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Hugh W. Nibley

# Evolution A Convenient Fiction

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## Summary:

This packet is a collection of comments by different scholars critiquing various aspects of the theory of evolution. Evolutionary assumptions have not held up to testing. The theory has become a matter of faith in science.

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## G-2 REPORT, NO. 3

### EVOLUTION: "A CONVENIENT FICTION"

N. Webster: Evolution is "a manifestation of related events or ideas in an orderly succession, as in a process of growth . . . . This theory, according to which the higher forms of animal life are derived from the lower . . . holds that all animals and plants are descendants of a very few simple organisms (or perhaps of but one) . . . ."

#### Orderly?

Ch. Singer (1950): "The reader will here ask, 'What is meant by these words, genus and species?' It is disappointing to be forced to reply that no clear definition can be given to them . . . . The question, in fact, lays bare one of the weakest points in the present state of biological science."

A. Kroeber: "But it is increasingly becoming evident that . . . the belief in the seeming prevalence of automatic, orderly, slow genetic differentiation must be questioned and perhaps abandoned."

E. Hayr (1942): "It is not surprising to find how few authors have dared to define the genus . . . no two authors are likely to agree as to what the 'essential' characters are. The best definition of a genus seems to be one based on the honest admission of the subjective nature of this unit . . . . The genus (is) a man-made unit, and not one of nature . . . left to the judgment of the individual systematist. The genus of the systematist is his own artificial creation, and not a natural unit. The same is true for the higher categories above the genus . . . ."

#### "Higher" Forms?

T.N. George (1951): "In the anthropocentric view . . . its (evolution's) progress (is) marked by the appearance of successively higher forms of life. In the light of the evidence now available . . . such a view invites rejection . . . . A 'line' of evolution is a convenient fiction . . . . There is no steady march of progress. The reptiles did not evolve out of the ruling amphibians, or the mammals out of the ruling reptiles . . . . The general picture is not one of continued advance (even as measured by arbitrary yardsticks), but of replacement . . . . [T]here manifestly has been no progressive evolutionary rise from one group to another . . . . [I]t is impossible to discern a single over-riding motif in evolution."

Since by definition evolution is "an orderly succession," i.e., a line, the admission that the line is a fiction discredits the whole concept.

#### Single Origin?

O. Dodson & W. B. Saunders: Today "Goldschmidt can speak of 'the bridgeless gap' between species. This discontinuity, never explained, presents 'the second major problem of evolution' . . . . All of the extant classes of



Mollusca were present already in the Cambrian . . . . The classes were just as distinct then as now and so paleontology is of no help in deciding what the relationships within the phylum may be . . . . [O]rganisms showing the transition from the trilobites to the other major anthropod types are entirely lacking and it may be that the several groups arose independently."

A THEORY, IS A THEORY, IS A THEORY:

M. Lamotte: "Lacking a rigorous logical demonstration, which is rendered impossible by the very nature of the field . . . we have not an acceptable theory of the mechanisms of evolution."

K. E. Bock: It was long ago recognized that evolution was (a) dead horse--but there was nothing to take its place: "This theoretical bankruptcy has forced us back into the evolutionist fold in spite of ourselves," since we must have some "methodological framework within which we can seek generalization about cultures."

E. Friedell: "Darwinism was a perfect expression of the English temperament and comfortable middle-class view of the world that refused to believe in sudden and violent metamorphoses, world uprisings and world calamities, but insisted at all times on gradual, safe, peaceful, and comfortable development. Today we know differently."

M. Jacobs: "Although details of most of these changes are inadequately evidenced by the fossil discoveries, the anthropologist uses as his frame of reference the concept of developmental levels. This serves as a means of classification in time. He presumes that subsequent discoveries will fit into one or another revision of an always tentative scheme of levels. This is the course of evolutionist thinking."

N. B.: The Concept, which is hundreds of years old, is **not** based on the evidence, which is inadequate to support it; instead the evidence is made subservient to the concept, the "frame of reference" into which it must be fitted. This was strikingly pointed out in a Presidential Address before the Am. Anthropol. Society, by A. N. Wallis.

A. N. Wallis: "Genealogists are notoriously ingenious and usually supply the family lines for anyone willing to pay for the service. Many physical anthropologists supply them free of charge--for all mankind. Any new find of a fossil is likely to change the picture of the line of human ancestry. Such, at any rate, has been the case since Pithecanthropus came on the scene to claim a name already coined and awaiting him. Ecanthropus changed the picture. Physical anthropologists are now taking their revenge by blotting him off the prehistoric landscape. The story, with diversity of interpretation necessitated by each new find, is retold, each succeeding year, with a different role assigned the actors in the drama. It is almost a certain bet that during the next decade it will be retold with no less shift in the roles of the leading actors . . . . In less than a decade this processing was formed, and more than once reformed, when each marcher was assigned a different place in it . . . .

These feats arouse speculation as to what the procession will look like at the end of another 10 years . . . . Let him who can prove any of it wrong cast the first stone. First prize, naturally, goes to him who can prove it correct."

Zukermann (quoted in Dodson & Saunders): "The difficulty is not only that stories of human phylogeny can never be more than a series of probabilities largely based on guesswork. We also have to consider the fact that speculation clouds almost every single stage in the treatment of the physical evidence itself. It begins with decisions to which fragments found in a deposit are to be individually associated with each other. It continues into the stage where their anatomical [text missing] framework of evolutionary change to which the facts can be fitted. When to all these we add the uncertainties associated with the geological dating of fossil remains . . . we have all the ingredients necessary to produce endless speculation and controversy."

Zukermann illustrates with the case of the "primate genus *Hesperopithecus*, the single fossil tooth of which is now known to be that of a peccary," though its claims "were supported by the selfsame leading authorities who today press the hominid claims of the new South African fossils . . . ."

E. Mayr: "[P]aleontologists, taxonomists, and geneticists talk three different languages, and all three of them have certain mistaken ideas about the basic facts and axioms of their sister disciplines."

Dodson & Saunders: "[I]t may be well to recall the admonition of Hyman that 'the exact steps in the evolution of the various grades of invertebrate structure are not and presumably never can be known.' Statements about them are inferred from anatomical and embryological evidence and in no case should be regarded as established fact."

#### THE MACHINES THAT NEVER WORK:

D. M. S. Watson: "Since Darwin wrote his theory of natural selection, [it] ha[s] been constantly in the minds of naturalists, who have designed, but never really satisfactorily carried out, experiments to show that natural selection does in fact occur."

H. Grundfest: "Darwin's combination of two blind forces, variation and natural selection, operating together inexorably in evolution is still as valid as ever. However, to specify these factors quantitatively precisely has been the effort of the last 100 years, and is still largely unsuccessful. The data in some areas are implausibly bizarre, among them some which Darwin himself found in various plants."

R. Good: "It has been difficult to realize that . . . there is a considerable and, it is fair to say, steadily growing realization that natural selection is not, and never can have been, that principle cause of evolution that it is still too often claimed to be . . . . It rests with those who believe in the importance of natural selection to produce the requisite incontrovertible evidence of it . . . . Their opponents are under no obligation to disprove it,

nor under any necessity to find a more satisfactory substitute for it." The main objections to natural selection are: (1) "That it is unscientific because it depends too much on false parallels and weakly supported assumptions", (2) "It is no longer appropriate to the moral, social, and educational climate of our time." No. 1 is illustrated by "the anthropocentric approach to evolutionary problems," e.g., "protective resemblance," which "supposes that the bird considered is no quicker at detecting the presence of the insect than a man would be. The point of the purposive word 'protective' really dodges the issue, but it does prepare the way for the teleological kind of explanation so satisfying to the human mind." Protective coloration is even more common among plants, "but for obvious reasons these botanical resemblances have never been the victim of [such] anthropocentric notions as 'protection', 'warning', and 'mimicry', nor of the assumptions involved in these."

H. Grundfest: "We are ignorant of the causes and mechanisms of variation . . . . Thus, in evolution we are forever dealing with an improbable calculus of probability, yet one which nonetheless must give a 'correct' answer-survival value . . . . In the field of psychological problems we have regressed since Darwin's time . . . ."

The social sciences have given up a Darwinian theory largely because they have given up all theory, right or wrong.

A. W. Herre: "It is assumed that the principles of genetics now so widely known and given in all texts are of universal application," but "a lichen produces no germ plasm and there are no genes; at least no one has ever found any indication of such. Yet lichens have well marked heredity and one can trace the evolution of many species . . . . Ever since 1919 . . . I have urged geneticists to study heredity in lichens, but thus far none has been willing to do so."

W. W. Howells: "Darwin was probably right the first time, then, and natural selection is more important in racial adaption than he himself later came to think. Curiously however, it is extremely difficult to find demonstrable, or even logically appealing adaptive advantages in racial features." (The theory is probably correct, but, "curiously", the evidence does not support it!)

A. Kroeber: "The whole question of what is genetic and what is secondarily acquired has become turbid: the genetic units have become few but vast, and undefined at the edges, without the instructions into the genetic units being clear as to what happened, or how or when."

R. Broom: The picture of human evolution becomes ever dimmer as with new discoveries "classification will become more and more difficult . . . . The classification of ape-men will be as difficult as that of man is today."

T. S. Westoll: "The early classical evolutionary tree of the horse, beginning in the small dog-sized Eohippus and tracing directly to our present day Equinus, was all wrong. The direct line of descendants of Eohippus led to a horse-like animal Hypohippus, which became extinct and so ended the line . . . . All evolution is made up of such 'finite stage' or blind alley patterns,



with offshoots starting up new side-lines. Through a series of offshoots present animal stocks are developed."

E. Mayr: "The acquisition of flight in birds . . . involved a rebuilding of the entire skeleton, of the brain, of most of the behavior patterns, and so forth. The organism seems to change as a harmonious entity, and not by random mutation of its parts. This objection to the conventional interpretation of evolution by the geneticists (random mutation and selection) has been made again recently."

#### BY FAITH ALONE

T. N. George: "Darwin's supreme achievement was to make compelling the inference that evolution had in fact taken place . . . providing a basis for mechanistic interpretation it helped to free biology of animistic influences." Darwin did **not** successfully demonstrate natural selection, but he did inculcate "conviction of the fact of evolution."

E. Haeckel entitled his work on Evolution, The Riddle of the Universe, which he firmly believed he had solved. "The Weltratsel (Haeckel's book) was undoubtedly a depressing document to theologians and like-minded people," wrote H. Schmidt in 1925, ". . . but it was a thing of joy to those who had attained the level of Positivist thinking. Precisely because it was offensive, nay shocking, to the one group, it was welcomed by the others as a new Gospel . . . . Attacks by its most violent opponents have not arrested its triumphant conquest of the world."

W. Weaver: "The great Darwinian movement, whose centennial we have so recently celebrated, has seemed to many to constitute a major indication that man, if he is indeed nothing but an improved beast, can by one more easy step be nothing more than a machine--and thus surely an object which science can wholly analyze, wholly capture within its special framework." Am Sci, March 1961.

R. Good: "For a variety of reasons, the hypothesis of natural selection gradually acquired a not altogether healthy degree of prestige, which is hard to break down. It has become, if only by reiteration, so firmly ensconced as a part of our general outlook on nature that it needs real determination to cast doubt on it. Biologists are conditioned to it from their earliest education and are seldom taught that there are conflicting opinions about it."

L. C. Eiseley: "Strangely enough, it is the student whose questions naively phrased, sometimes pierce, unwittingly, through our careful array of measurement and method to ask us those old, unsettled questions about the nature of life that have troubled man since the beginning. It does not grace us to smile and fend off these questions."

#### BACK TO ESCHATOLOGY

H. Schirmbeck: "The darling child of Darwinism is Blind Chance," which the amazing perfection and complexity of biological processes refutes. "If the

observer simply lets the transcendence of every organic phenomenon work upon him without opposing it, he perceives the very opposite of anything like mere accident."

H. Grundfest: "The most useful approach to explaining evolutionary changes is still teleology (there is a purpose behind it!), an uncomfortable state of affairs for the school-book logic which poses as philosophy of science." Today, biologists are ashamed of teleology. "Much modern botanical research . . . has attained an ateleological attitude which verges on sterility, and indeed might signify such, were it not that teleological reasoning is substantially more common in the laboratory and field than in the research papers. These words of Heslop-Harrison apply to all biology, I think." (i.e. science rejects purpose, but can't get anywhere without it!)

E. Mayr: "It must be admitted, however, that it is a considerable strain on one's credulity to assume that finely balanced systems such as certain sense organs (the eye of vertebrates, or the bird's feathers) could be improved by random mutation."

Sir Charles Sherrington: "The body is made up of cells . . . 1000 billions . . . Each of the cells from the beginning besides shaping itself takes up for itself a right station in the total assembly. Thus each cell helps to shape, and to construct as by design, the total assembly . . . Each cell, we remember, is blind; senses it has none. It knows not 'up' from 'down'; it works in the dark. Yet the nerve-cell for instance, 'finds' even to the fingertips the nerve-cell with which it should touch fingers. It is as if an immanent principle inspired each cell with knowledge . . . [T]he microscope . . . convey[s] this impression of prescience and intention . . . Nerves seem for their purpose, constructed in view of what will be 'wanted' of them. Before ever they function they grow where they will be wanted, they make the 'right' connections . . . Living structure is a mass of Aristotle's final causes. All is remembered; no detail is forgotten . . . [T]oday the biologist writes, 'we can only understand an organism if we regard it as though produced under the guidance of thought for an end, as a final cause at work.'" An organism taking form is "an aggregate of cells doing what they are doing for the first time and the only time they ever will. Yet every step they take seems fraught with purpose toward a particular end . . . That impression of concerted endeavor comes, it is no exaggeration to say, with the force of a self-evident truth."

#### THE VOICE OF DESCENT IS FAINT:

C. S. Coon: "If we consider the same evidence in the dimension of time, no clear pattern of evolutionary succession emerges, as many would like to believe . . . During the span of 50,000 generations . . . the human organism has remained the same . . . As far as paleontologists know every species of mammal now alive was already in existence at the beginning of the Pleistocene . . . It is safe[r] to assume that Homo sapiens existed at the beginning of the Pleistocene, than to build up an evolutionary scheme within the Pleistocene times on the basis of relative dates of the few fossils that have yet appeared . . . The oldest specimen of Homo sapiens known is also the oldest of all

fossil men of any kind, older than Pithecanthropus, Sinanthropus, Rhodesian, or Neanderthal . . . ." There is **no** evidence that primates "appeared on the face of the earth in the order of their evolutionary development . . . . It is the order of their Disappearance . . . that follows a rational pattern. This is what the bones tell us."

W. E. Howells: "If the time of their origin (i.e. of the first true men) is blurred, the place is no less so . . . . The when, where and how of the origin of races puzzle us not much less than they puzzled Charles Darwin . . . . In the Descent of Man, Darwin turned his back on his own central notion of natural selection as the cause of races."

A. Thomas: "We support the opinion of Dobzhansky (1944) who holds that from the beginning there has existed but one single human species . . . . The current classifications which distinguish species, genres, and inferior and superior categories of human fossils seem to have no foundation."

M. D. Sahlins: For a long time anthropologists have tried to prove that the more primitive societies are ape-like. Exactly the opposite is found to be the case: "Comparison of primate sociology with the findings of anthropological research immediately suggests a startling conclusion . . . . Human social life is culturally, not biologically, determined . . . . It is an extraordinary fact that Primate urges often become not the secure foundation of human social life, but a source of weakness in it . . . . Paradoxically the cruel belligerence that is popularly considered the epitome of human nature (the "primitive"!) reaches its zenith in the human condition most removed from the pristine."

#### WHERE IS THE 'PRIMITIVE'?

M. Gimbutas: "There is no evidence that our neolithic ancestors were constantly battling with axes. There is no trace of an axe as weapon in historical sources, in folk-customs, in art or in folklore."

C. F. Hockett: "Nowhere in the world has there been discovered a language that can validly and meaningfully be called 'primitive'."

Sapir: "[W]e know of no people that is not possessed of a fully developed language. The lowliest South African Bushman speaks in the forms of a rich symbolic system that is in essence perfectly comparable to the speech of the cultivated Frenchman."

Herbert Spencer's **main argument** for evolution was that "philology proves the dispersion of mankind to have commenced before there existed a language sufficiently organized to express religious ideas."

A. Kroeber: "When in 1919 Paul Radin assembled 15 pages of evidence to show that all native American languages were probably inter-related, he was shrugged or laughed off. Now it is a group of Sapir-trained linguists who are making much more voluminous findings by newer methods to the same effect as Radin, and

the results of their more conservative colleagues seem to point in the same direction of overall anarchy . . . . The overall picture, at least among linguists in America, is fast becoming chaotic."

W. D. Wallis: "The further we proceed into the gloom of the prehistoric, the clearer our vision . . . . With regard to remote prehistoric man we can make inferences on much less abundant, and much less clear, evidence than would suffice if we were dealing with contemporary men."

(Comment on the paradox that the more ancient a thing is, the easier people think it is to understand and imagine. The Church System is full of experts, who can tell you all about primitive thought, primitive religion, and the early days of mankind -- but any of these would be hopelessly stumped by a specific question on the well-documented history of subsequent ages. We have a dozen self-certified experts on Egyptian but none of them can read Latin, let alone Egyptian.)

W. D. Wallis: "I have sought, and in vain, for an anatomist who would venture to say from examining the bony inside of a skull whether the individual was a mute or an orator . . . . Yet to this very year the statements are made, in some instances by anatomists, that Pithecanthropus as indicated by the skull (!), probably had speech. As mentioned, those same anatomists would not make pronouncement regarding the speech abilities of a contemporary individual if they had not only the bones of the brain case, but also the brain."

The experts would not dare commit themselves as to whether a modern anthropoid can speak or not, even when they have its whole brain to examine; yet they will take a fragment of a prehistoric skull and from that alone confidently announce that its possessor could speak.