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The Next Evolutionary Leap In Terrestrial Life, Part 1

by Nate A. Lindell, created 14 June 2013

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Evolution as the cause of our existence is hotly disputed by those who do not correctly understand it, many of whom have been misinformed about the nature of the process by those who fear that evolution threatens the superstitions that comfort or empower them and thus preach against it sophistically. Belief in evolution, at least hard evolution, eliminates the possibility that a spiritual or even a material God (i.e. Jehovah or aliens) having "created" us, particularly the possibility of any God having created us in his/her/its image. Those who believe that a God created them & lived their life accordingly have much to lose should they embrace evolution & little to gain, as Pascal's wager explained.

If you are one of the people who rejects evolution as even a possibility, please read "Selfish Genes and Selfish Memes" at pp. 124-134 of The Mind's I: Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul, which is an excerpt from Richard Dawkins's The Selfish Gene & understandably explains how hard evolution worked to create life on Earth,

Or creating.

Why must we think that the evolutionary process has now ended?

Assuming you've now read & understand Dawkins's exposition of how life evolved into (in some forms at least) its present more-complex macro scale from an originally entirely simple micro scale, consider how life on Earth in its more complex forms (we'll call it macro life) has come & gone. Long ago there was the age of the dinosaurs & insects; now we live in the age of the mammals and insects. The age of giant mammals — mammoths, cave bears, etc. — has, relatively speaking, recently ended. The age of the amphibians seems to be coming to an end, with the global extinction of frogs & salamanders. The age of the primate that engages in reflective thought, makes and uses the most complex tools of any previous animal, etc., the age of mankind, is here.

Also in The Mind's I is Harold J. Morowitz's "Rediscovering the Mind," which, at p. 40, pointed out to me "the dramatic instances of discontinuity in evolution." That prompted me to wonder, what the next leap might be. Consider with me the leaps that were, as I gleaned from Morowitz and Dawkins:

- 1) from the big nothing to the Big Bang — the coming into existence of our universe;

- 2) the beginning of complex molecules that replicated themselves from

simpler surrounding constituents — the beginning of primordial life;

3) the encoding of directions on how replicators replicate themselves in genes rather than based on the laws of chemistry;

4) Replicators joining with each other to form a colony, macro life, which facilitates their survival & the passing on of their genetic information (see Dawkins's piece at p. 134)

5) Macro life, through the natural¹-selection process — i.e. the elimination of characteristics that don't aid a life form's survival, preservation of characteristics that do aid survival), developing a brain that is complex enough to enable the being, man, to engage in complex self-reflective thought. One could further subdivide these leaps in the evolutionary process, or identify leaps \pm overlooked; but the point is, they happen. And each leap springs from what the last leap was.

Reflective thought, a.k.a. consciousness. It's only a stepping stone, \pm say.

"All the great empires of the future will be empires of the mind."

Winston Churchill, 1953.

You're all invited to unchain your imaginations & leave a comment as to what this could mean, regardless of ol' Winnie's original context. As for myself, it could mean that the next great evolutionary leap will be into a reality more profoundly mastered by the minds that depend on material reality (see my posts #119 & 135)

No doubt, as Nathaniel Branden well explained in The Psychology of Self-Esteem, the more powerful, focusable & flexible one's consciousness is, the better one will be able to effect their survival & thus pass on the genes with that design. We already ^{use} chemicals (e.g. Ritalin, Adderol, Depakote, SSRIs, etc.), electrical devices (e.g. cochlear implants, deep-brain stimulators, even prosthetic eyes that ^{directly} stimulate the occipital lobe's visual cortex), and are getting to the point where we'll be able to use stem cells if not transplants of brain tissue to enhance human consciousness. Imagine being able to

- hear like a bat (they hear sounds we can't

- see like a mantis shrimp (they see ultraviolet light) or a cuttlefish

- smell like a bloodhound (even average dogs can smell skin cancer cells)

- have the kinesiestic sense & neural-processing speed of a hummingbird.

Etc. Imagine the removal, deadening or better control of the parts of our brains that cause mental or emotional illness in people, altering our very souls!

The possibilities are promising, scary & interesting.

FN.1 People are natural. What they do is natural. Yet we call it artificial. Yet more evidence of the contempt we have for our own species..., which I will demonstrate!!