

A Letter to the Science Section:

Why some anthroposophists support Darwinism

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'Truth ... needs to be illuminated from many sides, since a truth can become exactly the opposite of truth when it is formulated too quickly'. Rudolf Steiner, 27.08.1915

Today Darwinism is the chief anchor of modern scientific materialism, and, as long as this theory exists, materialism will also exist. It should, therefore, be among the primary concerns of science-minded anthroposophists to fully explore its many deficiencies; so why are some so reluctant to do this?

Could it be that in following certain of Rudolf Steiner's indications, we are led to try to spiritualize Darwin's theory, rather than to seriously examine and question it? We are right not to reject it on religious grounds, as so many have sought to do, but there are many other valid reasons for rejecting this theory today, reasons that were not there in Steiner's day, which fact alone would have made any rejection of it premature. However, perhaps we should now view Darwin's theory in the context of an ongoing evolution of consciousness, so that we may better understand the problems with which Steiner was then confronted, and also determine in what way our interpretation of Darwinism needs to be altered today.

Monist Epistemology

In *The Philosophy of Freedom*, Rudolf Steiner provides us with a 'monism of thought', which because it is an epistemological argument needs to contain no mention of evolution *per se*. Likewise there is no mention of Darwin in Owen Barfield's essay 'Rudolf Steiner's Concept of Mind' because it is not essential to that theory. As a theory of knowledge, therefore, and as Barfield clearly shows, Steiner's 'monism of thought' stands quite independently of the statements that he makes in Chapter 12 of that same work, which specifically concern Darwin's theory. These are essentially different subject areas and should be treated as such. To combine them, as I will show, may turn us into our own worst enemies.

Steiner makes two observations in Chapter 12 that seem to spiritualize Darwin's materialistic theory (or have that effect). The first is when he writes that the theory leads to 'improvement' in the organic realm. He states: *'Evolution is understood to mean that the later (more perfect) organic forms*

are real descendants of the earlier (imperfect) forms, and have developed from them in accordance with natural law'.

Today, it is quite clear that although this is what Darwin intended his theory to mean, this is not what it actually does mean. There are now two things that stand opposed to this interpretation: (1) the realization that a theory based solely upon *accidental* events cannot possess a purposeful direction of any kind; and (2) that the now much discussed phenomenon of 'stasis' (leading to the theory of 'punctuated equilibrium'), shows that species appear suddenly in the fossil record then continue unchanged for very long periods of time, and that still no evidence suggests that a causal relationship exists between one species and another. All of this throws very serious doubt upon the claim that any 'imperfect' organism can be said to have been the ancestor of a 'more perfect' one (why did Steiner put these words in brackets?).

Steiner's second statement, however, is even more puzzling. He writes: *'Ethical individualism, then, is the crowning feature of the edifice that Darwin and Haeckel have striven to build for natural science. It is spiritualized theory of evolution carried over into the moral life.'*

In order for this claim to be true, Darwin's monist materialistic theory would need to have been completely spiritualized, i.e. turned into something which it is not. By stating its relationship to ethical individualism in this way Steiner is totally overlooking Descartes' dualism with its attendant disjunction. This oversight (if that is what it was) has caused some anthroposophists to suggest that Steiner must be proposing a 'third monism', one in which these two opposite worldviews are united, rather than being separated by their opposing directions in logic.

Today, in assessing the importance of Haeckel and Darwin's contribution to science, one must, however reluctantly, bear in mind that Haeckel was later convicted of fraud by a university court, and that Darwinism itself is a totally irrational theory, made so by the illegitimate attribution of human creative ideas to a supposedly Mindless nature, under the guise of metaphor (see my article 'Darwin's Devious Metaphors').

One must remember, however, that at the time that Steiner wrote *The Philosophy of Freedom*, he was a young man steeped in the traditions of German idealism, which caused him to look for the best in everything, and also, that he was involved in a close friendship with Ernst Haeckel, undoubtedly a relationship of karmic significance. He also seems to have concluded (perhaps because of the unconsciously deceptive way that Darwin had used language) that there was an underlying similarity between Darwin's materialistic theory and Goethe's morphology, when in fact the latter depends on the presence of