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Darwinism Dead at 150

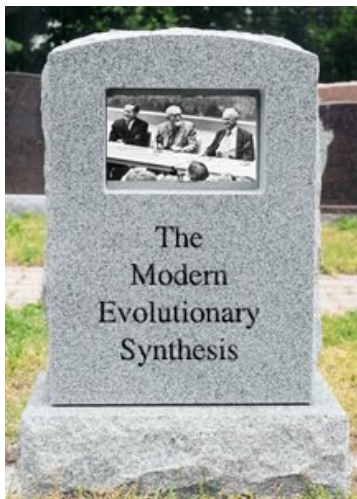
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Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri

Darwinism, or the original theory of evolution proposed by Darwin 150 years ago in his *Origin of Species*, in which he introduced the idea of natural selection, was laid to rest about a half century ago when it was succeeded by the neo-Darwinian theory involving genetic mutation and natural selection, also known as the modern synthesis. Since then an endless stream of textbooks, courses, media presentations and “genetic toolkits”^[1] have been used to indoctrinate students and the public with these ideas causing many to give up their religious conviction in God or the soul as integral to their understanding of life. However, with the advancement of science, especially in the field of biology, more detailed knowledge of the genes and genome have revealed a far more complex dynamic relation between the genome and phenotype and its environment than can be explained by appeal to simple genetic mechanisms. This has been a dawning realization among biologists during the last few decades, but the “evolution industry” (Suzan Mazur, *The Altenberg 16: An Exposé Of The Evolution Industry* (2010)) has kept the public in the dark about the real scientific overthrow of the modern evolutionary synthesis. Now all of that is about to change.



Scientists were invited to attend a 2008 conference in Altenberg, Austria, to address this critical junction: “The challenge seems clear to us: how do we make sense, conceptually, of the astounding advances in biology since the 1940s, when the Modern Synthesis was taking shape? Not only we have witnessed the molecular revolution, from the discovery of the structure of DNA to the genomic era, we are also grappling with the increasing feeling – for example as reflected by an almost comical proliferation of “-omics,” that we just don’t have the theoretical and analytical tools necessary to make sense of the bewildering diversity and complexity of living organisms.”

A senior investigator at the National Center for Biotechnology Information, National Library of Medicine, and National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, has published two peer reviewed papers on the current status of the “modern evolutionary synthesis,” wherein he states, “The edifice of the modern synthesis has crumbled, apparently, beyond repair.” [Eugene Koonin, *The Origin at 150: Is a new evolutionary synthesis in sight?* Trends in Genetics, 25(11), November 2009, pp. 473-475] and [Eugene Koonin, *Darwinian evolution in the light of genomics*, Nucleic Acids Research, 37(4), 2009, pp. 1011-1034].

From the abstract of his second paper: “Comparative genomics and systems biology offer unprecedented opportunities for testing central tenets of evolutionary biology formulated by Darwin in the *Origin of Species* in 1859 and expanded in the Modern Synthesis 100 years later. Evolutionary-genomic studies show that natural selection is only one of the forces that shape genome evolution and is not quantitatively dominant, whereas non-adaptive processes are much more prominent than previously suspected. Major contributions of horizontal gene transfer and diverse selfish genetic elements to genome evolution undermine the Tree of Life concept. [2] An adequate depiction of evolution requires the more complex concept of a network or ‘forest’ of life. There is no consistent tendency of evolution towards increased genomic complexity, and when complexity increases, this appears to be a non adaptive consequence of evolution under weak purifying selection rather than an adaptation.”

The concept that natural selection provides the foundation for evolutionary change has long been challenged for its failure to explain how different forms arise in nature, but only how they may be favored once they do arise. Through the work of scientists like Motoo Kimura, Tomoko Ohta [Theoretical aspects of population genetics, Motoo Kimura and Tomoko Ohta (1971)] and others, it has been concluded both theoretically and empirically that natural selection has little or no effect on the vast majority of the genomes of most living organisms.

In this regard, Dr. Koonin adds (see above): “There is no consistent tendency of evolution towards increased genomic complexity, and when complexity increases, this appears to be a non adaptive consequence of evolution under weak purifying selection rather than an adaptation.” Purifying evolution refers to the cell’s coordinated elimination of harmful mutations.

Allen MacNeill [teaching biology at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY] writes on his blog [3]: “Kimura, Ohta, Jukes, and Crow dropped a monkey wrench into the “engine” at the heart of the modern synthesis — natural selection — and then Gould and Lewontin finished the job with their famous paper on *The Spandrels of San Marco* and the Panglossian Paradigm.” [4]

Suzan Mazur, laying down the gauntlet recently wrote [5]: “Let’s begin with the facts: The days of evolutionary science being an exclusive old boys club are over. The public is a party to the discourse now and knows the emphasis in evolutionary science is on VISION and not textbook rules. And while Rutgers philosopher Jerry Fodor’s and University of Arizona cognitive scientist Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini’s new book, “*What Darwin Got Wrong*,” does not showcase amateur evolutionary theories, the authors do indeed reach out to the public “hop[ing] to convince” through Fodor’s sublime ability to argue a point and Piattelli-Palmarini’s wit, charm and biophysics savvy that we as a people have got to move on because the central story of the theory of evolution —

natural selection — is wrong in a way that “can’t be repaired”. They are careful not to say what the public also knows, i.e., that a critical mass of people is simply tired of Darwin’s vision. It’s out of vogue.”

And, as if to add yet another nail to the coffin: “Unless the discourse around evolution is opened up to scientific perspectives beyond Darwinism, the education of generations to come is at risk of being sacrificed for the benefit of a dying theory.” – Stuart Newman (professor of cell biology and anatomy at New York Medical College in Valhalla, NY).[\[6\]](#)

It was Darwin, himself who explained how he should be buried: “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.” [\[7\]](#)

Suzan Mazur writes, “Stuart Newman’s now got a seductive theory about the origin of form of all 35 or so animal phyla—“it happened abruptly” not gradually, roughly 600 million years ago via a “pattern language”—which serves as the centerpiece of the “Extended Synthesis.””[\[8\]](#)

While what is being called the “Extended Synthesis” does not outright dispense with natural selection and gene mutations, it subordinates them to minor roles. And while the concept of evolution itself is certainly not yet rejected by these scientists, the gradual march of science is demonstrating how scientific understanding is constantly subject to error and revision because of its inherently finite, incomplete view of reality.

In order to assuage the feelings of the Darwinian ideologues like Richard Dawkins, Eugenie Scott of the National Center for Science Education in the US, and others the term “expanded synthesis,” is being promoted with the assurance that neo-Darwinian mechanisms are still being brought into the picture, although in a subordinate way, in order to ease their transition into what is not only a change in thinking about life, but a change in how to think about life in a non-mechanistic, dynamic, and holistic way, e.g. Complexity Philosophy’ [\[9\]](#)

Vedantic science does not suffer the fate of finitistic science but has proposed for millennia that the cause of the diversity of species is due to the underlying variety of conscious living entities that manifest such bodies as indicated by theistic Samkhya philosophy. Modern science has not yet progressed to the finer level of understanding that requires advancement beyond a purely materialistic ontology. It must be properly appreciated that Vedantic knowledge is also systematic, scientific and rational but requires a different epistemic-ontological grounding than the impersonal/materialist paradigm assumes.

And it is condescending to think that the ancient cultures were somehow more primitive, mythological, or somehow less informed about nature and reality than modern scientists. The chronological conceit of authors like Jean Gebser, Brian Swimme and others think modern man to be superior to all previous civilizations that they know of based on a narrow materialist, Eurocentric education and the hegemony that the history of civilizations from that perspective has gained. Of course, there are civilizations mentioned in the Vedas that they simply have no knowledge of or they consider mythological. Nonetheless, their ideas are simply not true when considered from the conscious basis upon which reality is grounded according to Vedic understanding, from which a strong case may be made for their superior advancement. Much evidence of those civilizations has been lost through the course of history but what remains in the form of sacred literature has never been excelled.

Descartes laid the philosophical groundwork for the modern scientific period by separating subjective cognition from objective bodies, thereby also dividing epistemology from ontology reducing knowing to indifferent “observation.” This is the perspective of consciousness and its object, of which material science only imperfectly

studies the object. In reality these two are not separated but dialectically related and sublated in the higher comprehending original unity of self-consciousness. Physical scientists fail to study these higher categories of reality and are therefore left with an incomplete understanding of a mere superficial nature that is inadequate to comprehend the core truth.

But scientific, rational inquiry will not stop until a comprehensive idea is reached that is coherent with the full range of our knowledge of life. That spectrum of knowledge is not circumscribed merely by chemistry, physics and mathematics. Thus Vedanta-sutra advises, that you will have to continue your search, athatho brahma jijnasa, until you reach brahma, the underlying spiritual source, janmady asy yatah, the fountainhead where all inquiry will reach its purpose. Then beyond knowledge Bhagavatam will guide us to the ultimate search – raso vai sah, the search for our highest fulfillment, sweetness and love.

References:

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- [1] http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/evolution/library/03/4/1_034_04.html
 [2] Will Provine, Tisch distinguished professor of Paleontology at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, in an interview [states](#), “We’ve discovered that Darwin’s idea of evolution by descent from common ancestors does not really work well as soon as you get behind multi-cellular organisms....and our methods phylogeny reconstruction are so poor, that we will never have a tree of life that goes back to the origin of life.”
 [3] <http://evolutionlist.blogspot.com/>
 [4] Stephen Jay Gould and Richard C. Lewontin. “[The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm: A Critique of the Adaptationist Programme](#)” Proc. Roy. Soc. London B 205 (1979) pp. 581-598
 [5] <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL1003/S00236.htm>
 [6] Stuart Newman, Evolution: The Public’s Problem, and the Scientists’ (2008).
 [7] Charles Darwin, The Origin of the Species Ch. 6. (1859)
 [8] <http://www.archaeology.org/online/interviews/newman.html>
 [9] <http://www.calresco.org/lucas/compute.htm>

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