

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

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The Only Species With a Soul

At a recent chapel service the chaplain was speaking about the history of humans as represented in the Bible. He is a creationist - a person who believes that the Bible is the literal truth and that God created everything in 6 days. He likes to emphasize that he is not descended from a monkey but rather formed in God's image.

I believe God created the universe - including humans - but I don't accept the creation myth as being the literal truth about how it happened. Humans are made up of the same building blocks as all other animal life on the planet. 99.9% of our DNA is identical to chimpanzees. It doesn't make sense to claim that God fashioned us separately. If our physical forms were based on different DNA or we didn't function on the same metabolic basis as other earth animals, then I may be willing to accept the "in his own image" hypothesis.

However, as I listened to the speaker a new thought occurred to me. Even though we are created out of the same building blocks as all other earth creatures, we do have one distinction: We often live for a higher purpose in life. We strive to be and do things that no other animal does. We don't exist solely to propagate our species. We have hopes, dreams and desires.

I call this difference as having a soul. That's what distinguishes us from all other living creatures. There is no biological explanation for our soul. The yearning toward a higher purpose has no physiological basis. It exists independent of our brain. In my opinion, that's what is meant by being created in God's image. I think we evolved (along with all the other animals up to a certain point. ^{What}

I don't know what happened or how it happened, but the creation of a soul is what sets us apart from animals. The people who first recorded the creation myth did the best they could based on their limited understanding (Genesis in the Bible was originally created from merging two older creation myths which did not agree in all details). However, we now know so much more about the creation of the universe and the evolution of our planet (and ourselves). It makes no sense to cling to those old myths and try to present them as literal truth when we know better. We have the ability to reason and we have a duty to use that reasoning power to investigate our origins to discover how and why we came to be the way we are.

I'm certain something manifested in humans at some point which separated us from animals - gave us our soul - but I don't know what it is or how it came about. I only know that it is. And that's enough for me.