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Comment by Jonathan Wells

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David Burton's article, "Evolution and Unification Thought: an Alternative Approach," references me by name, so the editors have kindly offered me an opportunity to respond.

In his article, Burton consistently refers to "the science of evolution." But both "evolution" and "science" have more than one meaning.

Evolution, in one sense, simply means change over time. In another sense it means small changes within existing species. In a third sense, it refers to the fact that many organisms living today are different from those that lived in the past. In a fourth sense, evolution refers to Charles Darwin's theory that all living things have descended from one or a few common ancestors, modified by unguided natural processes such as variation and selection. In the twentieth century, Darwin's theory was combined with genetics (which deals with changes in gene frequencies and mutations in DNA) to form what has been called the Modern Evolutionary Synthesis, or Neo-Darwinism. It is in this sense that Burton uses "evolution," calling it "the basic paradigm of evolutionary science today."

Science, in one sense, means the current scientific establishment and the majority view ("consensus") of its members. In another sense it means the effort to understand reality by formulating hypotheses and testing them with evidence. In a third sense it means the quest for natural—i.e., materialistic—explanations for everything, including religion. (Materialism is the view that only matter is real; mind, spirit and God are illusions.) In the first sense, science is a sociological entity; in the second it is an empirical enterprise; and in the third it is applied materialistic philosophy.

Burton points out that "one of the goals of Unificationism is to establish a unity between science and religion." The question is whether Neo-Darwinism is the kind of "science" that Unificationism wants to unite with religion.

Neo-Darwinism is clearly science in the sociological sense, because it is the consensus of the current scientific establishment. But a scientific consensus can be unreliable. In 1500, the consensus was that the Sun revolves around the Earth; in 1700, it was that things burn by giving off phlogiston; in 1900, it was that atoms consist of electrons revolving around nuclei like planets circling the Sun. History shows that science should not be based on a majority vote of scientists, but on evidence.

Neo-Darwinism, however, does not fit the biological evidence. Darwin's mechanism of unguided variation and selection has never been shown to produce anything more than small changes within existing species; it has never been observed to produce a new species. The same is true for DNA mutations. The fossil record poses challenges for Darwin's theory, as Darwin himself acknowledged; for example, Cambrian fossils show the major animal groups appearing together, already formed, rather than diverging gradually from a common ancestor. Darwin thought that similarities among early vertebrate embryos provided strong evidence for their common ancestry, but he was mistaken:

Vertebrate embryos in their earliest stages are actually very different from each other. The geographic distribution of species seemed to support Darwin's theory in the nineteenth century, but since then distributions have been discovered that don't fit it. Branching-tree diagrams that supposedly show evolutionary relationships were originally constructed from anatomical comparisons, but more recent trees constructed from molecular comparisons conflict not only

with anatomical trees but also with each other. In short, the evidence does not support Neo-Darwinism.^[1] This is one of the main points of my 2008 book, *Evolution and Unification Thought*, and my 2011 article of the same name in this journal.^[2]

Darwin called his *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* “one long argument,” but contrary to popular belief the argument was not based primarily on evidence. For instance, despite the title of his book Darwin had no evidence for the origin of species; nor did he offer any evidence for natural selection—only “one or two imaginary illustrations.”^[3] Instead, Darwin’s book was primarily a theological argument against creation by design, and the argument took this general form: The facts of nature are inexplicable on a theory of creation, but they make sense on the theory of descent with modification. As if that weren’t enough, Darwin then ruled out creation by design on the grounds that it “is not a scientific explanation.”^[4] In effect, he defined “science” to allow only materialistic explanations. His modern followers rely on the same logic. Thus it is not surprising that Neo-Darwinism resembles the views of ancient materialistic philosophers.^[5] In short, Neo-Darwinism is not empirical science, but applied materialistic philosophy.^[6]

Burton quotes a sentence from my 2008 book stating that Stalin was influenced by Darwin’s views. Burton then claims, “In accordance with these sentiments expressed by Wells evolution has come to be viewed within the Unification movement 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.” But I do not reject evolution; I reject Neo-Darwinism. And I do not reject Neo-Darwinism because it is “one of the pillars of communism;” I reject it because it is empirically false. My book makes that clear.

Burton also implies that my “involvement with the Intelligent Design movement” makes me part of a “creationist movement” that rejects science. Burton bases this claim on a 2008 book by Karl Giberson, *Saving Darwin*, which claims that intelligent design (ID) evolved from young-Earth creationism. But Giberson is wrong: Historically, young-Earth creationism and ID had separate origins; conceptually, they are clearly distinct; and sociologically, they comprise very different groups. For details, see the New World Encyclopedia entries “Creationism”^[7] and “Intelligent Design.”^[8]

I have never been a young-Earth creationist, and I do not reject empirical science. I do, however, reject materialism. And Burton’s “science of evolution” is the applied materialistic philosophy of Neo-Darwinism. If Unificationists want to unify science and religion, they should embrace evidence-based science, question the scientific consensus, and reject Neo-Darwinism.

Notes

^[1] <http://www.discovery.org/a/10661>

^[2] <http://journals.uts.edu/volume-xii-2011/113-evolution-and-unification-thought>

^[3] <http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/frameset?pageseq=105&itemID=F373&viewtype=side>

^[4] <http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/frameset?pageseq=411&itemID=F391&viewtype=side>

^[5] <http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/history/ancient.html>

^[6] <http://www.discovery.org/a/8101>

^[7] <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Creationism>

^[8] https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Intelligent_design