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Burton's Response

WRITTEN BY DAVID BURTON

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Jonathan Wells brings up a number of points we do not agree on, but there is one thing we do agree on. It is that the modern evolutionary synthesis is the current scientific consensus of the biological sciences. His position in his rebuttal of my paper depends on weakening the meaning of “scientific consensus.” He does this by suggesting that it is a sociological construct and implies that this social construct is somehow separate from the available evidence. This implied separation of consensus and evidence I do not think is correct. Though there is definitely a sociological component to natural science outside the laboratory, observation and experimental evidence are still the final arbiter for any scientific theory. This is so even in biology. Biology cannot be singled out because you don’t happen to like the consensus. The consensus supports the theory that provides the best interpretation of all the available evidence.

Wells points to change in consensus over time to suggest its unreliability, but this gives the lie to the implication that it does not respond to evidence, since it is precisely the accumulation of new experimental evidence that leads to a change in the theory supported by consensus. This is how science should proceed.

There is another point we agree on what it means to “question the scientific consensus.” No scientist makes their name by proving what is already known. It is by constantly challenging the theory supported by consensus that science progresses, but there is a caveat. To actually change that theory you need compelling experimental evidence. That Wells rejects the theory supported by consensus and seeks to change it is not an issue. It is actually an important part of science for some people to do so. Aside from the issue of creationism, one issue for me is that the minority position he supports seeks to change the popular perception of the scientific consensus without compelling experimental evidence. Scientifically Intelligent Design is at best hypothesis, or perhaps philosophy, that in turn requires the additional hypothesis of a “Designer.” It is not scientifically compelling, and in claiming to be science it is dangerously close to the position of people like Richard Dawkins who regard God as a hypothesis to be proven, or disproven, by science.

Though interesting in its own right, all of this is secondary to the central theme of my paper, which Wells does not address. Unlike Wells, I am not seeking to change the scientific consensus, but rather to show that it is not antithetical to religious thought. This is so particularly in the context of an ontology derived from Divine Principle and Unification Thought. What I am doing in this paper is to lay the groundwork for deriving a general evolutionary theory for Unification Thought, the scope of which is comparable to that of the vision of Teilhard de Chardin. My belief is that de Chardin was an important pioneer for this kind of synthesis, which began from his acknowledgement of the validity of both religious and scientific thought. Further, I believe that this type of approach most completely fulfills the vision of Divine Principle for integrating religion and science into one undertaking. The paper as a whole does not stand or fall on the issues Wells brings up.

Indirectly this also begins to address another charge Wells levels at the modern evolutionary synthesis, that of materialism, where “Materialism is the view that only matter is real; mind, spirit and God are illusions.” Science in general is often accused of materialism, but this is a consequence of its reliance on experiment, which limits the scientific consensus to theory that can be experimentally supported. This experimental component is what makes science different from philosophy or theology, and it is what has allowed for the rapid progress of science and

technology in the last two hundred years. Though the fact of God's existence is beyond experimental support, I show in this paper that the modern evolutionary synthesis can be compatible with the existence of God. Consequently Wells' charge of materialism in this instance is not correct.