



When they can't see the forest for the tree

IN MANY CLASSROOMS DARWINIAN EVOLUTION HAS BEEN GIVEN A NO-DEBATE STATUS. HERE'S WHY.

by Carolyn Reeves

During one of the early presidential candidate debates before the 2008 election, Jim Vandehei addressed Senator John McCain with this question: "Senator McCain, this comes from a Politico.com reader and was among the top vote-getters in our early rounds [of question gathering]. They want a yes or no. Do you believe in evolution?" Senator McCain responded, "Yes." He then added that when he hiked the Grand Canyon and saw it at sunset, he knew the hand of God was there.

Mr. Vandehei followed up with this question, "I'm curious, is there anybody on the stage that does not agree - believe in evolution?" Sen. Sam Brownback, Mr. Mike Huckabee, and Rep. Tom Tancredo raised their hands.

Watching the debate that night, I remember thinking, What a loaded question that was! Vandehei might as well have asked, "Are you a well-educated person who believes the scientific evidence for evolution or are you still clinging to your religious beliefs - and you can't choose both."

The question not only confronts politicians, but it also confronts thousands of public school students every year. For that reason, it is worthy of a little analysis.

First of all, evolution is one of those words that have multiple meanings. It may simply mean that groups of living things change over time. It can also mean that all living and once-living organisms on earth evolved from a one-celled organism over millions and millions of years.

If I were asked whether or not I believe in evolution, I would answer like this: "If you're defining evolution as the changes that occur in groups of living things over time, my answer is Yes. If you're defining evolution as a process by which all living and once-living organisms can trace their original ancestor back to the same first cell, my answer is No. And, it is an emphatic No if evolution is limited to random, naturalistic processes."

Although some newer models of the history of life have appeared in recent years, the evolution of life is often illustrated by a single tree that has been dubbed "Darwin's Tree of Life." The ends of the branches represent the organisms living today, while parts of the branches nearest to the trunk represent older ancestral organisms. Somewhere at the bottom of the tree would be a cell that was the beginning of all living things.

According to most neo-Darwinists (the modern Darwinists who have updated their ideas about evolution), one cell evolved into organisms with many cells that were ancestors to all plants, animals, and other living things. Fish are thought to have evolved before reptiles, which evolved before mammals and birds. Mankind would be just one of the mammals that evolved.

It is possible to "believe" in the changes that occur at the ends of the branches and still not believe that everything represented by the tree of life diagram is true. Just because one believes that groups of living things change over time does not lead to the conclusion that all life evolved from the same first cell.

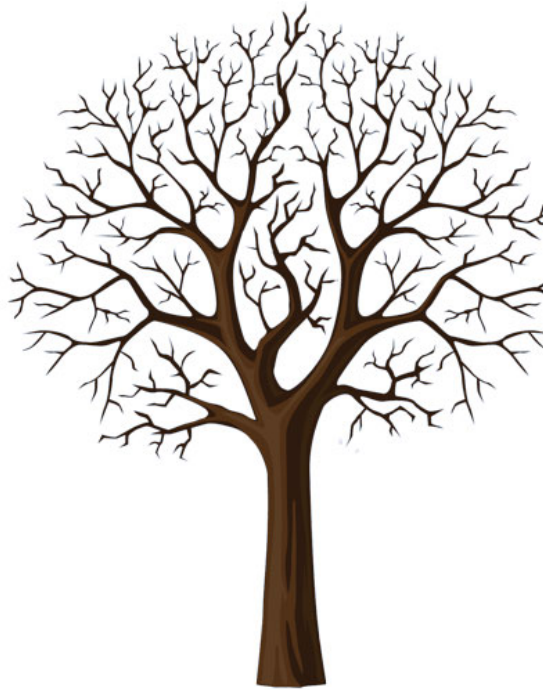
The ends of the branches could just as easily be thought of as the tops of a forest of trees. To many people, a forest of trees is a better way to represent the changes that have occurred in the original forms of life. One tree might represent a wolf-like animal that branched out into all the dogs, coyotes, wolves (possibly other canines) we see today. Another tree might represent different varieties of orchids which evolved from an original set of orchid plants. Still another tree might represent all races of humans, who can trace their ancestors back to the same original parents on earth, Adam and Eve.

Even though Darwinists claim that wolves, orchids and man can all trace their ancestors back to the same one-celled organism, there is actually a great deal of agreement between the ideas represented by the tree of life and the forest of trees. In fact, much that is in typical biology textbook about evolution can be taught without controversy.

Many pages in biology texts are devoted to giving examples that living things change over time. For example, finch beaks are shown to get thicker during dry periods of little rain as a result of a process known as natural selection. The number of dark-colored peppered moths in an area was shown to increase during a certain period when air pollution darkened trees. Physical differences in the squirrels on opposite sides of the Grand Canyon are often shown. The different groups of squirrels may have evolved because of being separated by the canyon, even though both groups of squirrels probably had the same ancestor squirrels. Bacteria and viruses are shown to mutate and change frequently, causing them to become resistant to certain antibiotics or to be one step ahead of vaccines. Fossil remains can be almost identical to living organisms or they can show distinct differences.

These examples hardly rise to the level of "believing" they are true. There has been some criticism of the research methods used to study the peppered moths, but for the most part, these examples are either observable or they are based on strong evidence. Almost anyone could say they "believe" in this kind of evolution. Controversies arise over what happened between the living things we see now and the first living ancestors.

Parents and students should be concerned about two aspects of how evolution is presented in most textbooks and in some schools. 1) Scientific challenges to the evidence for Darwinian evolution are not included. When no one with any scientific credibility ever questions the notion that life evolved naturalistically from a one-celled organism over millions of years, students may conclude that



every aspect of evolution must be true. 2) Terms like creation, God, supernatural, purpose, and even intelligent design are ruled out of bounds. This leaves Christian students to wonder if their beliefs about God as the Creator are false or irrelevant.

Various aspects of the evidence are often critically challenged by other scientists. This can be found in the scientific literature, but textbooks only present the evidence that supports Darwinism. For example, radiometric dating is one of the main reasons for accepting that millions of years have passed since the first life arose. Carbon-14 dating methods usually agree with known historical dates that are only a few thousand years old, but it cannot be used to date things in millions of years. The millions-of-years dates come from other kinds of radiometric tests. In spite of the term "absolute dating," the dates obtained from these methods are sometimes false or contradictory. There have been occasions when lava flows known to be less than a few hundred years old registered millions of years by one of the absolute dating methods.

When legitimate scientific challenges about evolution are not heard in the classroom, the situation is much like allowing the prosecution in a court case to present evidence, but then not allowing the defense to respond. Because science builds upon debate and analysis of evidence, many Christians find it extremely puzzling why there is an insistence upon a no-debate status for Darwinian evolution. It is not because the evidence is overwhelming or because there is "scientific proof" that all life evolved from the same first cell.

The underlying reason some scientists avoid anything religious in scientific discussions is because they are grounded in a philosophy known as naturalism: a belief that everything observed in nature must have a natural explanation. Since the Darwinian version of evolution is the only explanation for the origin of life that doesn't require supernatural acts, it is basically accepted by default. Actually, naturalism works fine for most fields of science.

However, when science attempts to reconstruct the past all the way back to the first cell and beyond, there is a collision with the First Cause of everything, Who cannot be explained by natural processes.

Obviously, Darwinian evolution is not the only possible explanation for the origin of life. Millions of intelligent people believe that life came about as a result of a supernatural creator. In a 2004 Gallop Poll of U.S. citizens, only 13% believed that humans evolved from natural processes without any help from God. Furthermore, about half of the remaining 87% believe that God created man in pretty much his present form.

In April, ordinary taxpayers expressed their displeasure with how their government is spending their money with hundreds of "TEA Parties" across the nation. It isn't necessary to stage a protest over the way the topic of origins is being taught in public schools, but rational thoughtful parents don't need to be apathetic either. Polite conversations with school officials or with lawmakers can do much to affect how parental concerns are addressed.

School officials would probably be pleasantly surprised to hear that conservative Christian parents are not opposed to every mention of the word evolution and are not asking that the Bible be taught in science classrooms. It is reasonable to request that the explanation for where all living things came from be presented in a way that doesn't come across as if a Creator God is false or irrelevant. It is reasonable to point out that there are challenges to aspects of Darwinian evolution in the scientific literature, and these should also be allowed in classrooms.



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Learn more, do more ...

You can join a strong movement already under way that is petitioning for more academic freedom in how evolution is currently taught. Learn more at www.academicfreedompetition.com.

Dr. Carolyn Reeves' book *Understanding Science While Believing the Bible* is an excellent resource for Christian students and adults as well. It is written to help readers understand that they do not have to forsake good science to believe in the Bible.

The book includes non-technical discussions of some of the most powerful scientific challenges to evolution. Furthermore, it offers strong arguments for the evidence of intelligent design in creation. Dr. Reeves has been a public school science teacher for 30 years and currently works as an educational consultant with Educational Resource Management.

Her book can be ordered from www.creationstudies.org or from HYPERLINK "[HTTP://WWW.MASTERDESIGN.ORG](http://WWW.MASTERDESIGN.ORG)"
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