

TWO

DARWIN'S LEGACY

It was a fine sentiment, a comforting hope to take the edge off Darwin's lament. But having seen "misrepresentation" steadily grow rather than decline during the decade after his mentor's death, Romanes had not been optimistic. All too often the history of science shows that what both he and Darwin feared might for a very long time endure.

As the doctors came and went and everyone tried to look on the bright side, in his manuscript Romanes hammered away at trying to get across what was at stake. Writing "his" Darwin out of mind must not, *this time*, endure.

"The question is whether natural selection has been the sole, or but the main, cause of organic evolution," he wrote to establish the grounding point for his case for Darwin's real legacy, versus what was already being widely degraded into the Social Darwinism of "survival of the fittest" by the Robber Barons of that time.

Because of the difficulty most of us face in grasping the differences and consequences posed by what often seem awfully picky points for the evolutionists, he labored at length to get the point across.

"Of all the errors connected with the theory of natural selection, perhaps the one most frequently met with—especially among supporters of the theory—is that of employing the theory to explain all cases...The term 'natural selection' thus becomes a magic word, or Sesame, at the utterance of which every closed door is supposed to be immediately opened."

"I am not here alluding to that merely blind faith in natural selection, which of late years has begun dogmatically to force this principle as the sole cause of organic evolution in every case...Such a blind faith, indeed, I hold to be highly inimical, not only to the progress of biological science, but even to the true interests of the natural selection theory itself...The point is, that the theory in question is often invoked in cases where it is not even logically possible that it can apply, and therefore in cases where its application betokens, not merely

an error of judgment or extravagance of dogmatism, but a fallacy of reasoning.”

This shows, he notes, “how easy it is to be cheated by this mere juggling with a phrase.”

Thereafter, Romanes focused on areas of concern that all too often 20th century science and education was either to fumble, miserably mangle, evade, or as if it was something wholly new born from the forehead of a new Jove, to rediscover and hail late in the century.

The effect of education

To pound across this soon-to-be ignored factor for Darwin’s expanding perspective on evolution, Romanes notes “the unquestionable influences of individual education.”

This seems obvious to us, but ahead, for a whole century, lay the battle between those holding this belief and those who were to claim that education had little effect, that only the quality of genes mattered, that it was mostly nature with minimal nurture involved.

Does this matter today?

Crossing over from scientific mind to political and economic mind, by the late 20th century this became the battle for vouchers of public money to support private schools. Underneath more acceptable rationales was the simple subliminal message. Public money to private schools would guarantee transmission of the gene pool of good money makers and good Christians to counter—God forbid!—the threat to human evolution of public school transmission of the gene pool of bad races and classes.

Surely, Romanes wrote, it was “sufficiently well known that individual education—or special training, whether of mind or body—usually raises congenital powers of any kind to a more or less considerable level above those of the normal type. In other words, whatever doubt there may be touching the *inherited* effects of use, there can be no question touching the immense *developmental* effects thereof in the individual life-time.”

Thereafter, Romanes tackled the issues in which, though dying, he enjoyed an immense advantage over most of his contemporaries and peers in science.

Almost all of them were beholden to sources of established wealth for employment—prestigious colleges and universities, foundations, or other organizations, all of which looked askance on those who were in any way labeled controversial. They were further dependent on the acceptance rather than the blackballing of professional associations. Beyond all this their time for independent thought and work was radically diminished by the long hours one must spend in teaching and in the writing of books and papers that might safely boost rather than risk their advancement.

For Romanes, however, this was no problem. He had Darwin’s great advantage. Having

inherited a fortune, he didn't need to teach or do anything else but work for himself. He could set his own agenda, finance his own research, invest with gifts in the work of others whose work he admired and believed in.

Like Darwin before him, here again in his disciple emerged the rare independence that made it possible to go up against the paradigm. Consequently, one after another, he was able to tackle issues over which the battle still rages on into the 21st century.

***The idea that selfishness and survival of the fittest are
the prime drivers of evolution***

“It constitutes no part of the theory of natural selection to suppose that survival of the fittest must invariably lead to *improvement* of type...Parasites, for example, present the phenomena of what is called *degeneration*, i.e., showing by their whole structure that they have descended from a possibly very much higher type of organization than that which they now exhibit.”

Cooperation versus every man for himself

Even “members of different species mutually assist one another” in “what is called symbiosis,” Romanes wrote.

Referring to the early appearance of the articles that a decade later Prince Peter Kropotkin brought together into his still widely read *Mutual Aid*, Romanes tells us that “all cases of mutual aid or co-operation, whether within or beyond the limits of species...fall under the explanatory sweep of the Darwinian theory.”

Sexual selection

One of the most glaring instances of the exclusion of whatever didn't fit the early agenda for the Neo-Darwinians was Darwin's pet theory of the impact of sexual selection as well as natural selection in shaping all life on this planet.

There “can be no question that the courtship of birds is a highly elaborate business,” Romanes wrote, “the inference is that the males do not take all this trouble for nothing; but that the females give their consent to pair with the males whose personal appearance, or whose voice, proves to be most attractive.”

The “evidence in favor” of the operation of sexual selection, Romanes tells us, “is both

large in amount and massive in weight.” Yet not until relatively late in the 20th century—with the surge of power for the women’s movement, and with an eye to its obvious book marketing appeal for males as well as females—did the Super Neos morphed from the Neo-Darwinians turn to the topic as if it were via them new born.

Creation by design and religion

Here Romanes stated what among the evolutionists all sides to the battle—as well as an overwhelming majority of people of any degree of liberated mind—were to wearily unite on for well over a century.

If all the creatures on this earth including ourselves “came into existence suddenly, the fact would constitute well-nigh positive proof in favour of...creation by design; whereas, if they all came into existence gradually, this would in itself constitute presumptive evidence in favour of naturalism, or of development by natural causes.”

So does this mean the Creationists and Evolutionists must go on until the earth burns to a crisp wasting our precious time in senseless argument?

Out of the feeling that was clearly also Darwin’s and his own increasing conviction of no real barrier between progressive science and progressive religion, Romanes ends the first volume of *Darwin and After Darwin* by noting that “the religious thought of our generation has been more than ever staggered by the question—Where is now thy God?”

A fascinating and promising phenomenon for the early years of the 21st century is the emergence of a new meeting ground for progressive science and progressive spirituality in a mutually reinforcing alignment to the cause of evolution.

In keeping with the *Zeitgeist* of an interface of toleration for belief in God or no God is Romanes’ discrete response.

“The logical standing of the case has not been materially changed.” When the “cry of Reason pierces the heart of Faith, it remains for Faith to answer now, as she has always answered before—and answered with that trust which is at once her beauty and her life—Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself.”

An embryo for chaos theory?

As we are next to see, of so much of amazement I came to find in the lost Darwin his

preoccupation with what he called *correlated variation* also engaged Romanes.

“Mr. Darwin, who has paid more attention to this matter than any other writer,” Romanes affirms, “has shown, in considerable detail, that all the parts of any given organism are so intimately bound together, or so mutually dependent upon each other, that when one part is caused to change by means of natural selection, some other parts are very likely to undergo modification as a consequence...it is evident that in this principle we find a conceivable explanation of the origin of such adaptive structures as could not have been originated by natural selection...”

Was this an anticipation of the “butterfly effect” of modern chaos theory?

Let’s consider the case for this possibility in the next chapter.