

Science Tear Sheet #2: What is Evolution?

A proper discussion of evolution requires a distinction between *limited variation within a species*—sometimes called microevolution—and *macroevolution*. Evolutionists intentionally refrain from making this distinction. In fact, when addressing the general public, evolutionists routinely claim that “evolution” simply means “change.” After evolution is so defined, they next declare that because change among organisms from parent to offspring obviously occurs, it is logically and scientifically indefensible to deny that evolution is a proven biological fact. Evolution is a fact of science, it is said, because evolutionary biologists have reached a consensus on the matter, with only the specific process through which evolution occurs open to debate. Often, such assertions are followed by condemnation of those who question evolution’s “factual” basis. Skeptics are condemned as scientifically ignorant and religiously motivated. Such an approach is a shell game aimed at removing the spotlight from Darwinism’s shortcomings. This game becomes clear when macroevolution and limited variation are defined.

Limited variation describes the observed limited physical changes that occur between parent and offspring, or the variation within a species over time. The term *limited* refers to the idea that the changes do not accumulate to produce a new species *type*, regardless of how much time is granted. While limited variation may, in rare instances, render certain variant populations within the same species type unable to produce fertile offspring, the variant populations are still of the same species type. As an example, it is said that much of Darwin’s thought on evolution developed from his observation of variations among the finches of the Galapagos Islands. Few would reject the possibility that all the finch species Darwin observed could have descended from a common finch ancestor. The important point, critics of Darwinism point out, is that the finches were all still finches, and observational evidence indicates very clearly that finches—like fruit flies, dogs, horses, and humans—have natural limits or bounds regarding the degree to which variation can occur. These bounds are established by the unique DNA coding information, or genotype, of the species type.

Macroevolution, or the notion of common descent, describes the theoretical process whereby one species type gives rise to another species type, or through which complex new organs are generated. It would encompass the evolution of man from a single-celled organism, while limited variation would not. Darwinian evolutionists (holding to neo-Darwinism or the “modern synthesis”) allege that all living forms descended from the first simple organism through a slow, naturalistic process that unfolded over hundreds of millions of years. The process of evolution involves slight but virtually unlimited beneficial variations that occur randomly through natural causes and are inherited by offspring. As these non-directed variations accumulate, individuals possessing beneficial variations replace the “less fit” because they can compete better for scarce resources in the struggle for survival. Over time, first new varieties, and then new species arise. The Darwinian process is said to have produced the great variety of species types alive today, as well as all those found in the fossil record. In summary, the process leading to macroevolution can be expressed as follows:

Random, Beneficial, Inheritable Variation + Selection + Time = Macroevolution

If limited variation is supported by the evidence and macroevolution is not, then Darwinism fails as a theory of origins or, at best, it remains highly speculative, while alternative explanations of origins requiring only limited variation and other observed processes remain plausible. In science, an adequate explanation utilizing only observed processes is always preferred to an explanation involving unobserved, theoretical processes. Therefore, if Darwinism must invoke unobserved, theoretical processes when scientific alternatives that rely only upon observed processes are available, then perhaps philosophical considerations are behind the continued proclamation of Darwinism as fact by many in the scientific community (see Science Tear Sheet #1 for further discussion).

All can agree that limited variation does indeed occur, due to the recombination of genetic material from parent to offspring. Generally, the *loss* of genetic information through harmful mutations can also result in the formation of new species (*speciation*) in rare circumstances. But this is not macroevolution in the Darwinian sense, for macroevolution would require a *net increase* of genetic information and complexity in order to account for human evolution from a simple life form (common descent), or even for complex new organs. Simply put, a mechanism producing the increase in net genetic information required for macroevolution has not been discovered, and the claim that recombination, natural selection, and mutations comprise an adequate mechanism for macroevolution is unfounded (see Science Tear Sheet #12). Experimental and fossil evidence supports the conclusion that there are, indeed, natural limits to the degree of change that can occur, and that these limits are programmed into the overall genetic blueprint, or genome, of each species. Away from the high school textbooks, even evolutionists admit that microevolution plus time does not equal macroevolution. In 1980, leading evolutionist Roger Lewin wrote of an important conference, during which:

A wide spectrum of researchers...gathered at Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History under the simple conference title: Macroevolution...The central question of the Chicago conference was *whether the mechanisms underlying microevolution can be extrapolated to explain the phenomena of macroevolution*. At the risk of doing violence to the positions of some of the people at the meeting, *the answer can be given as a clear, No...*Species do indeed have a capacity to undergo minor modifications in their physical and other characteristics, but this is limited.ⁱ [emphasis added]

For this reason, critics of Darwinism maintain that *it is misleading to not distinguish between limited variation and macroevolution*, or to cite examples of limited variation as proof that macroevolution has occurred or could occur given enough time. This is misleading because 1) the genetic processes involved in limited variation and occasional speciation (primarily recombination and the loss of genetic information) are drastically different than those required for macroevolution (a net increase of genetic information and complexity); 2) limited variation is supported by the evidence, while macroevolution is not; and 3) limited variation is not a sufficient process for Darwinism to have occurred. Yet, admitting that no naturalistic process has been found that can produce the added genetic information required for macroevolution would, barring the future discovery of such a mechanism, effectively end the evolution debate. As stated previously, Darwinists' solution is to broadly define evolution as "change over time," *which allows the term to encompass both limited variation and macroevolution*. Since there are undisputed examples of limited variation, evolutionists then claim that Darwinism is a fact of science. As should now be clear, however, this approach is unscientific and deceptive.

For Discussion:

1. If macroevolution is not supported by the evidence, can you think of any naturalistic explanations of the diversity of life seen today and found in the fossil record?
2. If macroevolution and the notion of common descent is not supported by the evidence, how would one answer the philosophical question *Where did I come from?* in a manner that is consistent with the scientific evidence? Would someone holding to a materialistic philosophy ever concede such a response or concede that macroevolution is not supported by the evidence?
3. Harvard biologist Roger Lewontin once stated that "scientists, like others, sometimes tell deliberate lies because they believe that small lies can serve big truths."ⁱⁱ Discuss the implications for evolution theory. Specifically, if evolution theory is not supported by the evidence, what is the little lie scientists sometimes tell, and what is the big truth that evolutionists wish to make students believe? (Hint: Consider the discussion of worldviews and ideology on Tear Sheet #1.)

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Students and teachers are encouraged to make this material part of the discussion of Darwinian science. Where schools are not willing to allow criticisms of Darwinism, it is all the more important for the Tear Sheets to be distributed outside of class and for students to ask questions about the deceptive Darwinian claims presented in textbooks.

ⁱ Roger Lewin, "Evolutionary Theory Under Fire," *Science*, vol. 210, 21 November 1980, pp. 883-884.

ⁱⁱ Richard C. Lewontin, "The Inferiority Complex," review of *The Mismeasure of Man*, by Stephen J. Gould, *New York Review of Books* (October 22, 1981)