

The descent of Darwinism

A review of
*The Naked Emperor:
Darwinism Exposed*
by Antony Latham
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Antony Latham currently is a practicing physician in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. In the preface of this book he summarizes his journey from a respect for Christianity gained from his mother to doubt and even skepticism about religion based upon his acceptance of Darwinian evolution.

However, while working in a hospital in northwest Kenya he became a Christian during what he characterizes as an ‘astounding conversion’ (p. iii). Latham does not say more than this about the dramatic change he experienced, but after that event, he reinvestigated the evidence for his understanding of evolution.

On his new journey he was helped ‘by many good books which support evidence for an Intelligent Designer of life—not least the classic *Darwin on Trial* by Phillip Johnson’ (p. v). Latham’s intellectual quest caused him to strongly reject Darwinism, but he retained his belief in an ancient universe. At the beginning of his book (pp. v–vi) and especially at the end (p. 248) he expresses his dislike of the young universe concept. But he does not reference any literature written from this perspective or any real attempt to deal with their arguments.

Topics Covered

Contents of *The Naked Emperor* book include: a fine-tuned universe, the first life and explosion of life, fossil record of invertebrates and vertebrates, human origins and nature, genetics, Darwinian myths, homology, convergence, irreducible complexity and

natural selection. There are seven pages of bibliography but no index.

Latham supports an ‘anthropic’ belief, which means that ‘the universe seems perfectly ordered to produce not just life but man’ (p. 1). He has calculated ‘that there is much less than one chance in one hundred billion trillion trillion trillion that another such planet [as Earth] could occur anywhere in the universe’ (p. 6). He further commented,

‘The fine tuning of our universe and our planet earth is so perfect that it has been described as being like a pencil balancing on its point. It continues to balance, against all the odds, because the conditions are exactly set for this to happen’ (p. 6).

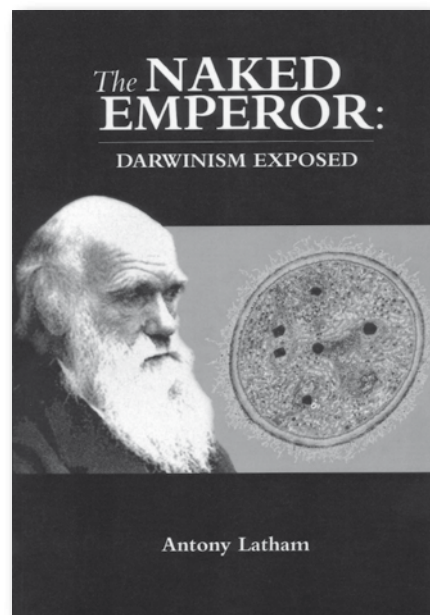
A biblical theistic view is supported by Latham, meaning ‘that God is constantly active and involved in his creation and continues to uphold it’ (p. 7).

Doubts about Darwin

Since the focus of Latham’s book is on Darwinism, it is important to understand Darwin’s background that led to his monumental works which so dramatically have impacted science and religion. Charles Darwin and his writings were products of the influences on his life. These included his evolutionary and anti-Christian grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, and the anti-clerical free-thinking atheist-zoologist, Robert Grant. Also important were ‘Darwin’s own powerful ambitions’, a prevalent naturalistic philosophy, ‘and, perhaps most importantly, an emerging Victorian idea of what God should or should not do’ (p. 197).¹

So fundamentally there was a metaphysical basis for Darwin’s evolutionary views. At the present time because there is considerable evidence against large-scale evolution, Latham says,

‘... my impression of Darwin as a scientist and basically humble man leads me to think that he would now be seeking a *totally different solution* [emphasis



added]’ (p. 44).

Latham distinguishes macro-evolution from micro-evolution, the latter referring to small changes characterized by Galápagos finches or the diversification of various human populations from the original pair. Macro-evolution, the perspective that there were large changes during long periods of time, characteristically would be the Darwinian view. However, it is important to understand that the most pertinent issue here is not the limited (micro) variation observed within extinct and extant groups of plants and animals, but rather whether there has been an infusion of *new genetic information* which would be necessary for any evolutionary progress. There is a lack of empirical evidence showing that the required new genetic information periodically would be incorporated.

Doubts about Dawkins

There are 16 chapters in *The Naked Emperor*. Interestingly, Chapter 15 with 47 pages is about 4–5 times longer than most other chapters and is arguably the most important section of Latham’s entire book. Chapter 15 contains a step-by-step critique of atheist Richard Dawkins’ famous book, *The Blind Watchmaker*. However, many topics covered in this chapter were explored with greater depth in previous chapters of Latham’s book.

Dawkins is the most prominent and vocal Darwinist in the world today. So Latham believes that if Dawkins' arguments cannot be refuted, then this current book by Latham would not be worth writing. Therefore Latham ambitiously accepts this challenge, intending 'to undo his [Dawkins'] arguments chapter by chapter beginning with his Preface' (p. 199).

Dawkins' 'religious' faith excludes any possibility for the supernatural. He proclaims that 'Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist' (p. 202). Dawkins' 'blind watchmaker' is natural selection, which is 'blind' because 'it does not see ahead, does not plan consequences, has no purpose in view' (p. 203).

The peppered moths appear to have had shifts in their colours over a few decades, and from this Dawkins extrapolated to millions of years. But Latham shows that there was just a shift in gene frequencies within a population and that 'there is no new genetic information involved in the story of the melanic moth' (p. 204). However, Latham does not mention the staged photos involved in the peppered moth experiments.²

Another example used by Dawkins involves dog varieties and the changes produced during hundreds or a few thousands of years by breeding to get the St Bernard and Chihuahua. But they still are dogs! Then Dawkins extrapolates to several hundred million years and he imagines a great variety of different life forms. Latham replies that this all 'is akin more to micro-evolution' and mainly 'distribution of existing alleles (not new ones)' (p. 205). However, Latham does recognize that mutations can be involved, but they would not result in one type of organism being transformed into another type.

Latham discusses Dawkins' example of how order (as in life forms) could originate (for example in a snowflake). But in the snowflake there is no meaningful information, according to Latham. Latham says that snowflakes have syntactic (meaningless) rather than semantic (meaningful) information. An example of the latter would be 'the sequence of nucleotides in DNA' which

'is full of meaning and purpose—it determines the characteristics of an organism' (p. 207).

A better distinction would be *order vs specified complexity*; the order in a snowflake or any crystal is repetitive and actually has low information content, and forms spontaneously under certain conditions because of the inherent properties of the substances. But in DNA and proteins, there is much higher information content without much repetition, and they do not form spontaneously under *any* conditions. Rather, energy needs to be meaningfully directed into the system by an intelligence to originally form DNA and proteins. In terms of letters, a snowflake is analogous to ABCABCABCABCABC ... or 'ABC' and 'repeat x times'. A protein or DNA molecule is more like a real sentence, e.g. 'The origin of information is problematic for evolution.'³ Proteins and DNA will work according to the laws of thermodynamics once set in place, like a snowflake or a crystal, but this does not explain how proteins and DNA *originated*.

In all of his considerations of Dawkins' reasoning, Latham conveys due respect, insight, and intense honesty. For Dawkins' weasel or hemoglobin simulations of evolution Latham points out that at the beginning there is a goal, and features are accepted, providing they are consistent with the *predetermined* goal. However, in Darwin's view the changes should be random (without goals), and so Dawkins' examples are not valid support for his presuppositions.⁴

Dawkins' eye

Dawkins argued that only quantitative changes led to the formation of the eye, but Latham says the complexity of the eye would have required new 'qualitatively different characteristics', for example the iris, which is:

'... of immense complexity such as its position in front of the lens, its shape and ability to open and close, its nervous system connections which intricately adjust the aperture in response to varying light and its other nervous system connections which adjust its aperture for

accommodation ...' (p. 213).

Latham recognizes that all these features and many others in the eye are not the result of 'a little bit of quantitative tinkering'; but are major complex characteristics. So he calls Dawkins' proposal 'preposterously wrong' (p. 213).

Dawkins makes the same mistake as has been common among others in the evolutionary community regarding the orientation of layers in the human eye. He thinks that nerve processes lying inside rather than outside the photoreceptor cell bodies (photo cells) is bad design. Of course, this virtually is a criticism of Dawkins' own designer, which is the environment working through natural selection.

Latham replies (p. 218) that the particular design of the eye works very well, which is true. But Latham could have strengthened his argument by pointing out that the photoreceptor cell bodies of vertebrates lie very close to a black pigmented (melanin-containing) layer called the choroid coat outside these cell bodies. This black pigment absorbs extra light and thus prevents a blurring of the image. Latham should also have mentioned that Dawkins' model starts with nerves behind the receptors, so nerves in front are actually contrary to prediction.

This pigmented layer also contains blood vessels which supply nutrients for the photoreceptors which have a high metabolic rate. Also the blood readily removes waste products, including heat. Having blood vessels (and black pigment) on the inside certainly would impair vision. In addition the nerve processes on the inside are virtually transparent and readily permit passage of light to the photoreceptors. So the eye really *is* well-designed.⁵

When dealing with the issue of convergence (an evolutionary concept that dissimilar forms in time become more alike because they live in separate but similar environments) Latham makes a good case for common design rather than evolution. For example, the almost identical 'saber-toothed tigers of the "old" and "new" worlds' (p. 220) are better explained by common design than convergence. By analogy,

an artist will have particular traits which are observable in each of his different paintings. But in a Darwinian world there would have been only ‘accidental mutations with no design’ (p. 221).

Dawkins’ theme is depressing

A very melancholic theme permeates Dawkins’ work, and is possibly the ultimate putdown for any purpose in life. This is the idea that the bodies of plants and animals are merely ‘vehicles for DNA This stark and very limiting understanding fuels his atheism’ (p. 222). However, we all can recognize the handiwork of God in the sky (Psalm 19:1) and other aspects of nature (Romans 1:19–20). We are not here on Earth so that our bodies just can pass on DNA to the next generation; for we are here to serve God and to enjoy Him forever.

Natural selection actually serves as a sieve, allowing some organisms to survive and have more offspring. Natural selection is, as Latham says, ‘a negative and uncreative force The weaker are killed off—that is all it can do’ (p. 231). Dawkins disagrees, saying rather that ‘it is able to be creative because of the competition amongst enemies such as gazelle and cheetahs’ (p. 230).

Latham considers this ‘a superficially neat argument’. The weaker and slower will be weeded out while the stronger and faster will survive and have more progeny. Certainly some variety exists in the gene pool, and we must remember that some small variation continually may be observed within specific groups of plants and animals. There will be some shifting of the relative numbers of various specific genes (gene frequencies) comprising each population. But for any *evolutionary progress*, it would be necessary to have the introduction of *new* genetic information into the gene pool—a most difficult challenge for evolutionary theorists to demonstrate.

DNA—apes and turtles

It has been known for some years that a comparison of human and chimpanzee DNA shows 98% similarity

(although recent studies put the figure at about 95%⁶), but we have not known until recently why the DNAs can be so similar and the organisms so different. So at this point I would like to interject an experience we had in my own research laboratory about 40 years ago.

We had been using blood serum proteins for biochemical taxonomy of turtles and had some good chemical procedures for doing this. But in the early 1960s, when DNA moved onto center stage within the scientific community, I decided to convert the laboratory to DNA in order to get closer to the genetic basis for chemical phenotypes of the different turtles. We obtained grant money for this project, and developed procedures for isolating, purifying, and comparing turtle DNAs.

This project continued for a couple years, but the results were virtually devastating. Anybody could look at the turtles we were using and see big differences among them. But their DNAs tested *virtually all the same*, and the results were repeatable. During our project, we had spent tens of thousands of dollars and long hours, days, weeks and months of work. For all practical purposes our project failed. The lab was shut down and special equipment sold. I went back to using proteins.

But we had made a discovery that did not become obvious until recently. What we unknowingly discovered was that DNA from the nucleus of a cell (genotype) *could not* be utilized to characterize the organism (that is to say, its appearance or phenotype).

On the basis of recent biochemical studies we know that the DNA is edited before it is translated into proteins for use by the body. Latham properly refers (chapters 2, 7 and 15) to introns which are edited-out DNA sections. After this the DNA may be subject to further editing. There is also, in these processes, an enormous army of small RNA molecules carrying out a host of activities which only dimly are understood at the present time.

So it is with apes and humans. There are many dozens of obvious physical differences between humans and apes, and anybody can distinguish any of the four types of apes from any

human of any ethnic group. I would estimate that the phenotypes of the apes would be 75–85% like humans (chimpanzees most similar, and gibbons the least). Indeed, over 55% of our proteins differ from those of chimps. So a DNA-similarity figure is meaningless as an indication of any relationship. Also see DeWitt.⁷

Saltation?

Unfortunately, Latham accepts the high similarity between human and chimp DNA as ‘a confirmation of a relationship based on common descent’ (p. 241). Of course he overlooks that since humans have about 3 billion base pairs, 5% similarity is about 150 million differences!

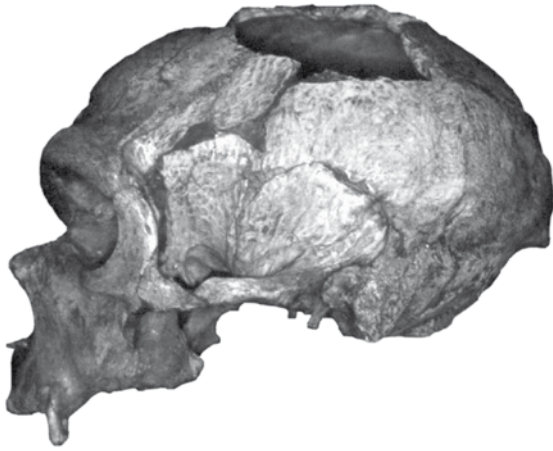
However, on p. 110 he says, ‘I firmly believe that the arrival of *Homo sapiens* was indeed a saltational event’ (big jump) from ape to human. However, this view certainly is contrary to a Darwinian mechanism that relies upon *small* changes!

It is interesting to note, as Latham points out, that Darwin’s friend, Charles Lyell, along with his main 19th century supporter, Thomas Henry Huxley, and many others including Darwin’s eccentric cousin, Francis Galton, the father of eugenics, did not support Darwin’s view of tiny variations as sufficient for evolution. They felt that there was a ‘need for macro leaps in the development of organisms’ (p. 142). However, this idea is not popular within the scientific community today.

Also, biblical creationists oppose a saltation idea as suggested by Latham. We believe that apes and humans had separate origins because of the testimony of both biblical revelation and science. There are scores of physical differences between apes and humans (one large difference being a speech center located in only the human brain).

Some suggestions

A reprint or revision of *The Naked Emperor*, needs attention given to the following, most of which are relatively minor matters. The last page of the preface should be numbered (vi). In



A lateral view of the skull of the man from La Chapelle-aux-Saints, France. Regardless of the strange features,¹⁰ Neandertal was nonetheless an ancient, post-Babel human. (Photo by Jack Cuzzo).

Chapter 6 higher-numbered footnotes need checking (e.g. footnote 18 from p. 107). On p. 114 the species of the garden pea should be *Pisum sativum* (letters switched in species name). Chapter 8 is labeled Chapter 7 at top of pages. In Figure 13.1 vertebrate is misspelled, and I had a problem with understanding some of the shading. There is the missing word ‘to?’ in line 9, p. 225. I also think it is important to give page numbers for all quotations.

In *The Naked Emperor* there is a discussion of Neandertals (pp. 98–100) about which there is considerable controversy. Latham could have enhanced the section greatly by referring to writings of Neandertal specialist, Dr Jack Cuzzo,⁸ who places Neandertals in a lineage with the human species. The anthropology chapter has a discussion of many popular forms including Toumaï and the more-recently-discovered Flores skeletons (found in 2003, not 2004).⁹

On p. 143 the text credits a German zoologist named Wilhelm Haacke with coining the term ‘orthogenesis’. I am not familiar with this gentleman, and so I checked a few sources for confirmation or correction. The famous late Harvard scholar, Stephen Jay Gould in *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Harvard, 2002, p. 66) said that a Theodor Eimer coined it. This issue should be checked further.

The Naked Emperor has nineteen

figures and only about one-half of these have legends. For a revision, all figures should have legends and full references. Figure 5.7, with a diagram of ‘horse evolution’, has no source for this branching tree. Interestingly, Jonathan Wells’ *Icons of Evolution* book (2000, p. 200) shows the identical pattern.

The future

Chapter 10, titled ‘Human Nature and Darwinism’, discusses human attributes which generally are not thought of in a discussion of evolution. In

Darwinism ‘everything in our make-up has been honed for survival’ (p. 149). But Latham interestingly takes aim at human characteristics saying,

‘The theory of evolution cannot explain altruism, the appreciation of beauty amongst humans nor the objective reality of beauty. All of these point to a creator and a purpose to life beyond mere survival’ (p. 159).

Latham does reference some literature dealing with this topic. My feeling is that the subject deserves more serious consideration by scientists and other concerned individuals.

Latham says that he has intended to be as objective as he could be in considering available facts. Because he has evaluated available information commonly utilized to support large-scale evolution I feel that the book can be valuable. He says that his ‘book is not primarily for Christians’ (p. vi), but ‘is relevant to any skeptical reader seeking the truth about our origins’ (p. i).

In the last chapter of *The Naked Emperor*, Latham opines that ‘The scientific community has, in general, turned a deaf ear *but the paradigm [of Darwinism] is creaking [emphasis added]*’ (p. 247). I would agree and expect that a widespread collapse of Darwinism is inevitable in the not-too-distant future. *The Naked Emperor* cradles a wealth of information supporting this prediction.

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10. According to Cuzzo, the strange features of the skull are due to the Neandertal’s longevity. See ref. 8.