

Evolution & The Specialness of Humans:

I believe life evolved. It emerged from natural processes.

The theory of evolution is the best theory we have today. It's a work in progress. We don't yet understand exactly how life itself emerged, but I believe it's only a matter of time before we do.

As a species, we're relatively new at this "science business." In the grand scheme of things, we're just now opening our eyes and peering out beyond the crib. We've only been doing "serious science" for about 300 years; the proverbial 'blink of an eye' in the evolutionary history of *Homo sapiens*. The things we've learned during this time, and the rate at which our knowledge is increasing is staggering. New discoveries about the way nature works drives our technology. Improved technology allows us to make more discoveries about nature. We're currently sending robots to Mars, submarines to the deep trenches of the oceans, and sophisticated micro-imaging devices into the workings of cells. We're reaching out beyond earth and the solar system, but there's still much about this planet that we haven't learned.

We don't yet understand how life emerged from non-living matter, but we've only been to one planet. From a scientific perspective, we really haven't even been on THIS one for that long. As our knowledge of biology and the environments of other planets increases, I believe we'll soon discover how life emerged from non-life.

An enlightened realist believes that life emerged. It was not created. It was not designed. It emerged and evolved. Given what we know about the way evolution works, it appears to be rather directionless and non-teleological (more on this later). The paths it took were dependent upon many non-predictabilities; i.e., climate, geology, and natural disasters. Consequently, it's reasonable to assume that the results of evolution could have easily ended up differently, depending on the whims of these

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non-predictabilities. The shapes, sizes and characteristics of living organisms never had a specific design-goal or target in mind. Life was never “intended” to conform to some pre-determined, pre-ordained design or archetype.

At one time humanity generally believed that earth was at the center of the physical universe, and everything revolved around it. We also believed that man was created in the image of God, and was at the spiritual center of the universe. There was no reason to believe that there were other planets in the universe, nor that life might exist elsewhere. Up until recently, people generally believed that only humans were capable of devising and using tools, and only humans had any ability to communicate within their own species.

One by one, each of these ideas has been disproven. Following this trend, I believe that we’ll eventually discover that there’s nothing particularly “special” about life on this planet, nor anything particularly special about *Homo sapiens*. As we continue to learn more about the universe, and incrementally lower our level of self-importance, I believe we’ll eventually realize that life is as common in the universe as stars and galaxies.

As an enlightened realist, I believe that life emerged from simpler biological processes, and that humans evolved from primates who evolved from simpler mammals who evolved from lizards that evolved from amphibians, etc. There was no grand, divine plan, and we weren’t created to emulate some higher life form.

We are what we are as a result of natural processes.

Teleology

As an enlightened realist, I believe there is no evidence for an omniscient, omnipotent designer of the universe. Consequently, it’s difficult

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to justify a belief in teleology; i.e., the belief that there is some purpose or goal-directed activity in the universe. There's no evidence that we, as humans, are here for a specific purpose, nor any evidence that the universe is here for some specific reason.

Despite the lack of direct evidence for such a purpose, a "teleologist" believes (to varying degrees) that everything is working towards some pre-established, pre-ordained goal.

On a personal level, he or she may have a sense of "destiny," or "fate." E.g., that they are on this planet to perform some specific task. It may be as mundane as believing that "it was in the cards" that they were supposed to marry a specific person and have a boy named William and a daughter named Sarah. Others may harbor more grandiose notions that they are destined to become great leaders, ingenious inventors, or record-shattering sport stars. In general, even though most teleologists would admit to having a great deal of freedom (and freewill), they would also claim that there's some mysterious way in which events unfold such that they are being influenced or nudged into achieving their pre-ordained goal.

On a more global or universal level, teleologists believe that not only are THEY pre-destined, but that the entire planet, or entire universe is actually proceeding "as it should." Cosmic forces are at work behind the scenes, patiently and secretively guiding the flow of events. These types of teleologists tend to believe that everybody and every action has a purpose; there are no coincidences. Winning the lottery, losing your keys, getting rear-ended by a semi, or finding a ten dollar bill; every event has a purpose because everything is heading for some grand crescendo.

Most Christians fall into the category of "hard teleologists" (whether they know it or not). God of course is believed to be in control of everything. The universe was made for man, and man for God's pleasure. For fundamentalist Christians, the climax of course is the second coming of