Dealing with Natural Selection in Scripture

Steve Robinson
Belmont University
Physics
Your Speaker

- I am a conservative Christian.
- I accept the macroevolution of single-celled organisms into modern humans over billions of years.
- I don’t really exist.
Worldviews

Most Scientists I Know:
Most Christians I Know:
Most People in this Room

Science/Truth
Science
Bible/Truth
Bible
Science
Discussion Topics

- Divine Inspiration
  - How can we believe the Bible when it appears to get the science wrong?
- Sin
- Altruism
- Divine Providence
The Self-Affirming Bible

• “All Scripture is God-breathed ... .” (2 Timothy 3:16)
• “For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:21)
• “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.” (1 Corinthians 2:13)

• Can God’s word be wrong?
Why do We Believe?

- science
- prophecy/history
  - “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the L ORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the L ORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.” (Deuteronomy 18:22)
- the courage of the disciples to act on what they saw
  - “Then Thomas said to the rest of the disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’” (John 11:16)
- inward knowledge
  - “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20)
- personal testimonies
  - “Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” (John 7:17)
  - “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)
Basic Premises

- “Words are not univocal; they're equivocal.” — Hank Hanegraaff
  - Context is key and literalism fails in all literature.
  - Symbolism and poetry permeate the scriptures.
- Truth is not contained in each letter of the Bible, but is an emergent property.
- God speaks to us in ways we can understand.
  - The Bible was written for us, but not to us.
- The Bible doesn’t get the science wrong; it presents it in a way that’s quite non-scientific (or not at all).
- God isn’t taken aback by difficult passages of scripture.
Discussion Topics

- Divine Inspiration
- Sin
  - What is natural selection’s role in sin?
- Altruism
- Divine Providence
What is Sin?

- Augustine in *Confessions*: sin is a preference (momentary or permanent) for *anything* over God, his truth, and his law
- the “anythings” are not sinful; the choice of the “anythings” is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>object</th>
<th>good use</th>
<th>sinful use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>material goods</td>
<td>survival</td>
<td>idolatry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>money</td>
<td>generosity</td>
<td>greed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>status/power</td>
<td>influence</td>
<td>oppression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Role of Sin in Christianity

- we are sinners
  - “... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...” (Romans 3:23)
- we cannot meet God’s standards
  - “For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.” (Romans 3:28)
- Jesus’ crucifixion restores our relationship with God
  - “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24)
In natural selection, animals most often survive when they:
- think first and foremost about their own needs
- deceive
- work off of their desires

Our tendencies are the same as those in animals, but we call those human tendencies sin.
- greed
- selfishness
- oppression
- sexual promiscuity
- lying
- stealing
- cheating
- murdering

Naturallyistically, we usually benefit in this world when we sin.
We are genetically predisposed to sin. 

Natural selection rewards self-gratification. 

Sin is self-gratification over God-gratification. 

Natural selection rewards sin and passes through generations. 

This solidifies but modernizes the Augustinian concept of “original sin.”
Biblical Support

• Sin has always been around.
  • “To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone’s account where there is no law.” (Romans 5:13)

• Sin is natural.
  • “I see a law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.” (Romans 7:23)
  • “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.” (Ephesians 2:3)

• The sinful nature opposes Christian morality.
  • “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.” (Galatians 5:17)
Discussion Topics

- Divine Inspiration
- Sin
- Altruism
  - How can we explain good behavior?
- Divine Providence
Altruism in Nature

- e.g., caring for the sick, warning of danger, dying in defense
- Those traits which tend to sustain a species will be selected.
  - If all potential mates die, it’s not good for an individual.
- Altruism gives a net positive effect to a local group.
  - Thus, it gives a net positive effect to an average individual, but not to every individual.
  - Generally helpful/hurtful traits may not be helpful/hurtful in every situation.
Is Goodness Natural?

- with regard to righteousness before God, no:
  - “...there is no one who does good, not even one.” (Romans 3:12b)
- inherently, yes:
  - “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.” (1 Timothy 4:4)
- with regard to action, yes:
  - “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:7–9)
Encouragement of Altruism

- “Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.” (Romans 15:2)
- “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” (2 Corinthians 12:7)
- “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” (Galatians 6:10)
- “And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” (Hebrews 13:6)
Many faiths gather in unity for prayer and remembrance

By SEAN BARRON

LORDSTOWN

Thousands attended a prayer service on Sunday at Youngstown's Mahoning Valley Temple, the site of a 1975 fire that killed 29 people. The service was held in memory of the victims.

The service was attended by representatives of many faiths and organizations, including the Jewish Community Relations Council, the Interfaith Council of Youngstown, and the Youngstown Area Interfaith Youth Corps.

"It's important for Americans to recognize that non-Christians around the world are also doing good," said Rabbi David Jacoby, spiritual leader of the Omega Temple Congregation. "They do good as well, which is a part of their intrinsic altruistic nature like animals.

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)
Selfish Selflessness

• We, like animals, expect a net return for altruism.

• “To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.” (Romans 2:7)

• “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.” (Matthew 16:27)

• “Serve wholeheartedly ... because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do ... .” (Ephesians 6:7–8)

• “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6)
Discussion Topics

- Divine Inspiration
- Sin
- Altruism
- Divine Providence
  - If everything is natural, how does God fit in?
Living by the Spirit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural Selection</th>
<th>Christianity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>altruistic genetic tendencies</td>
<td>God’s image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selfish genetic tendencies</td>
<td>temptations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- We can choose to act on our altruistic nature just as we can choose to act on our sinful nature; nature doesn’t have to win.
- “So I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:16)
- “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” (Romans 13:14)
- “... choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... As for me and my household, we will serve the **LORD**.” (Joshua 24:15)
- “... let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.” (Hebrew 12:1)
- God and Satan act as influencing agents for our choices.
Summary

• Divine Inspiration
  • We can trust scripture when we understand its use and purpose.

• Sin
  • We are predisposed to sin through natural selection.

• Altruism
  • In God’s image, we have a moral compass.

• Divine Providence
  • God is an agent who influences our choices to obey or ignore our innate tendencies.