

Evolution and Unification Thought

David Burton
August 22, 2016



When dealing with issues of science and religion, evolution is probably the most well-known point of contention. The two camps, “Creationist” and “Evolutionist,” are entrenched. Most Unificationists tend to side with the Creationist camp because of its support for theism. Although Unificationists often take a strong stance against evolution, a rejection of evolution is not required by the underlying teaching, and the situation is actually far from clear.

There is a middle ground in the debate between creation and evolution: It does not have to be creation or evolution, but can be *both* creation and evolution. This is the message of Divine Principle, when it suggests that internal and external truth should develop in full consonance.

If we are to bring about a true unity between science and religion, what is needed is a more inclusive approach, which can be derived from the ontology in Divine Principle and an acceptance of the validity of scientific knowledge. Unification Thought provides fertile ground for exploring the relationship between religion and evolution.

In contrast to the Creationist *a priori* rejection of evolution, one of the goals of Unificationism is to establish a unity between science and religion. *Exposition of the Divine Principle* clearly addresses the importance and significance of science. It states “the way of religion and the way of science should be integrated and their problems resolved in one united undertaking; the two aspects of truth, internal and external, should develop in full consonance.”



David Burton

The text also acknowledges the validity of scientific knowledge, and even goes further in suggesting that religious teaching has changed over time to come closer to science. “Today,” it asserts, “people will not accept what is not demonstrable by the logic of science ... Indeed, throughout the long course of history, religions have been moving toward the point when their teachings could be elucidated scientifically.”

Each area of science has its own techniques for investigation, but all branches follow a consistent logic of theoretical and experimental validation: the scientific method. Biology, too, has its own methods of investigation, but it adopts the same standards of proof as the rest of science. Evolution thus has no less validity than any scientific theory, and these passages from *Divine Principle* should apply equally to evolution as to theories in physics or chemistry.

From these passages, we might expect Unificationism to accept evolution, but in fact, we find a general opposition to evolution. I believe this arises from the Unificationist opposition to communism. Evolution has come to be viewed as one of the pillars of communism, in fact, of atheism in general. Consequently, the Unification theistic opposition to communism leads to a rejection of evolution. However, it is possible, and important, to separate the science from its adoption by atheism.

Further muddying the water the Unificationist opposition to evolution tends to adopt some parts of creationist thinking. I suggest that the approach of the creationist movement cannot lead to the larger goal of unity between science and religion found in Divine Principle. In the first instance, this is because the creationist movement begins from a position of rejecting the science of evolution. All too easily the rejection of evolution then leads to a general condemnation of science that is divisive rather than unifying. The forward-looking purpose of a new type of reconciliation between science and religion as found in Divine Principle is incompatible with the backward-looking purpose of creation science. Adopting creationist thought does not align with the purpose of Unificationism.

Evolution in Unification Thought

The ontology of Unification Thought (UT) and Divine Principle is a general description of how things exist. The texts describe existing things as they are now, but do not explain the process of how things

came to be that way. In other words, they do not contain a theory of evolution. Unification Thought, however, does contain the basis for an explanation that could perform this function. UT states:

“[H]uman beings possess the Sungsang and Hyungsang of minerals, plants, and animals and, in addition, they possess a Sungsang and Hyungsang of a still higher level ... as the levels of existing beings ascend from minerals to plants, to animals, and to human beings the Sungsang and Hyungsang become more substantial and elaborate layer by layer.”

UT goes on to connect this layered structure to the developmental process of God’s creating all things. In the process of creation, according to Unification Thought:

“God first formed or visualized, in His mind, the idea of a human being as a being of united Sungsang and Hyungsang. Only then did He form the ideas of animals, and then plants, and then minerals, one by one, by subtracting their specific elements from the Sungsang and Hyungsang of human beings and lowering their dimension.”

This is a direct application of the layered structure to development in creation. First, within God’s mind, there is a downward process that starts with the idea of the highest level, human beings. When the specific characteristics of human beings are subtracted, what remains are the layers within animals. If the specific characteristics of animals are subtracted, what is left is the layers within plants, and a final subtraction leaves the characteristics of minerals. After this downward process within God there is subsequently an upward process of creating actual things. UT accordingly notes, “in the actual process of creation God followed the reverse order — that is, based on the ideas He had formed, He created actual minerals first, then plants and animals, and finally human beings.”

Each new step or layer that appears is a distinct creation by God. This successive creation is not directly an evolutionary theory, but in describing the appearance of progressive change in creation it does lay the groundwork for explaining the appearance of evolution.

A new approach

We normally consider evolution to represent change to the shape and behavior of the individuals in a species. In contrast, contemporary biologists tend to talk about evolution in terms of populations. In a population, change to some individuals does not necessarily constitute evolution. In fact, change to individuals is ongoing in a population even in periods of evolutionary stasis. If we change our perspective from the individual to the population, then observable evolutionary change corresponds to change in the collective average of the population rather than to change in some individuals within it.

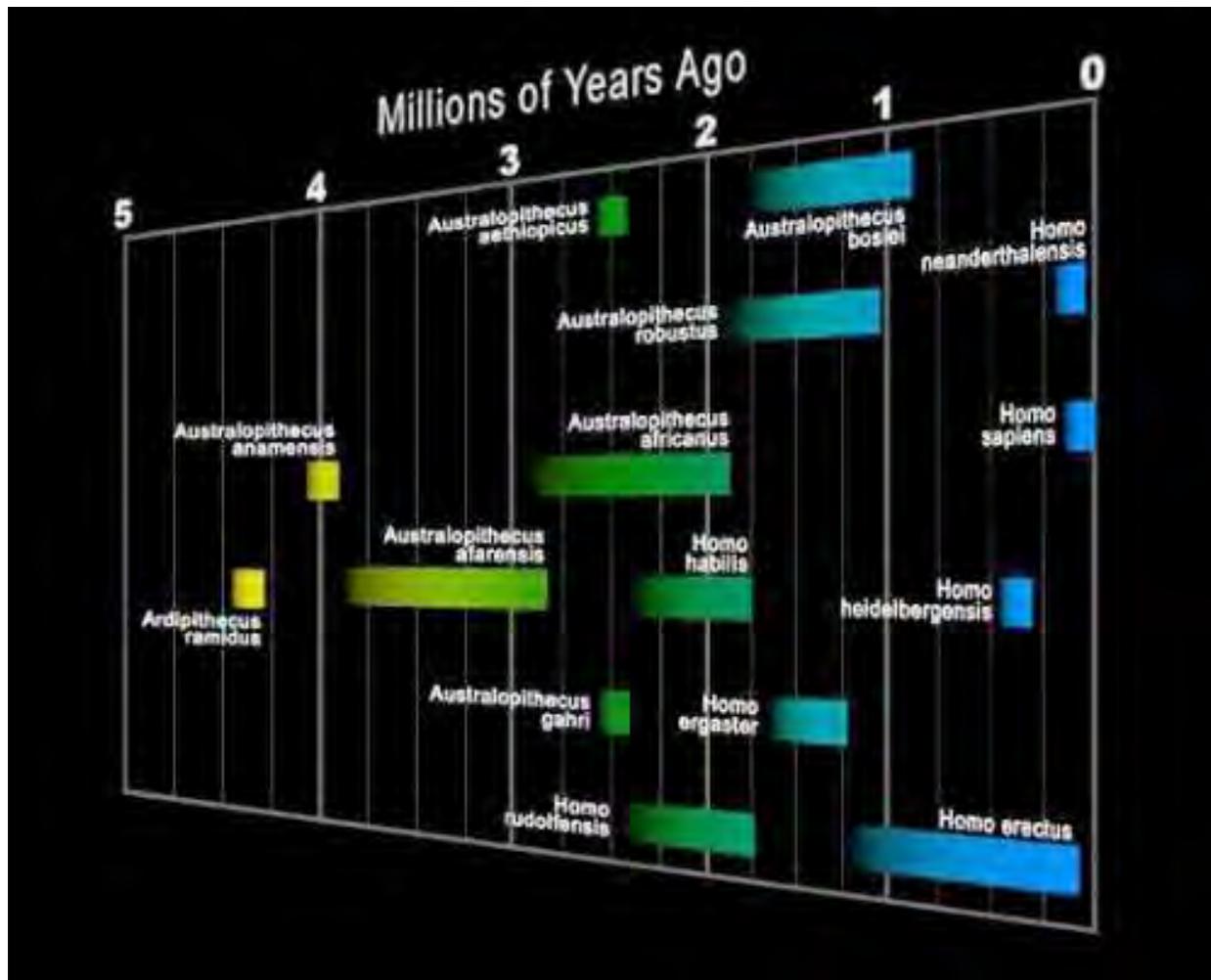
One big advantage of taking the perspective of the population rather than of the individual is that it allows us to deal with the randomness inherent in individuals, i.e., the randomness of mate selection and individual mutations. Despite randomness on the individual level, the evolutionary change to the population is not random. This means evolution from the perspective of the population is potentially compatible with a concept of teleology or purposeful creation as found in religious thought. It allows us to deal with evolution in the context of religious thought without negating the science or randomness that seems to be an integral part of nature.

Evolution in the broadest sense simply means continuing change of any kind over time. Darwin’s theory of evolution applied only to living beings. However, this does not do justice to contemporary science. Darwin proposed his theory before there was an understanding of the role of things like plate tectonics, mass extinctions, meteorites, or the expansion of the universe. In other words, he did not know how the universe and earth change with time, and how this has affected the evolution of life. He was proposing an explanation for change in living beings that acted independently of the environment against the essentially static backdrop of an unchanging earth. Contemporary science suggests, however, that evolutionary change in living beings happens in the context of their dynamic relationship with a changing, not static, environment.

Adding a changing environment into the mix completely changes the picture from one based only on living beings. Descent with modification is then no longer a sufficient scientific definition in and of itself to describe evolutionary change. This shifts our notion of the driving force for evolution from random change in individuals to the non-random relationship of populations and ecosystems with a changing environment. We can start to describe evolution in the context of emergent individual truth bodies at larger scales than that of individual organisms. Life is inextricably connected to its environment, and hence the context for understanding change in living beings must also include an understanding of change in the Earth.

UT’s description of the process of God’s creating addresses this. The layered structure of existence, the inner downward development of logos within God, and the outer upward creation of existing beings all include minerals as an integral part of the explanation. The progressive creation that UT uses to explain

evolution in life would then also apply to the evolution of structure that is not alive. From the formation of atoms to stars and galaxies, there is an overarching evolutionary process at work. The definition of evolution, therefore, should not just be restricted to change in living beings, but extended to include change in the universe as a whole. The evolution of life, then, is but one component of this larger context of evolution as progressive change in the universe.



The times of existence of the various hominid shown in the chart above are based on dated fossil remains. Each species may have existed earlier and/or later than shown, but fossil proof has not yet been discovered.

Following this expanded view of evolution, we can turn to the key question for religious people. How is God involved? This moves into more speculative areas not directly addressed by science, and it is not straightforward to address. UT sees every new thing to be a direct creation by God in a way that is not random. Yet randomness is a fundamental aspect of nature.

This suggests we should look for God's involvement in the directed nature of the overall change and in the selection processes themselves, perhaps even in the changing environmental conditions that drive the change in equilibrium positions for living populations. So, superimposed on the underlying randomness is a "pressure" toward a particular direction from God. In other words, God does play dice, but they are weighted dice such that in the statistics of large numbers there is selection toward a particular outcome.

Teilhard de Chardin's approach

There is some precedent for this type of approach in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's evolutionary theology. Teilhard, a Jesuit priest, was also a paleontologist. His writing combined science and religion and tried to stay true to both, with remarkable results. He presented an evolutionary theory that begins from inorganic particles leading up through living things to the emergence of consciousness and God. That is, he already has adopted the larger context of evolution suggested here, building an overarching theory that encompasses all things.

For Teilhard, the key parameter in evolutionary change is complexity. He sees the universe beginning in a state with large numbers of particles of low complexity. Then over time complexity progressively increases to give fewer and more complex beings that integrate all the simpler particles that preceded them. The final unity of everything in one most complex being, the Omega Point, represents God. The future emergence of the Omega Point provides the impetus, acting backwards in time, toward increasing complexity found in all things. This scheme allows for randomness in science, teleology in religion, and God's involvement in a way that is consistent with our discussion here.

Though some aspects of Teilhard's thought are quite distinct from Divine Principle and Unification Thought, the overall picture he presents is remarkably compatible with a relational view of existence, with the addition of the evolutionary component missing from Unification Thought. His work points to one way to begin to develop a general evolutionary theory in the context of Unification Thought. In particular, his idea of evolution as most essentially a progressive increase in complexity driven by God provides the key paradigm for such a theory.

If we can combine the basis developed here with important elements from Teilhard's thought, it may give us a more general evolutionary theory that has universal application. In its compatibility with both science and religion, the theory may also be a step toward developing the new approach to reconcile science and religion advocated in the introduction to *Exposition of the Divine Principle*.

Adapted from "Evolution and Unification Thought: An Alternative Approach," Journal of Unification Studies, Vol. 15, 2014.

Dr. David Burton teaches chemistry at the University of Bridgeport. He holds a Ph.D. in physical chemistry from the University of East Anglia, Norwich, England. He and his wife, Kathleen, both graduated in 1990 with an M.Div. from Unification Theological Seminary.