

# Darwin, Victorian England, Eugenics, and a new evolution

***Evolution Revolution: Evolution is True. Darwin is Wrong. This Changes Everything***

Alan Bennett

Lexem Publishing, 2014

John Woodmorappe

The author of *Evolution Revolution* is identified as a graduate of the prestigious Columbia University. He has been doing years of research at the Columbia Medical Center.

This work is eye-opening in a number of ways. It upends many popular myths about public resistance to the ideas of Charles Darwin. It challenges the notion that Darwin and his supporters were simply absorbing and repeating the racist ethos of their times. In actuality, eugenics was deeply interwoven within the very fabric of Darwinism. The elimination of unfit peoples was not some kind of collateral belief arising out of the social constructs of Victorian England. It was the very motive behind, and the very essence of, Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

The author proposes that current evolutionary theory relies too much on genetic changes, and he proposes an alternative theory of evolution. In it, evolutionary changes are driven primarily by alleged self-organizing principles, by the modification of regulatory networks that govern gene expression, and by sequential events in embryonic development.



## Evolutionistic dominance long before Darwin

Evolutionary thinking goes back at least as far as ancient Greece, notably to the ideas of Anaximander (c. 610 – c. 564 BC). The author provides an impressive body of evidence for the many evolutionary thinkers that functioned for some 150 years before Darwin. They included Gottfried Leibniz, Pierre Louis Maupertuis, James Burnett, George-Louis Leclerc (Comte de Buffon), Marquis de Condorcet, Erasmus Darwin (figure 1), Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, and Robert Grant.

However, Bennett goes beyond all this. He suggests that evolution was already widely accepted by the time of Darwin. In this respect, Bennett concurs with creationist authors, such as the late Henry M. Morris.

The widespread acceptance of organic evolution long before Darwin had implications for the belief in the



**Figure 1.** Erasmus Darwin, grandfather of Charles Darwin, and one of the many influential evolutionists that had predated Charles Darwin.

old earth and the geologic column. Many authors have argued that the old earth and geologic column were in no sense based on organic evolution, because, according to their argument, acceptance of organic evolution postdated them. Bennett's conclusion makes it obvious that, to the contrary, belief in organic evolution was already prevalent. This could not help but exert a subtle influence on the emergence of beliefs in the great antiquity of the earth and the existence of the geologic column.

### **Darwin merely replaced theistic evolution with atheistic evolution**

What exactly did Darwin do? According to popular misconception, the Victorian English generally believed in a literal 6-day creation. When Darwin wrote the *Origin of Species*, he met with a storm of religious hostility, and there was a brief "war between science and religion". Soon thereafter, educated people (including Christians) supposedly humbly bowed before the evidence, and abandoned their beliefs in the 6-day fiat creation in

favour of Darwin's brilliant insights. Bennett decisively rejects the foregoing scenario. He points out that Victorians already generally believed in evolution, and had done so well before Darwin, if only because it fit the "human progress" zeitgeist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the Victorians held to a "God was behind it" view of evolution, and *that* is what Darwin sought to eliminate.

A corollary misconception would have us believe that Darwin's ideas shocked Victorian England because they upset the cherished notion that humans are special, and did so in the rude manner of portraying humans as "descended from the apes". In contrast, Bennett shows that the evolutionary origin of humans, from non-human primates, was widely accepted long before Darwin. Several pre-Darwinian scientists, such as James Burnett and Jean Baptiste Lamarck, had written openly and freely about humans being descended from apes (p. 86). The oft-retold story of the ape-descent confrontation of Bishop Wilberforce and 'Darwin's bulldog' Thomas Huxley finds no support in the original sources (p. 92). It is probably a rationalistic fairy tale.

Bennett elaborates on how Darwin was out to replace theistic evolution with atheistic evolution:

"Neither natural selection and the idea evolution as a competitive struggle for existence, nor the idea that evolution is like a branching tree were original to Darwin. More importantly Darwin organized *The Origin* to argue against belief in 'special-creation' rather than other scientific explanations for evolution. His goal was to refute the belief that evolution was based on a 'Divine Design'. Darwin's target was not science, but society. What was later called 'Social Darwinism' was baked into his theory from the beginning" (pp. 65–66).

In other words, Darwin was not attempting to upend six-day fiat creation, as this was not much believed by Darwin's time. Instead, Darwin was attempting to upend what may be called theistic evolution, and to replace God-involved evolution with God-less evolution.

From a theological perspective, the foregoing developments once again illustrate the incremental rejection of God in Christian-dominated societies. This creeping atheism works as follows: first make God unbiblical and remote (the old earth and the geologic column), then make God into a vague behind-the-scenes tinkerer (theistic evolution), and then finally eliminate God altogether (as Darwin did).

### **The Industrial Revolution, capitalism, and eugenics**

Charles Darwin thought that what now is called social Darwinism was part of the very essence of biological Darwinism, and not (as commonly supposed today) some kind of add-on or misunderstanding of Darwinian evolution. Bennett considers Darwin an atheistic eugenicist and identifies the agenda behind his *Origin*:

"Darwin's goal was to arrange the evidence for evolution in a way that 'scientifically' justified eugenics as a solution to the social problems of the working class. He would use the same evidence to make the case that belief in evolution and God—science and religion—are irreconcilable. You can believe in one or the other, but not both. Society would have to choose: belief in evolution and science, or belief in God and religion" (p. 66).

To understand why Darwin thought this way, the reader must first appreciate the massive changes in English society in the century before Darwin.

### Darwinism: a remedy for Victorian social problems

Bennett mentions the poverty of the working classes, but rejects the common notion, derived from Marxism, that early capitalism was a black-and-white exploitation of working peoples. He comments:

“For a thousand years, England had been home to about four million people, mostly rural peasants led by a small group of aristocrats. In 1750, this abruptly changed. The Industrial Revolution transformed agriculture, forcing thousands of peasants off the land and into cities where they worked in factories and became a potent new social force—the ‘working class’. Wealth from the Industrial Evolution made possible safer water, better sanitation and vaccinations, all of which sharply reduced the death rate of working class children. The four million Britons of 1750 doubled to eight million by 1800, and reached a staggering 17 million by 1850” (p. 83).

So what does this have to do with Darwin? Everything. Darwin, and others who thought like him, were alarmed by the proliferation of the ‘lower orders’ in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. Worse yet, the inferiority of the ‘masses’ was innate and biological, and, contrary to the idealistic beliefs of many Christian activists, could not be corrected by such things as education and social reform. Something had to be done. Why not let ‘nature take its course’, so that the weak, inferior, and unfit would be allowed to die out? However, nature is too slow, and so humans must speed it up. Eugenics, including the mass sterilization of ‘undesirables’, would solve the problem. However, eugenic procedures would be objectionable to most people. For this reason, Victorian society had to be transformed so that it accepted eugenic procedures in the name of science and scientific progress.

If God could be removed from the picture, so much the better. That is why Darwin propounded his version of evolution, in which God plays no role, and in which the ruthless removal of the unfit is a natural and inevitable process.

### Eugenics and Darwinism

Throughout the first several decades after the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859), eugenics dominated evolutionary thinking. It was a given. Bennett provides many examples of this, and comments:

“Held up as the ‘scientific’ solution to social problems, eugenics programs spread rapidly in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, to France, Germany, the Soviet Union, and dozens of other countries. In the United States, tens of thousands had their children taken away and were sterilized, lobotomized ... and worse. The connection between Darwinism and eugenics cannot be dismissed as the abuse of Darwin’s ideas by others. Those who created modern Darwinism were the same people who created the modern eugenics movement. *The eugenicists were the Darwinists* [emphasis in original]” (p. 115).

Indeed, the leading eugenicists were Darwin’s own family members, as another author commented:

“[In the] years leading up to the First World War, the eugenics movement looked like a Darwin family business. ... Darwin’s son Leonard replaced his cousin Galton as chairman of the national Eugenics Society in 1911. In the same year an offshoot of the society was formed in Cambridge. Among its leading members were three more of Charles Darwin’s sons, Horace, Francis and George.”<sup>1,2</sup>

This continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century: “It was Darwinists (Huxley, Fisher, Dobzhansky, Muller, others)

who fueled the campaign for eugenics” (p. 159).

Eugenics is now only of historical interest. Or is it? The link between eugenics and evolutionary thinking is not completely gone even today. Princeton philosopher Peter Singer advocated that disabled human infants should be put to death, complaining that only the Christian had prevented this.<sup>3</sup> What about inconvenient children? Then two Italian philosophers also took so-called abortion rights to their logical conclusion in a prestigious medical ethics journal.<sup>4</sup> They seriously suggested that even healthy infants that have been born have no right to live, and should be killed if they are inconvenient to their family (p. 162).<sup>5</sup>

### Neo-Darwinism: an intellectual strait-jacket

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Darwinism, according to Bennett, was very resistant to new ideas, even ones that in no sense could bring God back into the picture. He lists several ideas that were slow to be accepted by the ruling Darwinian school of thought. He comments:

“Think of all the ideas put forth by Darwinists that proved entirely fictitious—blending, gemmules, the Wiesmann Barrier, the Central Dogma, kind selection, selfish genes, the Handicap Principle and many others. Even natural selection has little, if any, supporting evidence” (p. 200).

Bennett then elaborates on the many adaptationist just-so stories that have been told by Darwinists. However, according to the author, the problem with standard evolutionary thinking is much deeper. Bennett suggests that Darwinism adopted an excessively gene-centred view of evolution.

The gene-centredness of current evolutionary theory is exemplified by Richard Dawkins’ *The Selfish Gene* (1976). Non-conforming evidence

was explained away by auxiliary hypotheses. For instance, altruistic behaviour in nature was attributed to kin selection. As an example, it is adaptive for an individual bee to give its life in defense of the hive, because the bee's genes will then live on through the physical survival of the other bees in the hive. The author asserts that no evidence has been found to support kin selection, but much evidence has accumulated against it. For instance, African army ants regularly attack and cannibalize their own.

[However, I can think of a counterargument: the survival of the cannibal ant individual is adaptive because its genes get passed on, even if this takes place at the expense of one's siblings. From an evolutionary standpoint, it is better that one set of genes survive than no cannibalism takes place and thereby *no* set of genes survive. This brings us to a more fundamental issue: if a theory cannot be falsified, it is not scientific, according to the Popperian criterion. Since any possible observation could potentially be reconciled with kin selection, how would one know that kin selection is false?]

### **So-called self-organization—an assumption, not fact**

The author spends the latter part of his book rolling out a completely new theory of evolution—one based on supposed self-organization of matter and of living systems.

In fact, author Bennett portrays self-organization as something inherent in matter—something that makes stars out of gas, galaxies out of stars, etc. Bennett is clearly using 'self-organization' as an evolutionary cover word. He is begging the question with a vengeance, by assuming the very thing he needs to prove. Thus, he is assuming that gas spontaneously organized itself into stars, etc., despite the enormous difficulties.<sup>6</sup> Then he closes the circle of reasoning by saying

that the spontaneous organization of gas into stars etc. demonstrates the inherent self-organizing properties of matter.

The author discusses what he calls 'emergent properties'. These are novel capabilities that have not existed in an earlier state of organization, but now emerge as a result of the association of units. For instance, he cites the surface tension of water, which, he claims, is an emergent property, in that (to him) it was not a property inherent to the water molecules themselves. However, surface tension results from the hydrogen bonds, and these most certainly act at the molecular level. Thus, surface tension (and other unusual properties of water—such as the high boiling point relative to molecules of comparable low molecular weight) is a property that occurs at the molecular level.

The issue, however, is more fundamental. As with so-called self-organization, Bennett uses 'emergent properties' as a buzz phrase that begs the question about its origins.

### **Living things are not ruled by genes**

The author refutes the 'genes specify everything' mindset of much of conventional evolutionary thinking. For instance, he shows that the social behaviour of ants and bees is determined neither by genetically imposed instinct nor by the governing influence of the queen—a governing influence that, unlike that of the human queen, is non-existent. Instead, the tendency to do specific jobs in a hive or colony is governed by the interaction dynamics of the individuals.

In like manner, ontology is governed less by commands from genes and more by the interaction of the developing embryonic entities. In a fascinating quoted experiment, a group of individual retinal cells assembled themselves, *in vitro*, into an optic-cup

structure, and did so in the absence of a lens.<sup>7</sup>

The foregoing discussion revolves around the subject of biological information. However, whether biological information resides in genes, interacting cells, interacting tissues, or interacting creatures, is not as crucial as the *origin* of this biological information. Did it arise from blind, natural processes, or can it be explained only by a designer?

### **Evolutionary storytelling: old and new—in a nutshell**

Bennett's mentality is unoriginal. He follows the standard question-begging line of "Living things exist; therefore organic evolution must have happened."

Let us now summarize, and contrast, the conventional and new ideas of evolution. When referring to the giraffe's long neck, the conventional evolutionist says, "Genetic mutations, edited by ongoing natural selection, made it that way", and then proposes an evolutionary adaptationist tale to speculate how it took place, such as the one about the longer-necked giraffe able to reach otherwise out-of-reach leaves to eat. Were Bennett applying his ideas to the origin of the giraffe's long neck, he could say, "Relatively rapid, environmentally stress-driven changes in the silencing and expression of genes, acting within the constraints of developmental pathways, made it that way." He then could engage in his own version of storytelling, spinning a tale about the neck area of the ancestral giraffe embryo undergoing accelerated and/or unchecked growth, leading to the exaggerated neck.

### **A comeback for embryonic recapitulation**

Throughout this work, the author downplays the role of genes in evolution and emphasizes the interaction of biological units during development.

He adopts an ‘add-on’ model of general evolution. According to this concept, major evolutionary changes involve the addition of a new ‘layer’ of sequential physical relationship over the pre-existing ones, rather than the restructuring of previous modes of existence. It is for this reason that so-called atavistic structures sometimes reappear, and ontogeny (supposedly) recapitulates phylogeny (figure 2).

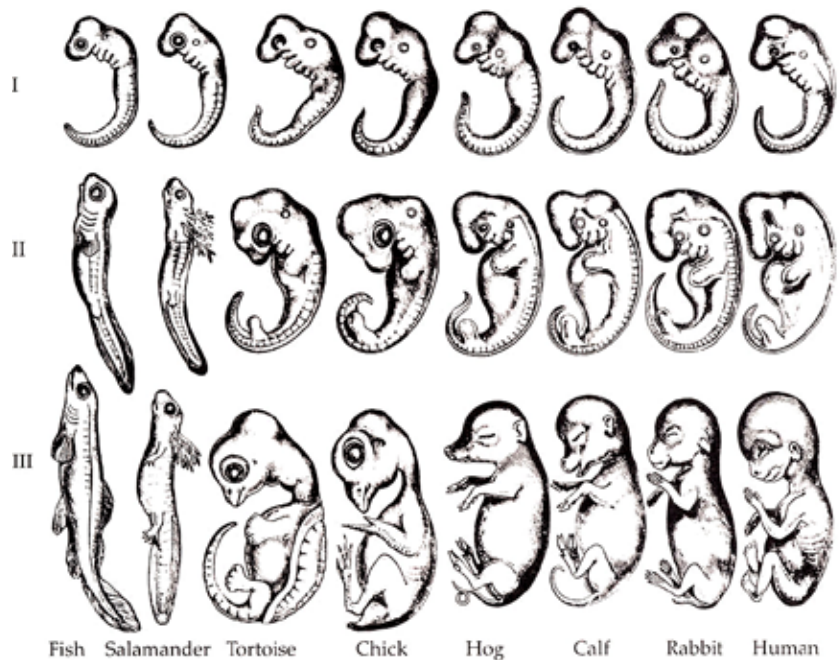
The author takes the atavistic-structure argument further. He cites some experiments, including one that supposedly caused the appearance of an ancestral, dinosaur-like mode of tail development in modern birds. However, it is unclear what the perturbations in development, whether experimental or natural, really mean. For instance, six-fingered humans sometimes are born, but no one suggests that this is an atavism, because humans are not believed to have ever had six-fingered ancestors.

As for the embryonic recapitulation theory, is it not one that has been discredited a long time ago?<sup>8</sup> In any case, it is rife with special pleading. For example, if humans go through a ‘fish stage’, as manifested by the pharyngeal pouches (‘gill slits’), then why no scales, slimy skins, piscine-like tails, etc. in the embryo? Oh well, these must (conveniently) have been lost.

**Evolution: too fast and too slow to be seen**

The author touches on alleged simultaneous evolutionary changes in organisms, and dusts off Richard Goldschmidt’s ‘hopeful monster’ conjecture. However, as with the original idea, it is based solely on evolutionary hope, and is devoid of supportive evidence.

Author Bennett unreservedly appreciates the discontinuities seen among fossils, notably in the Cambrian explosion. He even cites the failure of so-proclaimed transitional forms. For



**Figure 2.** The long-abandoned embryonic recapitulation theory is revived according to the arguments presented in this book.

instance, ocean-dwelling flatworms were thought to be transitional between primitive and complex animals until they were found to have the same genes as complex animals (p. 269).

The author revives the idea of punctuated equilibrium, and does so with a twist. He suggests that stasis customarily exists among organisms because their organismic organization is resistant to destabilization. However, once destabilization advances beyond a certain level, the stasis breaks down, and there is supposedly a rapid burst of evolutionary change, leading to a new stable and resistant-to-change configuration. That, to him, is how new species come into existence.

As an example of stasis, disequilibrium, and a novel stasis, he brings up the example of a pile of sand. One can keep adding sand grains, and nothing happens. However, there comes a point when adding another grain of sand causes the pile to suddenly collapse. After that, there is a new, stable layer of sand. This analogy is superficial at best and useless at worst.

The stability of the original sand pile exists only because the force of friction between the sand particles is greater than the force of gravity that is acting on the sand particles to get them to slide past each other. One excessive sand grain, and the force of gravity is now greater than the resistive force of friction, and the pile collapses. There is nothing remarkable in that, and it has absolutely nothing to do with any hypothetical reorganization of living things and emergence of new species.

It is clear that Bennett is not advancing anything new. All he does is return us to the time-worn theme that evolution, conveniently, occurs too slowly to be seen in real life, and also too fast to be seen in the fossil record.

**Still no role for God**

Bennett claims that his ideas reconcile God and evolution. They do not. All versions of evolution repudiate *any* form of divine intervention, purpose, or supervision. All of them rely on blind, natural processes—only

different ones—to supposedly produce order from disorder, life from non-life, and new, more complex forms of life from preceding, less complex forms of life, etc.

Let us return to the subject, raised by Bennett, of emergent properties. As noted earlier, Bennett has performed a bait-and-switch, confusing the existence of emergent properties with the (imagined evolutionary) origin of emergent properties. To extend this consideration, let us think of the watch and the jet plane. Both are made of metal. The ability to tell time and the ability to fly are clearly emergent properties, as neither ability is in any way a property of any metal. The ability to tell time and the ability to fly are the outworking of a specific configurational entropy (or specified complexity) that has been imposed upon the metals. No blind, natural process can impose this specified complexity upon the metals. Only an intelligent designer can do that. Now if this is so obviously true of the emergent properties of relatively simple man-made devices, how much truer is it of the vastly more complex emergent properties of living things?

### Watch out for the creationist bogeyman!

Any questioning of evolutionary dogmas has been made taboo, even if the questioning was done by evolutionists working in a strictly evolutionistic framework of thinking. Bennett comments, “Despite this, any scientific criticism of Darwin was branded ‘anti-evolution’ and ‘creationist’. Defending Darwinism became synonymous with defending science [emphasis in original]” (p. 200). [What else is new?]

In fact, Bennett describes the bitter infighting among evolutionists on matters of disagreement (pp. 358–362). It takes on comical proportions. In fact, any evolutionist who questions conventional evolutionary claims

is attacked as a ‘creationist helper’ (p. 198).

### Implications for creationist research

The silencing of genes accounts for the blindness of cave fish. This solves the apparent problem of God creating fish with non-functional eyes. He didn’t. Clearly, this blindness is ephemeral. In fact, the breeding together of blind cave fish, from different caves, compensates for the independent silencings, causing the progeny to have normal sight (p. 302).<sup>9</sup> This also shows that this blindness must have arisen recently. Without selection pressure of *needing* sight, the genes for sight would have been irreparably damaged by random mutations over many generations.<sup>10</sup>

In my detailed work on Noah’s Ark,<sup>11</sup> and the aftermath of the Flood, I identified changes in the animals’ genomes that can help us understanding the marked and rapid changes in the descendants of the animals released off Noah’s Ark, including the origin of new species from the genus-kinds (or family-kinds) on the Ark.

Bennett updates the subject of rapid changes. Darwin’s famous Galápagos Island finches are instructive. Major changes in the beaks can occur within a few generations, much too quickly to be explained by natural selection. We now realize that the environmental stress of a changed diet ‘unsilences’ the finches’ genes that govern the development of the beaks, thus driving the ‘overnight’ changes.

### Conclusions

This work is yet another one by an evolutionist who admits that existing theories of evolution are completely inadequate. However, the new version of evolution is no less conjectural than the old one. The creationist can agree with each evolutionist about the

inadequacy of the other’s evolutionary model.

The silencing and ‘unsilencing’ of genes, and the effects of environment on genetic expression, is of broad-based interest. It can help account for the rapid diversification of life, from a few founders, after the Flood, in a matter of a few thousand years or less.

### References

1. Sewell, D., *The Political Gene: How Darwin’s Ideas Changed Politics*, Picador, London, p. 54, 2009.
2. Bergman, J., Darwin is the universal acid that affects everything, review of Sewell, ref. 1, *J. Creation* 25(1):19–21, 2011; creation.com/sewell.
3. Singer, P., Ethics and Intuitions, *J. Ethics*, 9: 331–352, 2005.
4. Giubilini, A. and Minerva, F., After birth abortion: why should the baby live? *J. Medical Ethics* 39:261–263, 2013 | doi:10.1136/medethics-2011-100411 (first published online 23 February 2012).
5. See also critique, Sarfati, J. Abortion ‘after birth’? Medical ‘ethicists’ promote infanticide, creation.com/abortion-after-birth, 8 March 2012.
6. Bernitt, R., Stellar evolution and the problem of the ‘first’ stars, *J. Creation* 16(1):12–14, 2002; creation.com/first-stars.
7. Eiraku, M. et al., Self-organizing optic-cup morphogenesis in three-dimensional culture, *Nature* 472(7341):51–56, 2011 | doi:10.1038/nature09941.
8. van Niekerk, E., Countering revisionism—part 1: Ernst Haeckel, fraud is proven, *J. Creation* 25(3):89–95, 2011; part 2: Ernst Haeckel and his triple-woodcut print, *J. Creation* 27(1):78–84, 2013.
9. Borowsky, R., Restoring sight in blind cavefish, *Current Biology* 18(1):R23–R24, 2008 |
10. Wieland, C., Let the blind see ... Breeding blind fish with blind fish restores sight, *Creation* 30(4):54–55, 2008; creation.com/blindsee.
11. Woodmorappe, J., *Noah’s Ark, A Feasibility Study*, Institute for Creation Research, El Cajon, CA, 1996.