

Dr Mortimer Adler's life-long 'crusade against evolution'

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Dr Mortimer Adler's conversion from an evolutionist to a creationist and, eventually, to Christianity, is a story typical of many persons in our modern age. A critical factor in his acceptance of Christianity was his life long study of evolution that eventually resulted in rejection of the Darwinist world view. He went on to publish several books and articles that explained in detail the reasons for his conclusions.

Dr Mortimer Adler (1902–2001) was considered by many leading intellectuals one of the greatest thinkers of all time, and according to a 1987 *Time* magazine article, he was the 'last great Aristotelian'. Adler has written or co-authored over 45 books (all of them very successful) and 200 articles. He was also chairman of the board of editors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* for many years. His 54-volume *Great Books of the Western World* has sold over a quarter of a million copies since 1952.¹

Dr Adler did his undergraduate work at Columbia University, where he finished a four-year program in three years, was ranked highest in his class, and was ranked first on the Phi Beta Kappa list.² He completed his Ph.D. in psychology at Columbia, and then served as a professor at the University of Chicago for twelve years, becoming a full professor before he became involved with the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. His work is of such stature that a national center based on his educational concepts was established in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

An outspoken opponent of Darwinism

Adler was also an active and outspoken opponent of Darwinism for almost a half-century.³ In 1985, *Time* magazine noted that Adler 'dismasts Darwin' because, among many other reasons, Darwinism categorizes humans 'as simply an animal with higher sensory perceptions'.⁴ The skeptic Martin Gardner even concludes that Adler 'has for some time been carrying on a one-man crusade against evolution'. Adler's lifelong interest in Darwinism eventually resulted in his writing two books on the topic. In his book, *What Man Has Made of Man*, Adler branded evolution 'a "popular

myth", insisting it is not an established fact'.⁵

Adler used the word 'myth' to refer to his conclusion that Darwinist conclusions 'vastly exceed the scientific evidence This myth is the story of evolution which is told to school children and which they can almost visualize as if it were a moving picture' (emphasis mine).⁶ Specifically, Adler has concluded the theory of evolution 'is not a theory in the sense of a systematic organization of scientific facts and laws, in the sense in which Newton's *Principia* is a theory' but is only a theory:

'... in the sense in which there is an attempt to explain certain facts, which have been scientifically established in the biological sciences, by making hypotheses which are not propositions to be proved, but are merely imaginative guesses about unobservable processes or events. This is the sense of hypothesis in which Newton said no scientist should make them (emphasis in original).'⁷

Adler adds that evolution as a theory is 'wild speculation' and that

'Darwin himself is partly responsible for much of this speculation. *The Origin of Species* is full of guesses which are clearly unsupported by the evidence. (To the extent that *The Origin of Species* contains scientifically established facts, these facts are not organized into any coherent system.) Furthermore, these guesses, which constitute the theory of evolution, are not in the field of scientific knowledge anyway. They are historical. This conjectural history, begun by Darwin, was even more fancifully elaborated by the 19th century evolutionary "philosophers".'⁸

He adds that work of the 'post-Darwinian "scientific cosmologies": Spencer, Haeckel ... [and] ... the post-Darwinian "evolutionary philosophies": e.g. Bergson' consists of wild speculations. Adler concluded that biological

'... "evolution" is not a scientific fact, but at best a probable history, a history for which the evidence is insufficient and conflicting ... [and that the] relevant facts are facts in embryology, genetics, palaeontology, comparative anatomy. These facts establish only one historical probability: that types of animals which once existed no longer exist, and that types of animals now existing at one time did not exist. They do not establish the elaborate story in which is the myth of evolution; nor do they establish any of the aetiological guesses about the way in which species originated or became extinct, such as natural selection, adaptation to environment, struggle for existence, transmission of acquired characteristics, etc.'⁹

He concludes by stating

'If the grand myth of evolution, as a history of the development of the forms of life, and the grand theory of evolution, as an explanation of how it all happened, are not scientific knowledge, how

much less are they philosophical knowledge. (This type of speculation, peculiar to the 19th century, did much to bring discredit upon the name of philosophy which it so wrongly arrogated to itself.) For the most part, the wild speculations of Spencer, Haeckel, Schopenhauer and Bergson are now generally discredited both by scientists and philosophers.¹⁰

While still just a young man, Adler had read a collection of articles by different authors in a 1924 book by Ernst Haeckel and others titled *Evolution and Modern Thought*¹¹ which he said caused him to be 'puzzled' by the 'conflicting points of view' on evolution expressed by the different authors:

'Try as I might, I simply could not figure out how evolution was supposed to work. I spent hours writing notes to myself and making diagrams in an effort to put down the steps by which a new species came into being.'¹²

He adds that this puzzlement remained with him for years, and only when he read Darwin's *Origin of Species* for the third time did he believe that he finally understood Darwinism. However, when he finally understood evolution he found much with which he disagreed. Gardner concluded that one of the things to which Adler objected was the view that life lies 'on a continuum in which one species fades into another by imperceptible changes. The evidence indicates, he argues, that "species" differ not in degree but in kind, with a radical "discontinuity" separating them.'¹³

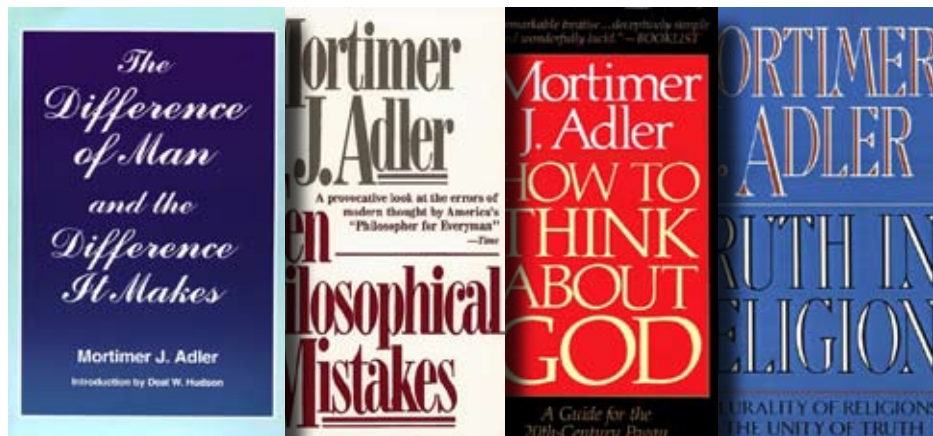
The radical discontinuity between humans and animals

Adler devoted an entire book to the 'radical discontinuity' between humans and animals. In this book, titled *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes*,¹⁴ he argues that the difference is both major and critical. In his autobiography, Adler stresses that the theme of this entire book is that humans and animals differ not just in *degree* (quantity), but in *kind* (quality) as well. He later added that

'since *The Difference of Man and The Difference It Makes* was published [in 1957], scientific investigations have turned up additional evidence relevant to [my conclusion] ... that man, with the powers of syntactical speech and conceptual thought, differs in kind from all nonlinguistic animals remains as clear and certain as before.'¹⁵

This view is reflected in many of Adler's other writings.¹⁶

As do all creationists (in the broadest sense), Adler recognizes that variation within the Genesis kinds is valid,



and writes in detail about this problem in his book, *Problems for Thomists*¹⁷ (a Thomist—a follower of St. Thomas Aquinas—champions the view that there exists a 'self-existent Prime Mover' an uncaused first cause, i.e. a creator, namely God). In this book, Adler examines in great detail the question of how many 'species' exist so he can answer the question

'... how many creative acts of God are required to explain the evolutionary jumps? ... Adler's ... view, which he considers "almost completely demonstrated", is ... Within a species, changes have occurred, but each species itself is a fixed type—immutable in its essence, and coming into being only by an act of God. Adler suspects that each species was created in several different types, underived from each other—for example, the separate creation of flowering and non-flowering plants.'¹⁸

Of course modern creationists would not equate the created kinds with the man-made category of species.

Adler was an active anti-evolutionist for decades. The conference on *Science, Philosophy and Religion* held in New York City each year drew many 'top scientists' and philosophers including Dr Adler. At these meetings Adler, who once said Darwinism is 'full of guesses which are clearly unsupported by the evidence' expressed concern about 'materialist ideology' and 'Scientism which dominates every aspect of our modern culture'.¹⁹ Gardner concludes that one of many examples of what he calls Adler's 'blasts' against evolution was expounded in a lecture

'... at the University of Chicago, in 1951. Men and apes, he declared, are as different "as a square and a triangle. There can be no intermediate—no three and one-half-sided figure." Most of Adler's arguments were straight out of the arsenal of Bible Belt evangelism If a scientist would only produce an ape that could speak "in simple declarative sentences", Adler said, he would admit a close bond between man and monkey. ... Only two explanations will fit all the facts, Adler concluded his speech. Either man "emerged" from the brute

by a sudden evolutionary leap, or he was created directly by God.²⁰

Adler once said 'Scientists ... are theologically naive. But that doesn't seem to stop them from talking about beginnings and endings. The beginning wasn't a big bang and the end won't be a final freeze. But don't try telling a scientist that'.²¹

Mortimer Adler was one of millions of Americans (including more than 40,000 active scientists) that do not accept Darwinism.²² Fortunately, Dr Adler was willing to speak out about his doubts about Darwinism in his lectures, articles, and books. As a result, he has articulated some major concerns that have not been satisfactorily addressed by evolutionists, even today. And as expected, Dr Adler has endured his share of attacks by Darwinists, especially those in the atheistic community.²¹⁻²⁴

Born of Jewish parents, he 'fell away from religious observance' as a young man to the point of becoming a 'religious scoffer'.²⁵ Only in 1984 when he was 82 did he become a professing Christian.²⁶ And ever since, he has been active in writing and speaking about his faith. The reason he became a Christian was because his life-long research proved to him that 'Christianity is the only logical, consistent faith in the world'.²⁷ He never expressed his conclusions on such topics as the age of the earth, but never criticized the conservative biblical view either.

Conclusions

Until he died, Dr Adler was deeply committed to demonstrating God's existence scientifically 'beyond reasonable doubt'.^{28,29} His confidence in God's existence was based on the cosmological argument (the conclusion that the existence of a creation proves the creator), and the fact that no form of evolutionism, including Neo-Darwinism, can account for the creation of either life or the cosmos.³⁰ Furthermore as a philosopher, he concluded that belief in Christianity is critical in developing a workable, humane system of ethics and morality.³¹

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