

## Conservation Ethics Based on Evolution?

***The Future of Life***  
**by Edward O. Wilson**  
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*The Future of Life* is an inspiring attempt to promote conservation ethics, but is replete with evolution and ‘evolutionary ethics’. It was eloquently composed by a Pulitzer Prize winner with a knack for summarizing complex issues and interrelated topics at a layperson’s level. E.O. Wilson has a keen ability to synthesize data from varying disciplines and deduce relevant big-picture conclusions. Unfortunately, his big-picture is naturalistic. Nevertheless, he offers has wise practical ideas for solving certain ecological problems.

It is sad to have to wade through such thick evolutionary bias to get to his useful suggestions and wonderful descriptions of the interrelated complexity between living things. The author even attempts to interpret his inherent ethical precepts and moral feelings in the limited context of naturalism. Naturally, he comes up with either ambiguity or illogical conclusions. Here is one attempt to justify his pro-environment ethic: “For reasons difficult to understand and express, there is no way to make a full and final evaluation of the ivorybill [an extinct American woodpecker]. The measures we use...rise from scattered unconnected facts and elusive emotions...” (p. 105).

### **The Problem: People**

The author describes population growth as a problem, and cites China, where traditionally agricultural water is now being used for industrial production to meet the greedy Western appetite for goods. “The fundamental problem is that China has too many

people” (p.37). It is suggested that we may eventually have to use some new nuclear technology to sustain a population grossly beyond what the earth could support. But “surely these are not frontiers we will wish to explore in order simply to continue our reproductive folly” (p.36).

Perhaps the fundamental problem in China is not sheer numbers of people, but rather how those people (mis)manage their vast resources. I suggest that their poor management is more the result of living out a faulty worldview, where evolutionary-based anti-God communism has corrupted the people and their use of land. It is not necessarily ‘folly’ to reproduce, but rather folly to mandate atheistic lies on a national level. If there is no God, then there is no accountability for wrongs done. Nor is there reason to conserve the environment or think of any generation than the present, for this world is all you have. Perhaps Israel demonstrates my point: this theistic culture has but a smidgeon of global real estate yet is replete with greenhouses, irrigation, and other technologies which maximize the efficiency of their land’s production. In 1995 the population density of China was 127/km<sup>2</sup> and that of Israel was 262/km<sup>2</sup>. Reproduction is not folly; non-theism (in naturalism, pantheism, communism, etc.) is.

Wilson would contend that the destruction of the Sumatran Rhino is an evil that man has wrought. But what universal moral code does Wilson use to make such judgment? In chapter 4, “The Planetary Killer” is humanity, or “...*Homo sapiens*, serial killer of the biosphere” (p. 94). “...Should we therefore just let it [the Sumatran Rhino] slip away? No, absolutely not...” (p. 83). Notice his use of a prescriptive moral term: should. If there is no real universal law to back up his moral prescription, then his utterance is void.

## **Evolutionary Ethics**

Materialistic evolution provides no place for a Universal Moral Lawgiver. Nor does evolution allow for legal knowledge to adjudicate between the relative offensiveness of ‘serial killing’ of rhinos versus serial killing of people. The Bible commands us to procreate, and to manage the biosphere wisely in the Dominion Mandate of Genesis 1:28. Biblically we know that while the loss of a specie is tragic, it is not murderous. The value of man has been granted by his Creator, who made man in the image of God. Ironically,

that special image includes conscience, which gives E.O Wilson, not rhinos, the awareness of morality that he falsely applies.

“Ethics evolve through discrete steps: from self-image to purpose to value to ethical precepts to moral reasoning” (p.131). There is no evidence for the evolution of morality. It is a *post-hoc* argument which presupposes evolution in order to argue that ethics evolved. It could be argued that morality contains interdependent parts that are irreducibly complex: the universal moral law, knowledge of that law, and ability to comprehend and variously apply the law must all exist simultaneously. What selective advantage would any of those solitary components confer before the whole moral apparatus was assembled? Since evolution only works on material, then these immaterial components must reside on genes, but there is no evidence for genes that code for morals.

Francis Beckwith and Gregory Koukl give cogent arguments against the idea that evolution somehow spawned morality in their book, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Thin Air*. In their chapter titled, “Monkey Morality”, it is explained that morality cannot be reduced to mere conduct or simply behavior. Morality includes intent and motive. If this were not so, then we would commonly and justly punish people for just accidentally hurting others. Evolution **can not** explain the origins of intent and motive, for evolution (supposedly) acts on matter, and motives are immaterial. Only an immaterial cause can produce an immaterial effect. “When morality is reduced to patterns of behavior chosen by natural selection for the survival value, then morality is not explained; it is denied” (p. 151, *Relativism*). Ultimately, morality is an illusion brought on by genes which trick us into behaviors which increase our survivability. If morality is an illusion, then there is no morality. Therefore we can kill Sumatran Rhinos without qualms!

Wilson admits “...stewardship...appears to arise from emotions programmed in the very genes of human social behavior” (p.132). So, stewardship (taking care of others on the planet (like Genesis 1 teaches)) comes from emotions? These emotions are in turn from genes? It only ‘appears’ this way to one who assumes naturalism is the only paradigm.

Emotions are no basis for morality. What if my emotions are different? What if I can’t stand the way the Ivorybill looks, and I hate the holes it pounds in my trees? I could then be just in my removal of the ugly, pesky birds. On one hand, the author provides an indefensible foundation for ethics which assumes evolution *a priori*. On the other hand, he

frequently appeals to a universal code, obviously not built on fictitious genetically determined emotions.

His conclusion is, “Thus, our place in nature is to think about the creation and to protect the living planet” (p. 132). Though I agree with this sentiment because of my Biblical worldview, his conclusion does not logically follow from his premises. He violates causality by having a material cause produce an immaterial effect. Biblically, though, it **is** our place to protect the planet. Evolutionarily, it is not! As Harvard’s Irven DeVore summarizes, “I look at evolution and I see indifference and capriciousness.” Yet evolution cannot tell DeVore why he has knowledge of such immaterial qualities as indifference and capriciousness.

### **Evolution of the Biosphere**

“If *Homo sapiens*...must have a creation myth...none is more solid and unifying than evolutionary history” (p. 133). Creation is not a myth, and evolution is not solid. No new genetic information has been observed to appear in creatures. Geneticists have run into an impasse for biological evolution: the alleged chance formation of irreducibly complex, immensely interdependent, mind-bogglingly efficient molecular-sized machines in living cells. A fossil record which should be replete with transitional forms has only a small handful of disputed candidates. Fossils overwhelmingly show no transition, only abrupt appearance of fully formed kinds. Evolution is not solid because it denies what must necessarily exist: a First Cause. Since we are finite and an infinite regression of finite causes cannot exist, then an infinite First Cause **must** exist.

Evolution is not unifying. When evolution formed an ideological basis of government in Nazi Germany, the Jews did not feel unified with their torturers. The author himself admits something similar, though in a different context: “In most places where the socialist experiment was tried, its record was even worse than capitalist countries” (p. 156). When anti-theistic evolution formed an ideological basis of government in Communist Russia and China, did the millions who were starved to death in mass genocides feel ‘unified’ with their brutal Darwinist oppressors? “...Violence has that capacity because of our evolutionary heritage, because of the laws of nature – tooth and fang.” (Al Gore).

When an 'explanation' of violence is needed, evolution provides it. When an 'explanation' of good morals is needed, evolution provides it. Macroevolution must now be seen as no explanation at all, but rather a philosophical assumption which violates causality and has no objective historical or scientific evidence.

Biblical history is unifying, if read as written. Genesis links all men together to one family (Noah's), and into one man (Adam). Acts 17 records that He has made every nation from one blood. Further, as God's creation, we share unity of origin and unity in our accountability to the Creator and Redeemer.

The author is astounded by the interdependence of ecological systems, which apparently "...evolved over hundreds of millions of years to their present condition by the activity of the biosphere, a stupendously complex layer of living creatures..." (p.39). If we had to artificially manufacture all the benefits that the biosphere gives, including water purification, oxygen maintenance, atmospheric gas levels, formation and enrichment of soil, nutrient cycling, detoxification, and pollination, it would be "...an economic and even physical impossibility, and we would certainly die..." (p. 106).

He explains that the evolution of biospheres has produced "...antibiotics, fungicides, antimalarial drugs, anesthetics, analgesics, blood thinners, blood-clotting agents...cardiac stimulants and regulators, immunosuppressive agents, hormone mimics, hormone inhibitors, anticancer drugs, fever suppressants, inflammation controls, contraceptives, diuretics and antidiuretics, antidepressants, muscle relaxants, rubefacients, anticongestants, sedatives...now at our disposal, complements of wild biodiversity. Revolutionary new drugs have rarely been developed by the pure insights of molecular and cellular biology..." (p. 120).

So, whereas intelligent, purposeful, powerful man only rarely develops new drugs, non-intelligent, blind evolution created all these pharmaceuticals? Their development can be explained by "...an evolutionary logic...All kinds of organisms have evolved chemicals needed to control cancer in their own bodies, kill parasites, and fight off predators. Mutations and natural selection, which invent this armamentarium, are processes of endless trial and error" (p. 119). It is a faulty logic, for the Law of Causality, a core tenet upon which logic is based and without which thought is impossible, demands that complex information only comes from intelligence. What amazing faith Wilson has in what he calls

the “Darwinian lottery!” (p.105), especially when we have never observed mutations inventing any new biochemicals. It is much, much more reasonable that the complex systems that Wilson marvels at are products of a Designer consistent with the God of the Bible; not products of a lottery.

## **Ecological Solutions**

Evolution provides no reason for us to care about the environment, yet Wilson does anyway. Putting aside his twisted view of origins, we see that Wilson has thought of some practical conservation ideas, especially in chapter 7 “The Solution”. Step one is to “turn away from claims of inherent moral superiority based on political ideology and religious dogma” (p. 151). Perhaps he should take his own advice.

Step two is to disarm our stereotypes of those in the other camp, so we can begin dialogue toward common ground. This makes sense to me because the Bible teaches me the merits of listening to others. How many harmful arguments even between creationists and evolutionists could have been avoided by applying grace? We must ‘disarm’ certain stereotypes if we are to work together for increasing our planetary management skills.

Step three: if you believe that the ‘eco-wackos’ are just out for political power, shed such notions to work at solutions. If you believe that the right-wingers are only out for unbridled capitalism, shed such notions to work to a common ground.

Also, immediately salvage hotspots, where biodiversity is most rapidly falling. Find creative ways to make conservation profitable, like mining for pharmaceuticals in the tropics, or employing ecotourism. Finally, these three entities must cooperate, and soon: the private sector, government, and science and technology.

## **Conclusion**

With a moral tone Wilson comments: “We, winners of the Darwinian lottery, bulge-headed paragons of organic evolution,...are chipping away the ivorybills and other miracles around us” (p.105). If we are nothing more than lottery winners, and the ivorybills are not, then they have no special or miraculous value! However, a consistent

outworking of even just the Dominion Mandate would engender a superior conservation ethic. If we are merely highly ordered atoms, what motive have we to conserve, or care about anything?