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Faith and Darwinism as Evolutional Tools

Prior to the establishment of the scientific method, the questions involving our existence deemed unexplainable were credited to the workings of an all-powerful deity. The scriptures of the World Religions contain the answers and explanations to these complex questions. It wasn't until the 19th century, when *On the Origin of Species* challenged the belief that God had created all species with specific characteristics by refuting the basic tenets of biological creationism, establishing the idea that the world is completely self-regulating and that there is no need for an overseeing deity. This idea brought forth by Charles Darwin challenged the integrity of many faiths, and as we've seen, created the foundation for one of the most controversial debates in recent history.

Humans' fascination with the questions of origin and purpose has been around since mankind's existence and is arguable what separates us from every other organism on Earth. Naturally, communities formed, each providing their own take on the answers to these questions through oral tradition, societal trends, and scripture. Using Judaism as an example, the Torah recounts "the history of the Israelites from the creation of the world until the entry into the Promised Land, and tell them how to live a moral and ritually acceptable lives." (Murray 94) A downtrodden community of shepherds gathered around the ideas of one man who claimed to have spoken to God. Moses' visions and relaying of the word of God

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inspired this community and sparked the spread of Judaism. According to the scripture, the Jews escaped oppression from their rulers, who happened to have their own polytheistic beliefs, and in turn, were to live and acknowledge the covenant that was formed between God and his people. This covenant, based upon the Ten Commandments Moses had brought down from Mount Sinai, served as the requirements for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven.

“A simple functional definition might be that religion is a way of creating a community.” (Amore and Hussain 23) Looking back at these events from the perspective of a Darwin observer, the covenant serves as an excellent foundation for a positive social structure within a community. The covenant formed between God and His people encourages a strong sense of unity, civic duty, and moral responsibility. The Ten Commandments are a type of community guideline. By prohibiting murder, adultery, theft, etc. followers live longer, grow exponentially and continue to spread the word of this successful way of life. These attributes are seen among thousands of species that thrive all around the world with the exceptions of few. To this day, world governments and economies abide by these same principals, which is a “testament” to how influential this guideline actually is. This small cult from ancient Egypt developed a social structure based on the fear of a deity, which in turn, lead to expansion, cultivation of the masses, and a basis for modern day society. Though, as one might expect, the word of an all-knowing,

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invisible deity and the Ten Commandments, “have always been subject to manipulation to serves one’s interest.” (Ali 352)

In the story of creation, curiosity, with the help of a woman and serpent (Satan), gets the best of man. The forbidden fruit, which was specifically deemed off limits by God was too enticing for man; thus, once eaten, the paradise of the Garden of Eden was lost and mankind was forced to wander the desert for all of eternity. Now, this seems like a perfectly reasonable explanation for the early Jews, who were essentially wandering the desert in eternal damnation herding sheep. A solution to this predicament surfaced when Moses made his announcement of the covenant and salvation at the Promised Land. Unfortunately for the Jews, Original Sin resurfaced through the worship of false idols and they lost their only chance for salvation. The Jewish people were then forced to wait for the Messiah to save them. It wasn’t until 400 years later rumors of the Messiah began to surface. Instead of a universal acceptance of Christ as the savior, Judaism split. The Jews who remained skeptical of Christ denounced any notion that he was their savior, which ultimately lead to his crucifixion and birth of Christianity. Along with the following expansion of Christianity, countless crusades, and societal advancements these events forever changed the entire trajectory of humanity.

Born February 12th, 1809 in Shrewsbury, England, Charles Darwin came from a long line of scientists and physicians. Charles’ grandfather, “Eramus Darwin

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purposed a natural explanation for the origin and development of life” (Berra 2). Being that Charles couldn’t stomach the sights his father was accustomed to in the medical field, he chose the route of biology, which his grandfather had made a career in. Charles’ father-in-law, a former slave and world explorer, encouraged Charles, despite his father’s refusal, to embark on the *Beagle* voyage, which ultimately lead to his revolutionary theory. The four year, nine month voyage provided Darwin with copious amounts of data and specimens, which secured his space within the scientific community. Darwin sketched his first ideas of evolution using an illustration of a tree, which branched off at multiple points, indicating the decent and particular species. Above the illustration he wrote, “I think” and put the sketch aside. Two years later “Darwin revised and augmented the brief 1842 sketch of his evolutionary theory, expanding it to 230 pages.” (Berra 50) Darwin continued to work on his evolutionary theory, which lead him to Thomas Henry Huxley, who together began to “challenge the creationist, Anglican establishment that still relied on ‘revelation’ to explain nature.” (Berra 56) *On the Origin of Species* was published on November 24th, 1859 marking the transition into modern biology. The debate that ensued between the Bishop of Oxford and Darwin’s companion, Thomas Huxley, proved to be quite eventful. After being taunted by the Bishop, Huxley stated if given the choice, he’d choose an ape over the Bishop, which caused quite a stir in the room.

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The Oxford debate was the first of many regarding *The Origin*. It sparked a movement, which led many people to question their beliefs and forced members of the clergy to scramble together a counter-argument. With the evidence in Darwin's favor, the integrity of the book of Genesis or the bible for that matter was at stake. If man had evolved from a common ancestor, what other inaccuracies could be found? Contained in the 155,000 word essay *The Origin*, was the answer to what generations thought to be the workings of an overseeing deity for thousands of years.

Even after countless experiments, newfound DNA testing, and the adopting of the theory as practice within the scientific community, the Church still abides by the scripture. The creationist vs. evolutionist debate continues to this day and in some cases has made its way to the U.S. Judicial system. The Scopes Trial, which had taken place in 1925, was a Christian response to the groundbreaking theory of Darwin. John Scopes, a middle-school science teacher who taught Darwin's theory in his biology class, was prosecuted for doing so in an anti-evolution state. The Tennessee Supreme Court decided Scopes guilty and fined him \$100. This case was the first of its kind in America, Scopes was granted a graduate scholarship and "a New York agent offered Scopes \$2,000 per week to appear in *Tarzan* movies and another offered him \$50,000 to debate evolution from a Vaudeville stage." (Moore 569) following the events that took place. Along with the anti-evolution movement seen

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in the Scopes trial, Christian Americans also called for alcohol prohibition, which was deemed necessary by the recent Fundamentalist movement.

Overall, the Christian response was one of complete sterilization. Those who lived their lives according to the word of God felt threatened and retaliated by using their overwhelming majority in government. This has been a common theme throughout history. Throughout my studies the response to challenging ideologies usually results in the reverting back to purer forms of faith. The difference with this particular movement is that there is scientific evidence to back up the opposing side.

Darwin's theory pushed the scientific community into the modern age, created enormous amounts of controversy, and revolutionized the way we look at human history. Religious sects responded with a call to faith, which severely altered the social views of early 20th century Americans. Rather than an acceptance of the scientific method, believers felt pressure to purify their faith. In hindsight, this response was arguably counter-productive given the later reforms. Today, there is still an opposition to the teaching of evolution in American schools, lead by creationists.

In no way was Darwin trying to challenge or get a rise out of believers, he merely immersed himself in his studies. He happened to find a reoccurring trend with the help of years of research. His findings did not coincide with the early scripture considered to be the basis for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. He simply

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established the idea that the world is completely self-regulating and that there is no need for an over-seeing deity, which was extremely taboo for its time. Darwin created a new pathway of thinking for future generations to come, one that encourages questioning and the drive to unlock the mysteries of our existence that have been credited to the workings of an omniscient, invisible being. Although religion is purely based on faith, it has proved to be essential to our development and evolution as a species. Without the religious laws that past generations abided by, our species would have gone a completely different route or possibly extinct. Religion was an evolutionary tool that gave humans the opportunity to thrive, think, and create the modern day technology that could one day explain our connection with the cosmos.

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