content with suggesting limited species evolution, but insisted that evolution could have created all living things.

Darwin's massive extrapolation from the origin of species to the origin of life was helped by his ignorance of the laws of inheritance and the limits of spontaneous change. Darwin believed in the inheritance of acquired characters, the idea that acquired skills can be passed directly to the next generation by affecting the reproductive system. If this were true then it would be possible for each generation to build directly on the advances of the previous generation. We now know that this is not possible because the genes that will determine

our offspring are in germ cells present from the day we are born.

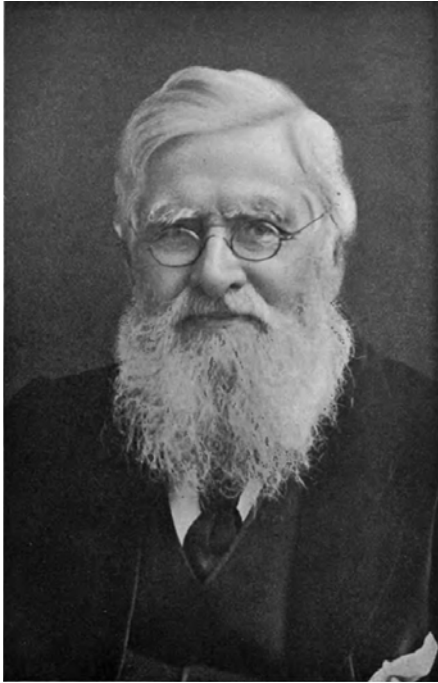
The fundamental problem with the theory of evolution is that the favourable genetic variations (mutations) on which it depends are extremely rare. The vast majority of mutations are disadvantageous, and the bigger the mutation the more likely it will result in a 'monster'. Even more problematic for Darwinian creative evolution is the fact that mutations are always *quantitative*, and only affect size, shape, number, colour, sweetness, etc. So, by selecting from these variables, breeders have been able to change the wild crab apple into a *Cox's Orange Pippin*. But nothing radically different has been created; all the different apples are the same species. Mutations such as would be necessary for the development of entirely new organs, such as echo-location or the production of spiders' thread, are not found. Mutations do not create new information; they only modify what has been created. There is therefore a fundamental difference between Darwinian macroevolution and the microevolution of species.

Alfred Russel Wallace

Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913) was the most famous of the intrepid Victorian explorers and naturalists. Like Darwin, Wallace was impressed with the fact that in particular areas you will frequently find a number of closely related species, suggesting that new species may have evolved. While in Sarawak, an island of the Malay Archipelago, he wrote an essay dealing with this subject, entitled, *On the Law which has regulated the introduction of New Species*, which was published in 1855. At this stage, like Darwin, Wallace had no idea how such change might have occurred; but three years later, in 1858, while prostrated with an attack of malaria, Wallace recalled what Malthus had written and realised that new species might arise through the natural selection of favourable variations in the struggle for survival.

Wallace immediately sent his article, titled, *On the tendency of varieties to depart indefinitely from the original type*, to Darwin for peer review. Darwin was shocked to find that Wallace had uncovered what he (Darwin) had believed and worked on for at least twenty years but had never published (probably for fear of offending those who believed that every species was a separate creation). After consulting with his colleagues, Darwin agreed to

** As still accepted by many Bible believers today.—D.J.B.



Alfred Russel Wallace

a joint reading of Wallace's article and extracts from his own 1834 sketch on Natural Selection. This took place at a special meeting of the Linnaean Society in London on 1 July 1858, and thus began the great evolution debate that continues to this day.

Although Wallace preceded Darwin in publicising evolution by natural selection, he generously conceded priority and fame to Darwin, whom he greatly admired. However, there were three significant differences between them:

- 1 Wallace never accepted Darwin's belief in the inheritance of acquired characters. Unknown to Darwin and Wallace, their contemporary, Gregor Mendel (1822-84), was revealing the laws of genetic inheritance, which mean that, instead of each generation being able to build on the achievements of its predecessor, every step in evolution would be dependent on the occurrence of a completely random beneficial mutation affecting the same organ—a process that would require vastly more time.
- 2 Darwin was nurtured in a freethinking Unitarian environment. His increasingly weak faith in a just God was finally lost following the tragic death in 1851 of Annie, his favourite daughter. Wallace, on the other hand, became increasingly religious and in his later years embraced Spiritualism. In his book *Natural Selection*,

published in 1870, he makes frequent references to a Creator, and he sees evolution by natural selection as the Creator's all-sufficient method of creation. In 1910, towards the end of his life, Wallace wrote a book entitled, *The World of Life: A manifestation of creative power, directive mind and ultimate purpose*. Wallace therefore became a typical theistic evolutionist.

- 3 The most fundamental of Wallace's disagreements with Darwin was Wallace's conviction that man's brain capacity is far beyond that required for mere survival in the struggle for existence. This is especially true of man's higher mental faculties such as self-consciousness, free will and speech, which enable us to understand abstract concepts such as time and eternity, good and evil, justice and mercy. Wallace argued that it was utterly inconceivable that such spiritual qualities could have arisen from the need for immediate material survival. On learning of his views on man, Darwin chided Wallace with being a retrograde naturalist and a "miserable friend".

In chapter 9 of his *Natural Selection*, Wallace argues powerfully in favour of man being a special creation. In this belief Wallace is in harmony with Genesis 1, where the language draws a clear distinction between the creation of man and that of the animals. Of the plants and animals we read, "Let the earth bring forth", but of man we read, "Let us make man in our image" (vv. 11,26). Thus Genesis 1 tells us that, whatever has been the extent of evolutionary changes in nature, Adam was a very special creation, and all humans today are his descendants.

We see, therefore, that Wallace outshines Darwin, not only in being the first to submit a scientific paper on evolution and in having a better knowledge of the laws of inheritance, but especially in his refusal to diminish the role of a Creator.

Conclusion

Far from being a slippery slope leading to Darwinism, the knowledge that both Genesis and nature support the microevolution of species greatly assists us in our fight against Darwinian macroevolution. This it does by allowing us to show the fundamental limitations of species evolution. It also provides us with common ground on which we can enter into a potentially fruitful debate with Darwinian biologists. The alternative is to continue in a 'stand-off', with neither side listening to the other.