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THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF EVOLUTIONARY THOUGHT

To use a phrase made famous in another context, Darwin's nineteenth century evolutionary theory fell like a bombshell on the playground of theologians. Yet it was a centuries old philosophy. There were at least two factors that created the climate of acceptance for a philosophy long rejected by the Christian West. One factor was that evolution was 'in the air.' Several nineteenth century men were proposing evolutionary theories. The second factor, equally important, is that the Scripture had been 'declawed,'¹ and thus crippled in the defense of the faith, through neglect of a presuppositional apologetic—i.e. presupposing the truth of the Bible, and interpreting the data through its light.² We will say more of this second factor later.

A. ANCIENT EVOLUTION MYTHS³

The Bible tells us that Babylon is the mother of harlots, the source of the religious error common to the nations. Thus the likely starting point of evolutionary cosmologies (which will not have God in

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1. Benjamin Wiker, Chapter 7, 'The Taming of Christianity, or Scripture Declawed,' in *Moral Darwinism* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002).
 2. 'Neutrality' or 'lack of bias' is a convenient myth—all data is interpreted through a worldview, which is based on unprovable presuppositions. It's like saying to the objector, 'Suppose Genesis history were true; what would you expect to find, and let's see how it squares with reality.'
 3. See also David Green, 'The long long story of long ages', <creation.com/article/759>, as well as Paul James-Griffiths, 'Evolution: an ancient pagan idea,' *Creation* 30(4):34–36, 2008.

their knowledge and suppress the truth in unrighteousness) is the Sumerian/Babylonian civilization. According to biblical chronology the Tower of Babel, confusion of languages, and scattering of people groups took place about 2242 BC. As far as specific evolutionary theory preserved in writing, we look to the Milesian School of Greek philosophy in the sixth century BC (600–501 BC).

The sixth century BC Milesian School produced Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes. Anaximander taught a theory of evolution over two thousand years before Darwin. Colin Brown summarizes his views:

‘Anaximander imagined an original state of formless matter which gradually evolved into the universe as we know it. Things came into being through a process of separating out. Living things originated from a primeval slime...he seems to have believed that human beings originally came from fishlike creatures.’⁴

Henry Morris summarized their thought as follows:

‘Both Thales and Anaximander taught that men evolved from animals, animals from plants, plants from inorganic elements, and all these from water. Xenophanes argued, on the basis of fossil shells on mountains, that land animals had evolved from marine animals.’⁵

Evolutionary myths found their way into the religions, philosophies and mythology of countries from Egypt to China. The religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism reflect evolutionary cosmology. In short, all who are cut off from biblical revelation fall into this error.

4. Colin Brown, *Christianity & Western Thought* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1990), p. 21ff.

5. Henry Morris, *The Long War Against God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 217.

B. EPICURUS AND LUCRETIUS

Epicurus (341–270 BC) was a Greek philosopher whose materialistic philosophy became known as Epicureanism. The Greek atomists built their materialistic theories of cosmology from ideas suggested by Democritus. The unique contribution of Epicurus was to ‘make physics subservient to ethics.’ For Epicurus the feelings of pleasure and pain are the supreme test in matters of morality and conduct.⁶ Since the feeling of pleasure and the avoidance of pain were the chief ‘virtues,’ Epicurus sought to rid himself of all troubling thoughts, those that would disturb his tranquility. Among the most disturbing thoughts were the thought of an afterlife where someone might be punished, and the thought of a god who might concern himself with human accountability. Epicurus designed a materialistic philosophy so as to systematically exclude any such disturbing thoughts. Thus he presupposed that only the material is real. For him the study of science was not a search for truth, but a way of achieving a certain state of mind. He says, ‘If our suspicions about heavenly phenomena and about death did not trouble us at all and were never anything to us...then we would have no need of natural science.’⁷ Epicurus had not even the pretence of scientific proof for his theories. They were simply presupposed assertions of his preferences. This leads to the possibility that similar evolutionary theories may have been adopted for the same reasons. As Socrates is known in greater detail from the writings of Plato, Epicurus became much better known in the Western world through the writings of Lucretius.

Lucretius (99–55 BC) was a Roman poet and philosopher. In his epic-didactic poem, *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius’ mission was to bring the philosophy of Epicurus to the Western Latin-speaking world. He speaks of Epicurus as ‘a god he was who first discovered that reasoned plan of life which is now called Wisdom.’⁸ Martin

6. Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, ed. Martin Ferguson Smith, trans. W.H.D. Rouse (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. xxxi.

7. Wiker, *Moral Darwinism*, ref. 1, p.33.

8. Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*. Book V, line 7.

An eye-opening, easy-to-understand walk through the history and nature of the battle that has long gone unrecognized—the battle of worldviews that underpins and transcends the modern creation-evolution debate—and what this battle has to teach today’s church.

The lessons are not just about the enemy’s tactics, but how we can avoid falling into the same traps repeatedly in this struggle for hearts and minds—one that has raged for many centuries, long before Darwin.

This war has seen even giants of the faith, such as Princeton’s Hodge and Warfield, fail to recognize the devastating consequences of not anchoring one’s thinking upon Scripture in all areas.

Creation Without Compromise is both a wake-up call and a practical ‘big picture’ remedy for much of what ails church and society.

In engaging, straightforward language, it strikes the right note for this time in history.

‘A valuable addition to the biblical apologist’s arsenal... shows the long history of evolutionary thought, and the unfortunate recent churchian compromise that performs eisegetical gymnastics on Genesis. ... also highlights the baneful effects of evolution on society, culminating in the Nazi eugenics and Holocaust—the same philosophy behind Hitler’s policies is now the official educracy dogma taught to students as fact.’

Jonathan Sarfati, Ph.D.

Author of *Refuting Evolution* (1&2), *Refuting Compromise* and *By Design*.

‘Defends the creation account with authority and finality... a solid foundation for the defense of the Christian faith.’

Eddie Bhawanie, Ph.D.

Director, Atlanta Center for Apologetics

