

EVOLUTIONARY CREATION DOES NOT FAIL: A RESPONSE TO 'NO HOMO: WHY THEISTIC EVOLUTION FAILS'

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Abstract

Evolutionary creationism (EC) formerly known as theistic evolution is a widely held view of the harmony between science and faith among theists of many denominations. Arguments against EC based on the fact that there is only one extant species of the genus Homo, or that human beings were not favored by God to survive, are strawmen, and are both scientifically and theologically refuted.

Keywords

evolutionary creationism • anthropocentrism • science and faith in harmony • strawman fallacy • Homo sapiens

This commentary is in response to the paper *No Homo: Why Theistic Evolution Fails* by Smith (1). As a theistic evolutionist, I would challenge the logic, science, and theology of this paper. First, I would like to point out that the term 'Theistic Evolution' is no longer in wide use by those who believe that mainstream science and theology are not in conflict but can be reconciled. We prefer the term 'evolutionary creationism' (EC), since it conveys the central idea that we believe God is the creator of all life through the laws of science including biological evolution (2).

The opening comments regarding the status of EC betray a lack of understanding of the spectrum of theistic beliefs regarding the nexus of science and faith. It is not true that we have a 'hard time making friends'. Quite the contrary. In fact, the EC view of reality is accepted by the majority of theists in the world, and even in the US, with its large number of evolution-phobic young earth creationists. It is true that our position lies between those that adhere to intelligent design and secular evolutionists, which means we have points of contention and also views in common with both. But this is true for everyone when it comes to worldviews on science and faith. The spectrum spans from flat earth literal text-believing creationists to philosophers who see evolution as the guiding principle in all of physical reality (evolutionism). And every labeled group within that spectrum, (including ECs) includes a variety of specific viewpoints on many details, leading to considerable overlap between such groups.

The paper fails to acknowledge that the large majority of members of the largest Christian organization of working scientists, the American Scientific Affiliation, hold to EC or similar views, even though the ASA has no official position on the details of creation, and all points of view are welcome.

While many arguments have been raised by theistic and secular scientists against the EC position, Smith takes an approach that is unique and puzzling. The author believes that a strong argument against the general EC viewpoint can be based on the evolutionary history of the genus *Homo*, which he claims refutes the anthropocentrism of God. He claims that if God were real, and if He truly had some special fondness for human beings, there would have been many more species or subspecies of *Homo*, and they would not have all gone extinct save one. The fact that Neanderthals, Denisovans etc. have gone extinct leads him to conclude that either God is not real, or that humans are not at all special in God's eyes. This idea is certainly novel in my experience.

It is also quite odd in my view. Haldane's famous remark about beetles was a witty joke and was pointed to the young earth creationist idea that God specifically and deliberately created every species of living creature, including all the over 300,000 species of beetles. Even most young earth creationists have abandoned that idea, and many now posit

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that evolution played a role in the diversity of life after the great flood. Of course, evolutionary creationists accept the theory of evolution by natural selection, which includes both mass and specific extinctions as part of biological history.

The idea that God's favor would be shown by a multiplicity of species in a particular genus or subspecies is meaningless from either a biological or theological viewpoint. On the contrary, one could say that the fact that *Homo sapiens* is blessed to be the sole survivor of a genus that never was entirely successful is strong evidence for God's favor of this particular species. Smith assumes that Neanderthals are a subspecies of *H. sapiens*, and not a separate species based on data indicating some degree of interbreeding, but as pointed out by McNulty (3) this conclusion is not well established.

In the final analysis it really does not matter what label is given to Neanderthals or Denisovans or other extinct forms of *Homo*. The point is that while it is indisputable that such alternative forms of the genus once lived, all went extinct save one – us.

The idea that God has no special feelings for human beings because other similar creatures went extinct is entirely backwards logically. If we are asked to provide some flowers for a special occasion, and find ourselves strongly attracted to red roses, we will not present a bouquet of different colored roses along with hydrangeas, daisies and others. We will choose a dozen red roses, one unique kind. We do not believe that the genus of *Homo* was created in the image of God, We believe that human beings, the specific biological entity that all people alive on earth today belong to was chosen by God to bear His image, and reign supreme in the biosphere.

Furthermore, according to the Bible, God was quite particular about exactly which humans he preferred to choose. He was not pleased with his original created couple, who disobeyed him, and he seriously considered getting rid of people altogether as the story of Noah and the flood demonstrates. Later the Bible indicates God's preference for one particular tribe of humans, on whom he showed favor and expected worship. With the advent of Christianity, God was seen as loving all of mankind.

The other argument Smith uses is his attack on what he calls the 'Charlie Bucket view' that God was anthropocentric because only human beings survived against great odds, and therefore there is evidence for God's special love for our species.

Smith quotes May (4) who gives a concise statement of the view that modern humans survived against great odds, suggesting God's intervention in our favor:

'The probability of [these events happening] is negligible. It is much more plausible to assume that the Creator of the universe deliberately intervened to promote the development of intelligent life.'

Smith then presents the following as his refutation of this argument:

Yet this conclusion, as we can see, neglects to acknowledge the fact that the majority of Homo species and Homo sapiens subspecies have gone extinct. And without any particular reason to think that anatomically modern humans were less likely to survive than archaic humans, we have no reason to think that the survival of anatomically modern humans in the present is in any way miraculous or suspicious. So, the Charlie Bucket view fails.

The problem with this argument is that we do in fact have reasons to think that *anatomically modern humans were less likely to survive than archaic humans*. It is a fact that human beings never reached a large stable population until quite late (50,000 ya) in their existence and were on the brink of extinction at times during that history. Some estimates have the human population reduced to a few thousand individuals at times, including after the eruption of the Toba super volcano around 70,000 ya. (5). It is perfectly reasonable to believe that human survival was indeed miraculous in the face of the dry, cold and miserable conditions following this event, not to mention other biological and environmental challenges early humans had to face.

But with the onset of the Upper Paleolithic Revolution, humans began to flourish and spread over the globe. Population growth soon made extinction of this branch of *Homo* highly unlikely. And it was not until after *H. Sapiens* became behaviorally as well as anatomically modern, that the competing species or subspecies of *Homo* went extinct.

Smith's idea of God wanting to 'maximize the occurrence of intelligent life' by allowing for the survival of multiple species of *Homo* is without any basis or grounding in any theological source. Biblical writers had no knowledge of previous *Homo* species, and there is not one word of such, other than reference to the Nephilim and giants, which were not considered to be human alternatives in God's eyes. While this

'maximize' idea is stressed over and over in the paper, it is the very essence of a strawman, which Smith effectively knocks down, to no effect, since it has nothing to do with any Christian view (including that of ECs) regarding God's creation and love of humanity.

Smith also indulges in the tired old argument that 'God could have' or 'should have' done something different than what actually happened. This is a meaningless approach to theology, since believers do not presume to understand what and how God could or should have done. It certainly gives no support to an attack on EC.

The author writes *Clearly, the evolutionary story is one built on daily cruelty, torture, extinction, and suffering that has persisted for millions of years.* This idea, that evolution is all about torture and suffering, is not consonant with the actual evolutionary process, which involves nothing more than variant allele frequency changes in a population, and only to a very minor degree has anything to do with the ancient image of 'nature, red in tooth and claw'. Life requires death, predation, starvation and some degree of competition for survival. There is no alternative that would fit in with the laws of nature.

In essence, the core argument being made in the paper has very little to do with EC per se. Most theists believe that humans carry the image of God, and that God looks with favor on our species. By arguing against this view, Smith is simply making an argument against theism, not any particular scientific flavor of it. It is the argument against the anthropocentric view of most theists, not theistic evolution that is the failure.

Smith states *So, by 'random', the biologist only wishes to suggest that mutations do not arise in response to an organism's needs.* While many evolutionary biologists might

hold to this view, it ignores an entire field of research into what is known as 'stress directed mutations' (6).

The bottom line of Smith's paper is given near the end when he states: *But the facts are in, and they seem to suggest that humans hold no special place in the universe.* Evolutionary creationists do believe that humans are special in the animal kingdom, that we evolved, but that we were also gifted by our creator with qualities previously unknown in life on earth. This idea was once called 'secular humanism', but 'new atheism' replaced the concept of human exceptionalism with a cynical view of human mediocrity (as expressed in the quote above), complete with meaninglessness and purposelessness. The EC point of view is that evolution is not at all counter to either a scientific or a theological argument for the exceptionalism of human beings but is in perfect harmony with both.

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