

## Why I don't believe in evolution

As my first paper to prompt discussion I ought to point out that the title is deliberately provocative, but there is an idea here that might be worth pursuing in the pub one Monday... get back to me!

I am not a creationist. Whether or not I believe in God depends upon your definition of God. I call myself an atheist (or tick 'no religion') for brevity; this is not the sort of question a philosopher can answer with a tick box! My belief, in as much as I have worked it out, is something like this:

Once upon a time there was a Big Bang, the explanation of which is largely physics not philosophy, so I claim ignorance and say nothing. After the Big Bang there were some particles in space, and our understanding (following Kant) puts all particles in four dimensional space-time, subject to cause and effect. The particles act predictably, changed by predictable forces. I acknowledge that we cannot in fact do this prediction because there is too much missing information and there would be issues of accuracy, etc. But in essence the early part of the universe is analogous to a snooker table with balls bouncing around reacting to each other and the relevant forces in a foreseeable way.

I will resist the popular temptation to introduce Quantum Mechanics here, because I realise I have far too little knowledge to be any use. I can see, though, that the bouncing particles can gather together, form planets and lead to an Earth. I'm happy to accept that this explanation is as true as its simplicity allows. We then have Earth with little puddles (or great oceans) of what has been called 'primordial soup', which in the right conditions (i.e. those which actually prevailed on our planet millions of years ago) can lead to life.

Life, as a concept, seems strangely hard to define. If I have an object in front of me what test can I do to conclude that it is, or is not, alive? The best definition I have heard is that life leads to a reversal of entropy- that is living things, like humans tend to introduce more complexity to the world; whilst dead matter tends to thermodynamic uniformity- grey paint seldom unstirs itself to black and white stripes. Reversal of entropy might be a good general definition, but when we start talking about terminally ill or unconscious bodies, recently amputated limbs and so on I can see problem cases appearing.

Evolution can explain (I take it) that particles and planets can give rise to life without the intervention of a deity. I'm happy to accept this, I will even accept that blind, godless chance can evolve proteins to plankton, amoebae and other basic life forms. I don't know how in any detail, but I accept that a solution may well be within the reach of human scientists sometime.

The point where I have doubts, and cease to accept my understanding of Darwin's theory, is after the evolution of consciousness. Defining consciousness is difficult, but even from a solipsistic viewpoint I know (sorry 'know'!) that I can make decisions that influence my actions. This means that my actions, at least some of them, are **not** solely the result of predictable movement of particles. The missing explanation is what I call consciousness. In fact I only need one example of one person in the whole of time who did something deliberately, that is consciously, in order to make my point.

If you accept that evolution is blind chance, driven by survival of the fittest; that is you do not believe that anything evolved with a purpose, then my deliberate, purposive actions offer a challenge to the view that evolution explains the world today. Yes it is a partial explanation, in the

same way that I cannot contravene the laws of physics I cannot choose my children's precise appearance but bouncing billiard balls is no longer an appropriate analogy.

I can act against the blind chance of Darwinian Evolution by choosing my sexual partner, deciding not to have children or donating to a sperm bank. If infanticide is morally culpable I can also thwart the passage of evolution by preventing some of the fittest from surviving. (If infanticide is simply the inevitable outcome of instincts then it is surely blameless). We collectively interfere with the survival of the fittest by keeping people like Stephen Hawking alive.

So, though I accept that evolution got us as far as conscious beings, from then on there is an alternative, additional explanation for the world being as it is. If you accept my contention that consciousness is an ability to make a choice (an ability rocks lack!) then we have a paradox.

It is surely reasonable to insist that any definition of God says not merely that God made the world, but God made the world **deliberately**. A god with no choice in what she does is, surely, no more of a god than the law of gravity is. There can be no point in praying to a god who, however benevolent, simply does what was going to happen anyway without the ability to decide. 'Omnipotence of the inevitable' does allow for a kind of atheist's god that I could easily believe in, a 'reason' why arithmetic (a mental phenomenon) applies to physical objects and other problems of Cartesian dualism.

So God consciously chose to make the world as it is and there were objects in the universe, created by God, before consciousness existed. If only we could understand what consciousness is!

For what it's worth I think consciousness evolved in to self consciousness, which (eventually) allowed consciousness of other people's consciousness (as a given, I can't prove that you are not a zombie). Once I 'know' that there are other people out there I can gain a concept of causality and a concept of conscience and it is easy to see that this could lead to a belief in God. Surely this collective understand **is** God, being common to most living people for generations. (Whether non humans or severely impaired humans are mentally part of this god I shan't discuss here).

This makes God an entity beyond any one person, He has objectives (say the Aristotelian good life) beyond any one person, and moral values which individual people might struggle to understand. But it does mean that, though a complete explanation once, evolution is not now the driving explanation for the state of the world I experience.