

William Robin Thompson—creation scientist

Jerry Bergman

Professor William Thompson was a widely published scientist and creationist. He was selected to write the introduction to the Everyman's Library edition of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. His introduction effectively documented the major problems with Darwin's theory, problems that remain unresolved today.

William Robin Thompson, FRS (1887–1972) was a well-known Canadian entomologist and onetime research scientist at the Imperial Institute of Entomology, and later Director of the Commonwealth Institute of Biological Control in Ottawa.¹ He was editor of *The Canadian Entomologist* and a widely published scientist in the peer reviewed literature throughout his career.²

He earned a B.S. degree in biology from the University of Toronto, graduating first in his class in 1909. He then completed an M.S. at Cornell University and later did research and taught in the zoology department at Cambridge University.³ He subsequently studied at the Sorbonne and the Dominican College of St Maximin and completed a Ph.D. and a D.Sc. from Paris and was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society of London. Professor Stedman, in the Cambridge University publication *Philosophy*, called Thompson “a distinguished biologist and more than an amateur philosopher”.⁴

In his first book on the problems of Darwin, published in 1937, Thompson wrote that as a professional entomologist he realized that “no matter how convinced an evolutionist” may be “no naturalist and, more especially, no biologist, can work and think” as a consistent Darwinism metaphysic. For example, the

“... systematic zoologist may assert that he is a thorough-going evolutionist, but as soon as he sits down at his table to work with his specimens ... as he does so, is perfectly satisfied that he is in contact with reality and that the method he adopts, suffices to make reality known ... although he may do his best to believe in his evolutionary metaphysic, he cannot live it. He cannot think without logic nor define without concepts; and if he is to retain any belief in his work and in the validity of his science he must, in point of fact, proceed on the assumption that

something corresponding to his concepts and his definitions actually exist in Nature—that through them he attains a true knowledge of reality.”⁵

He added that an evolutionist, to be consistent, is “forced in practice to admit that there is a fixity in Nature” and “may affirm ... his complete disbelief in the reality of species, but it is in the definition of these alleged unrealities that he spends his working life”.⁵ He also explained how the concept of irreducible complexity created difficulty for evolution:

“An organism is an assemblage of coordinated parts, and its ability to function may be considered as dependent in some degree on the correct relation between these parts. Thus, unless the muscles of a limb have attained certain dimensions and are attached at certain points in a definite manner; and unless the joints are of a certain type, the limb cannot execute the movements normal to the species. It seems, therefore, that any modification occurring in an organism must respect these correlations, if the organism is to survive.”⁶

Thompson was asked by J.M. Dent & Sons to write the 16-page introduction to its 1956 Everyman's Library edition of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (figure 1). This edition was to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Darwin's publication of the original 1859 edition. Because of his recognized standing as a scientist, the publishers gave him complete freedom in writing the preface. This is obvious in the introduction, where Thompson made it clear that major problems existed with Darwin's thesis. He began his commentary by noting: “I am not satisfied that Darwin proved his point or that his influence in scientific and public thinking has been beneficial.”⁷ Thompson defined Darwin's theory as “gradual transformations leading from a simple primitive organism to the highest forms of life, without the intervention of any directive agency or force”.⁸



Figure 1. First page of 1958 Everyman's Library edition of Darwin's *Origin of Species* giving credit to Thompson for his introduction.

This miracle was done by “natural selection, leading to the survival of the fittest, in populations of individuals of varying characteristics and competing among themselves”.⁸ Thompson then noted that Darwin’s theory did not concern itself only with nature, but also with the religious idea that no supernatural input was required for the creation. He added that “at the time the *Origin* was published no body of experimental evidence [existed] to support his theory, [thus] he [Darwin] fell back on speculative arguments”.⁹ As a result, “Personal convictions, [and] simple possibilities, are presented as if they were proofs . . . in favor of the theory” of evolution.⁹ Thompson added that

“Darwin did not show in the *Origin* that species had originated by natural selection; he merely showed, on the basis of certain facts and assumptions, how this might have happened, and as he had convinced himself he was able to convince others.”¹⁰

Thompson added that “while the modern Darwinians have retained the essentials of Darwin’s evolutionary machinery, to wit, natural selection, acting on random hereditary variations, their explanation, plausible in Darwin’s day, is not plausible now”.¹¹

On the issue of the contribution of Darwin’s ideas to research, Thompson pointed out that, rather than encourage research, Darwin’s theory actually served to hinder important research. In 1865 the Austrian monk Gregor Mendel published the results of his experiments on the genetics of garden peas. This work was ignored until 1900, partly because most scientists focused on Darwin’s incorrect views.

Thus, Dr Thompson declared, “Fruitful researches on heredity did not begin until the rediscovery in 1900 of the fundamental work of Mendel, published in 1865 and owing nothing to the work of Darwin.”¹² Thompson concluded that Darwinism caused a great deal of work to be “directed into unprofitable channels or devoted to the pursuit of will-o’-the-wisps”.¹² Thompson’s conclusion about what Stedman called “the doctrine of evolution”¹³ was as follows:

“Darwin considered that the doctrine of the *Origin* of living forms by descent with modification, even if well founded, would be unsatisfactory unless the causes at work were correctly identified, so his theory of modification by natural selection was, for him, of absolutely major importance . . .”⁹

The problem then was, and still is now, the arrival of the fittest, not the survival of the fittest, which is what Darwin’s theory addressed. An example Thompson cited was Darwin’s explanation of how



Illustration: Caleb Salisbury

Figure 2. Professor William R. Thompson (1887–1972).

“... the titmouse might become transformed into the nutcracker, by the accumulation of small changes in structure and instinct owing to the effect of natural selection; and then proceeded to show that it is just as easy to transform the nutcracker into the titmouse. The demonstration can be modified without difficulty to fit any conceivable case. It is without scientific value, since it cannot be verified; but since the imagination has free rein, it is easy to convey the impression that a concrete example of real transmutation has been given.”⁹

He added that the Darwinian explanation of life was very appealing to many because of its fundamental simplicity.

“The reader may be completely ignorant of biological processes yet he feels that he really understands and in a sense dominates the machinery by which the marvelous variety of living forms has been produced. This was certainly a major reason for the success of the *Origin*.”⁹

Another problem is Darwin’s belief that “Every characteristic of organisms is maintained in existence because it has survival value.”⁹ The problem is this value relates only to the struggle for existence, and no other traits. Therefore one cannot commit

“... to the meaning of differences between individuals or species since the possessor of a particular modification may be, in the race for life, moving up or falling behind. On the other hand, we can commit ourselves if we like, since it is impossible to disprove our statement. The plausibility of the argument eliminates the need for proof and its very nature gives it a kind of immunity to disproof.”⁹

One of the other major problems with Darwinism, Thompson noted, was

“... the accidents of the evolutionary process, especially as pictured by the Darwinians, in whose hands it became an effective weapon in attacks on the concepts of providence and design ... the Darwinian theory of Evolution involves the failure and destruction of myriads of living creatures, and that according to this theory, the evolutionary advance gets its driving force from the success of the few and the annihilation of the many. Concentration on detail, aided by literary artifice, has produced from these materials a lurid picture of ‘Nature red in tooth and claw’.”¹⁴

Nor could he accept theistic evolution, a view he saw as both theologically and scientifically bankrupt.¹⁵

The Problem of censorship

Zimmerman noted that in Thompson's *Science and Common Sense* book he had argued that "the concept of organic evolution was an object of genuinely religious devotion" and "this probably is the reason why the severe methodological criticism employed in other departments of biology has not been brought to bear against evolutionary speculation."¹⁶ Thompson noted, in reference to the chapter about evolution in his recently reissued *Science and Common Sense* book, that if he could rewrite this work he would have made a far stronger case against evolution.¹⁷

"At the time he wrote it the book had to be passed by a reader who had strong evolutionistic views. Therefore Thompson was forced to modify his own position to get the book published."¹⁷

Another example Zimmerman cited was that of Professor Rev. H. St Denis, "dean of philosophy at the University of Ottawa, [who] had five book reviews refused by the *University Review* on the grounds that they contained severe criticism of Teilhard de Chardin, the current idol of theistic evolutionists." Thompson also recognized the problem of censorship, noting that:

"This situation, where scientific men rally to the defense of a doctrine they are unable to define scientifically, much less demonstrate with scientific rigour, attempting to *maintain its credit with the public by the suppression of criticism* and the elimination of difficulties, is abnormal and undesirable in science [emphasis added]."¹⁸

Conclusion

Professor Thompson was an eminent scientist who had the privilege of writing the introduction to a popular edition of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. In his introduction he effectively explained why time has not been very kind to Darwin's theory. In short, a basic problem he has with evolution is not the survival of the fittest, but the arrival of the fittest:

"Life is essentially an adaptive process. The problem of the 'origin of adaptation' in an absolute sense, is simply the problem of the origin of life The Darwinian theory in its various forms holds that adaptations are due to chance, since they result from the effect of natural selection on random variations."¹⁹

Even in 1956, Thompson noted that there existed "... a great divergence of opinion among biologists, not only about the causes of evolution but even about the actual process. This divergence exists because the evidence is unsatisfactory and does not permit any certain conclusion. It is therefore right and proper to draw the attention of the non-scientific public to the disagreements about evolution."¹⁸

As expected, Darwinists were not too happy with his effective critique. Ronald Numbers wrote that Thompson "scandalized evolutionists by attaching a negative introduction to an edition of Darwin's *Origin of Species*."¹ Actually, his rejection of Darwinism guided his scientific research and his 183 scientific publications document that it did not impede his scientific output.³ All the criticisms Thompson presented are still valid today and are actually a greater concern due to the enormous level of progress made in molecular biology since he wrote his introduction.

References

1. Numbers, R., *The Creationists*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, p. 356, 2006.
2. For example, see Thompson, W.R., Biological control and the theories of the interactions of populations, *Parasitology* 31:299–388, 1939; Thompson, W.R., The philosophical foundations of systematics, *The Canadian Entomologist* 84(1):1–16, January, 1952.
3. Thorp, W.H., William Robin Thompson, *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society* 19:654–678, December 1973.
4. Stedman, R.E., Royal Institute of Philosophy, *Philosophy* 13(52): 501–503, 1938, p. 501.
5. Thompson, W.R., *Science and Common Sense: An Aristotelian Excursion*, Longmans Green and Company, New York, NY, pp. 194–195, 1937.
6. Thompson, ref. 5, p. 199.
7. Thompson, W.R., *Introduction to The Origin of Species*, J. Dent & Sons, London, p. vii, 1956.
8. Thompson, ref. 7, p. ix.
9. Thompson, ref. 7, p. xi.
10. Thompson, ref. 7, p. xii.
11. Thompson, ref. 7, p. xiii.
12. Thompson, ref. 7, p. xx.
13. Stedman, ref. 4, p. 502.
14. Thompson, ref. 5, p. 222.
15. Thompson, W.R., *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, The Oratory, Lexington, KY, 1935.
16. Zimmerman, P., *Darwin, Evolution and Creation*, Concordia, St. Louis, MO, p. 229, 1959.
17. Zimmerman, P., *Creation, Evolution and God's Word*, revised ed., Concordia, St. Louis, MO, p. 42, 1972.
18. Thompson, ref. 7, p. xxii.
19. Thompson, ref. 5, p. 213.

Jerry Bergman has nine academic degrees, including two PhDs. His major areas of study for his graduate work were in biology, chemistry, and psychology. He graduated from Wayne State University in Detroit, Medical University of Ohio in Toledo, University of Toledo and Bowling Green State University. A prolific writer with numerous publications, Dr Bergman has taught biology, chemistry and biochemistry at Northwest State in Archbold, Ohio, for over 24 years. He is also an adjunct Associate Professor at The University of Toledo Medical College.
