

Darwin defends evolution

An exclusive interview with the ghost of Charles Darwin

It is not every day one gets the opportunity to interview a ghost. (Perhaps that is because ghosts don't exist.) Real or imagined, however, the chance to fire questions at Charles Darwin is irresistible.

Worldview by Guy P. Harrison

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G. Harrison: Are you surprised that your theory of evolution is still being debated in the 21st century?

C. Darwin: No, I'm not surprised, young man. I anticipated controversy. That's why I dilly-dallied for so long before publishing. My intentions were only to make a contribution to science, but I knew that some would find it indigestible regardless of the evidence for it. Publishing felt like confessing to a murder. My stomach was in knots for half my life because of it. Even my beloved wife, Emma, nagged me to no end about the possible repercussions.

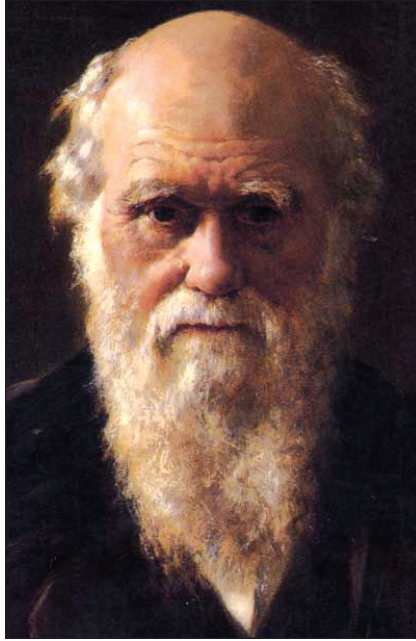
Alliance to truth was my greatest burden, however. I simply could not ignore the reality staring back at me. Let's be clear, I did not invent evolution; I merely described it.

Does accepting evolution mean one must reject religious belief?

It depends on the belief but, in a general sense, no it does not. Evolution certainly does not disprove the existence of any god. Also, contrary to a common misconception, evolutionary theory does not address the beginning of life. How life started is an entirely different question. Evolution only describes how life changes over time. One can recognize change via natural selection and still choose to believe in a god. The two are not mutually exclusive. It is important to understand that many religious people around the world have freely accepted evolution as fact. For example, the Catholic Church's official policy is that evolution is undeniable by the weight of so much evidence from so many sources. Pope John Paul II declared this in 1996. One can be Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Jewish or Buddhist and accept the reality of evolution, as millions currently do.

Proponents of Intelligent Design [ID] say that scientists are unable to explain life fully because it is irreducibly complex. Therefore, an intelligent designer must be involved.

That is absolutely bonkers. Of course



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scientists haven't figured out everything yet! We were all in caves picking ticks off one another barely a moment ago! Pointing to gaps in our knowledge is not proof of anything other than the fact that we still have much work to do. Look, science has achieved much within a short time but these ID people are too quick to surrender. By their logic, why bother seeking new answers to anything? ID is nothing more than giving up on the search for knowledge. Anyone whose disposition leads him to attach more weight to unexplained difficulties than to the explanation of a certain number of facts will certainly reject my theory. That is as true today as it was in 1859 when I wrote it.

They say this is a fairness issue in science classes. Why not teach both?

Because they have no evidence. They have as good a case as those who still believe that magic is real. Shall we give magic equal time in science classes too?

But ID is very popular.

So what? Science is not a popularity contest. Conclusions are not arrived at by vote. ID has gained no traction in the scientific community because it has not been proven in the way evolution has. It has only won over those who do not understand how science works. If the ID hypothesis is to prevail, its supporters must collect evidence and publish their findings for the world's

scientists to analyze and challenge. If there is anything to it, the idea will triumph. However, attempting to tear down a well-established scientific theory with a public relations campaign is preposterous.

Does the controversy anger you?

Not really, because it is all poppycock. You see, I don't think evolution is being rejected in a meaningful sense. Anyone who needs to get something done accepts it. Believe me, your modern pharmaceutical companies don't deny evolution because they have to come up with antibiotics that work against ever-evolving bacteria. And I see that the American president has promised to spend \$7.1 billion to defend against a possible avian influenza pandemic. Now let's think about this; he fears a virus that can only threaten millions of people if it were to evolve from its present form into a form capable of human-to-human transmission. Therefore, this President Bush gentleman appears to accept evolution—no matter what he says to the contrary.

Is ID a threat to your theory?

Even if it invades every classroom in the world, it will not change what is real. All those fossils will still have been unearthed. All those genetic discoveries would still have been made. And all those first-hand observations of evolution occurring among the fast-breeding microbes and insects would still have been seen by scientists. Remember, Galileo was bullied and quieted by the anti-science crowd but it changed not one thing in the heavens above us. So too will life continue evolving, whether anyone speaks of it or not. Ultimately, I suppose, it becomes a question of whether we wish to try and understand nature or not.

Please allow me to add one more thing, lad. I wish for your readers to know that I would happily jettison my beloved theory of evolution the very moment that I am shown convincing evidence against it. I am not so loyal to any theory—not even my own. My loyalties are with reason and evidence. I don't want to win a debate; I want to know what is real. I only wish these ID people felt that way.

Newton and Einstein seem to get a lot more respect from the public than you do these days. Do you feel slighted?

Not at all; why would I care? I'm dead.