

Notes from a Misspent Retirement: What's Wrong With Us?

Evolution is a subject that exercises many people.

I need to explain how and why it became important to me.

A little background. I was born in Portsmouth, England, in 1949, in the immediate aftermath of World War Two. Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan had been defeated at enormous human and material cost, and the aftermath cast a long dark shadow over my childhood.

My father was a British Royal Air Force (R.A.F.) fighter pilot, who joined up and trained during the war. I was thus a “service brat”, and we moved every couple of years - a new place, a new school, new companions and sometimes a new country and new sorts of people. I often felt an itch to move on if we stayed for long in one place, so my formative years were very different to those who are born and bred in a single place with an extended family always close by.

This upbringing has given me a perspective on humanity and human nature that I have been studying in greater depth since my retirement. One book that made an impression on me was Daniel Quinn’s novel [Ishmael](#), which explores, in his imagination, critical points in the history of humanity that shaped us, and how our mode of living changed from hunter-gatherers, to settled agrarians. This led me to studying [evolutionary psychology](#), a field that has its critics, even among those who accept the truth of evolution, but there is no doubt, given that evolution is true, our brains, and therefore our minds, have been shaped by evolution, and in order to understand human nature, we have to acknowledge that they have been profoundly influenced, shaped, even, by evolution.

So what **is** wrong with us? And why is it vital for us to try and understand human nature as well as we can? Well, I’ve always thought that to address a problem, the first step is to try and understand it. What’s the problem? Look at history: Warfare, genocide, exploitation, division. The sheer waste of human life and resources. Who knows what the world could have been like if we had concentrated on health, welfare, education and life-supporting sciences instead? We call ourselves Homo sapiens sapiens. The second “sapiens” is to distinguish ourselves from other sapient species such as Homo sapiens neanderthalensis. Sapient - possessing sagacity - being sage. I don’t know of any conflict, apart from acts of self-defence, where engaging in conflict has ever resulted in overall gains for anyone, as compared with the alternative of cooperation. Life is not a zero-sum game. Yet it seems so easy for us to whip up hatred for “the other” and to spend a great deal of our time and resources on opposing them or exploiting them. How can this be?

One result from evolutionary psychology (EP) is an experiment that indicates that ethnic conflict as opposed to conflict over resources and racism is not part of our natures. This is predicted from the observation that in our deep past (in the environment of evolutionary adaptedness or EEA in the jargon of EP) could not have shaped such instincts in us, only ever having come across people as strange as those across the river or the other side of the hill. Rather, what we

are attuned to is signals of coalitional alliance. The experiment, conducted by R Kurzban, J Tooby, L Cosmides, leading researchers in the field of evolutionary psychology, found that what predicts positive cooperative interpersonal behaviour is not “race” or anything else but whether or not you recognise that someone is in your coalition group or not. Here is their paper.

<https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.251541498> . History, unfortunately, has confounded coalition groups, with “races”.

What can we learn from this? It’s pretty simple really. People don’t go on murderous rampages against people they gain from positively interacting and co-operating with. There are many cases where engineering situations that encourage mutual profit have succeeded, despite some recent efforts of populist separatist rabble-rousers and warmongers. These include the unification of Italy, and of Germany, and other modern nation-states, the United States of America, and the European Union. It is possible for people of differing origins to come together for mutual benefit.

The other side of that coin, though, is that it seems that it is all too easy to whip up resentment and hatred of others, and engineer situations where inhuman behaviour is evoked. See -

- ◆ The Milgram experiment, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram_experiment beginning in 1961
- ◆ Jane Elliot’s “Blue Eyes/Brown eyes” exercise https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Elliott in 1968
- ◆ And the Stanford prison experiment https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford_prison_experiment in 1971,

and, of course, those genocides and pointless, mutually destructive wars that have occurred throughout history.

It was while studying evolutionary psychology that I came across a Yahoo group frequented by leading professionals and lay people. It was here that I learned, to my utter astonishment, that a significant proportion of - mostly Americans - but also people from other English speaking countries, and various strains of Muslims, plus a number of followers of certain sects of particular Judaic sects, (all from the Abrahamic religions) reject evolutionary science and even vigorously oppose it in public and in schools. I, being British, thought it had all but petered out by the end of the 19th century! These people are usually collectively known as “creationists”, and I will use that name to denote them from here on. Please note that I am not including all those that think their god created the world and its contents, just those who reject and oppose mainstream science. My meaning of “creationists” is those who believe that the world is young, typically 6,000 years old, and/or that “macroevolution”, the evolution of the different “kinds” of living things, did not and cannot happen. These creationists frequently hold a number of beliefs that can be found in a grab-bag of beliefs and attitudes, which include the ideas that -

- ◆ All the sciences that contradict creationism (typically labelled “evolutionist” and “atheistic”, whether they are evolutionary or atheistic or not) are false and part of a global, multi-generational, multinational conspiracy invented by atheists and other

sensible people to turn people away from their god. These sciences include cosmology, astronomy and geology, as well as biology and even physics.

◆ “Evolutionism” is inherently racist, despite the fact that it makes a nonsense of the idea of racism and was opposed by Darwin, a committed member of an anti-slavery campaigning family. [Here is what I have to say about that.](#)

<https://barryhisblog.blogspot.com/p/darwins-sacred-cause.html>

◆ The big-bang is also an atheistic plot to deny god ([despite the fact that proponents of it include such figures as Georg Lemâtre, who was a Catholic priest](#)).

◆ There was a global flood some 6,000 or so years ago that wiped out every life-form except for the crew and living manifest of a wooden boat, commonly known as “Noah’s Ark”. I came across Glenn Morton, who described himself as a “Bible-believing Christian”, who parted company with the “Institute for Creation Research” because, 1) he had a dedication to the truth, and 2) he needed to make a living as an effective oil prospector. I had great admiration for him when I interacted with him. A no-nonsense guy with the character of a geologist - hewn from granite. I’ve preserved his writing the best I could here, @ [Glenn Morton’s archive pages](#).

<https://barryhisblog.blogspot.com/p/glenn-mortons-pages-archive-contents.html>

◆ Homosexuality is an abomination in the sight of God, and is a deliberate, personal choice that people have conscious, deliberate control over.

◆ Climate change is another fake multinational conspiracy.

To me, it is a moral question. How can you hope to be an effective moral agent in a world when you have a completely incorrect mental model of that world? How can you ever make effective moral decisions?

Thus, I began to become involved in “discussions” with various science-denying groups on the internet. As always, I tried to get to understand the situation and the people I was interacting with, but I still find it difficult to understand the mentality. One book I came across helped somewhat, was Karen Armstrong’s [“The Battle for God”](#).

The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam is a book by author [Karen Armstrong](#) published in 2000 by [Knopf/HarperCollins](#) which the [New York Times](#) described as “one of the most penetrating, readable, and prescient accounts to date of the rise of the fundamentalist movements in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam”.^[1] *The Battle for God* traces the history of the rise of [fundamentalism](#) in the three major [monotheistic](#) faiths. Armstrong’s analysis starts with developments in [Judaism](#) and traces it through the creation of fundamentalism in [Christianity](#) to adoption of a similar approach to modernity in [Islam](#).

Out of everything I have learned about evolution, one line of evidence that stands out for me as

being slam-dunk proof of it, is the evidence from endogenous retroviruses, or “ERVs”. I have spent a great deal of my time studying them, writing about them and explaining them. Finding myself needing to explain the same things over and over, I have developed the “ERV FAQ” which can be found @ <https://barryhisblog.blogspot.com/p/endogenous-retroviruses-frequently.html>

Creationist bingo.

1) Deep time, the big bang and the origin of life from non-living matter (abiogenesis) are “atheistic” and “evolutionary.”

No. Deep time was discovered well before Darwin and Wallace outlined how evolution could work. Pioneering geologists, notably James Hutton, found that the tale of Noah’s flood couldn’t account for the facts of geology. And even before Darwin and Wallace, Georges Cuvier, the leading naturalist of his time, was sceptical about the likelihood of organisms changing over time, because they were so exquisitely adapted to their circumstances and their way of living (their niches). To try and explain faunal succession, he posited a series of catastrophic floods and new creations. BTW, Lord Kelvin, who gave us the absolute Kelvin scale of temperature, thought that the world could not be that old(though far older than Ussher’s universe), because he thought that the sun burned by combustion, and is quickly burning its stock of fuel. This was just before nuclear processes were discovered, that generate heat by fusion and fission, and not by combustion.

And no, an early proposer of the big bang was a Catholic priest. Fundies might deny that Catholics are Tru Chrischuns™, but they are certainly not atheists. Theists welcomed the big bang over the steady state theory, because it gave God “something to do”.

And, of course, biological evolution is to do with the fact that living creatures can change over generations, and how and why they can change. You can’t have it before you have life. It is not about the origin of life, and certainly it is not about cosmology - the origin of the universe.

And BTW, Genesis 1 maintains that the earth and the waters brought forth life, but strangely, bible-believers, even though they say they believe that scripture is the “Word of God”, will refuse to accept it! They do not have sufficient faith in their God to believe he could create a material world that could bring forth life.

And lastly, the major Christian denominations, and many of the other followers of the Abrahamic faiths, Judaism and Islam, accept, deep time, the big bang and the origin of life from non-living matter

2) Evolution is atheistic.

2) Evolution is racist.

3) SLoT

4) Information

5) Design

6) Quote mining. One of the slimiest forms of creationist lying is called quote-mining. This takes the form of selectively quoting an “evolutionist” in order to try and convince the gullible that the “evolutionist” has severe doubts about what they think. The most infamous lie is to quote Darwin, discussing the evolution of the eye, where he is quoted as saying, “

“To suppose that the eye, with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest possible degree.” - Charles Darwin, Origin of Species, 1st Ed., p. 186.

Darwin often introduces an argument with an apparent conundrum, then goes on to discuss it. It is a hook. An attention grabber. He immediately goes on to say what he does actually think.

“Yet reason tells me, that if numerous gradations from a perfect and complex eye to one very imperfect and simple, each grade being useful to its possessor, can be shown to exist; if further, the eye does vary ever so slightly, and the variations be inherited, which is certainly the case; and if any variation or modification in the organ be ever useful to an animal under changing conditions of life, then the difficulty of believing that a perfect and complex eye could be formed by natural selection, though insuperable by our imagination, can hardly be considered real.”

Even when this is pointed out to them, creationists will not admit that the use of the mined quote is mendacious.

Creationist “debating” tactics (decoy, smokescreen ...)