

ALI 274: Islamic Perspective to the Theory of Evolution

Prepared for Academy for Learning Islam

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Session Outline

- Importance of Discussing Evolution
- What is the theory of Evolution?
- Understanding the “conflict” between religion and evolution.
- Relevant Discussions in Islamic theology.
- Introduction Qur’an and the evolution of man.

Importance and relevance

- Evolution vs. Creationism.
- Creationism is associated with theism.
- Evolution has been associated with atheism.
- Broader conflict between Religion (Din) and Science (Ilm/Aql).
- Conflict started in 17th century Europe between scientists and Church.
- Applicable to discussions on abortion, same-gendered relationships etc.

What is the theory of evolution?

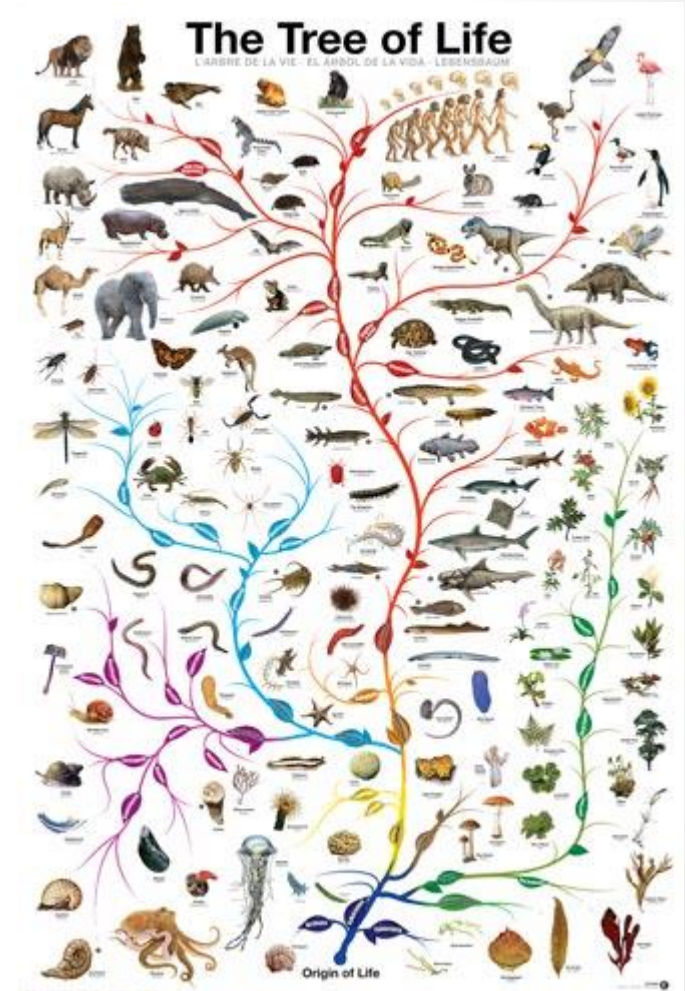
- A view or perspective is predicated of a “subject”.
- It is not possible to predicate a view without understanding the subject.
- Theory of Evolution is a scientific theory.
- Question: what question is the theory of evolution attempting to answer?
- Hint: It is not answering the source of life on earth.

The theory of evolution

- Evolution is defined as change over generations in one or more inherited traits found in inter-breeding populations of organisms.
- Famous examples mentioned in most text books:
 - Darwin's finches from the Galapagos Islands.
 - Moth population in industrial Europe.
- Genetic Variation is caused by a number of factors including mutation, gene flow and mating.
- The surviving species are chosen by human or natural selection.

Macro-evolution

- Macro-evolution explains the evolution of complex species from simpler life forms.
- Macro-evolution is a process that spans millions of years.
- Below is a suggested timeline for macro-evolution:
 - 1 Billion Years Ago: multi-cellular life
 - 500 Million Years: fish like vertebrates.
 - 360 Million Years: Four-limber vertebrates move to land.
 - 225 Million Years: Dinosaurs evolve.
 - 65 Million Years: Dinosaurs go extinct. Birds and mammals survive.
 - 6-8 Million Years: First human like species evolve.



What is the problem?

- Critical thinking requires us to identify and articulate the problem(s) with evolution.
- Hadith states that *a good question is half of the answer.*
- Cannot provide the Islamic perspective without identifying the questions.
- Why is the theory of evolution a concern for religious people?

The problems

- Shahid Murtaza Mutahhari articulates two distinct areas of conflict between the theory of evolution and religion:
 - The theory of evolution allegedly negates the existence of God.
 - The theory of evolution disproves the scriptural narration for the genesis of man.
- The issues will be treated separately from each other.
- The first issue is philosophical and the second is exegetical.

Science and God

- Modern era, scientific method is the criteria for acceptance and understanding of reality.
- If an occurrence or an existence cannot be demonstrated by science, it is assumed that it does not exist.
- Where do you think is the fallacy in this argument?

Science and religion

- Demarcate the scope of science and religion.
- The natural sciences explain the natural and observable world.
- Religion explores – amongst other realities – the metaphysical world.
- There are two questions with regards to evolution and God:
 - What process facilitated/caused the multiplicity of species?
 - Given that it was evolution, does it negate the existence of God?
- Can you explain which question is the subject of each field?

Evolution and the existence of God

- Argument for existence of God is argument by design.
- Argues that every designed structure needs a sentient designer.
- Most apparent example of design is complexity of life.
- Scientists are now capable of explaining the complexity of life forms through evolution.
- Hence evolution negates the existence of God.

Time for critical thinking.

- Shahid Mutahhari asks if there is any correlation between micro-evolution in our belief in God?
- Is there any correlation between macro-evolution and theism?
- If a person believes that creation can happen in a gradual process, does it make him an atheist?
- We indeed created you from dust, then from a drop of] seminal [fluid, then from a clinging mass, then from a fleshy tissue, partly formed and partly unformed, (22:5)

Human evolution

- Evolution also suggests that humans evolved from simpler animals.
- The following is a suggested timeline:
 - 65 Million Years Ago: Dinosaurs go extinct but lemurs survive.
 - 35 Million Years: First monkeys appear on earth.
 - 22.5 Million Years: First ape.
 - 5-6 Million Years: First human like species in Africa.
 - 2 Million Years: Homo-erectus.
 - 200,000 Years: Homo-sapiens.

Scriptural narration

- Questions for reflection:
 - What other information do you need to formulate the Qur'anic perspective of human evolution?
 - What are the critical questions that need to be answered to formulate a complete perspective?