

Book Review

Review of S. Conway Morris' Book: Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe

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ABSTRACT

Simon Conway Morris in "Life's Solution" makes his point. Evolution does seem to be going somewhere, and human-like intelligence is along the way (not to be confused with the endpoint). Morris is less convincing with his belief that we are alone in the universe. To collect convincing data we need to travel to distant corners of the universe, and see for ourselves. But such a hypothetical adventure is out of the question, at least today. You can find this book at Amazon http://www.amazon.com/Lifes-Solution-Inevitable-Humans-Universe/dp/0521603250/ref=cm_cr-mr-title.

Key Words: solution, life, lonely universe, inevitable, human, evolution, Darwin's Theory.

There are controversial issues that are worth noting. Morris is trying to maintain a scientific standard, and so it is necessary for him to distance himself from creationists. Morris (page xv) writes, "if you happen to be a 'creation scientist' (or something of that kind) and have read this far, may I politely suggest that you put this book back on the shelf." Now what gets missed is that there is an undeniable tension in these words, and it seems to me that science is going to need to study life's tensions if it is going to come close to life's solutions. Morris may try, but he cannot escape this issue. In the index we see Morris referring to "creation scientists" four times, and Morris (page 322) is found conceding to them this much, "the former [i.e., creationists] know in their hearts that something is out of kilter." If something is in someone's heart, it must be a feeling, an instinct, something that the rational mind takes for granted. And this vital something is no less a vitalism/teleology that Morris (page 5) defends, he writes: "Could it be that the attempts to reinstall or reinject notions of awe and wonder are not simply delusions of some deracinated super-ape, but rather [attempts to] reopen the portals to our finding a metaphysic for evolution? And this in turn might at last allow a conversation with religious sensibilities rather than the more characteristic response of either howling abuse or lofty condescension. "

And regarding Darwin's theory, Marris [page 1] makes this point: "Darwin's formulation of the mechanisms of evolution is not only straightforward, but seemingly irrefutable." Karl Popper had a word to describe such theories that could not be testable, or theories that continually rationalize themselves in the face of new data. Evolutionary psychology comes to mind, but that's not the word! But I'm sure you folks see the problem here!

In terms of providing evidence for convergence, what can I say other than that Morris gave it heavy: chlorophyll; eyes; sabre-tooth; brain-structures; communication; well it goes, and goes. A good example from communication is Morris (page 252) quoting Diana Reiss: "surprising complexity and plasticity in the communication, orientation, and navigation systems of many species ... diverse species either use or can learn to use, to different degrees, symbolic or referential communication for intraspecific or interspecific exchanges. This suggests that there may be a convergence or continuity in the communication and cognitive abilities in animals from different evolutionary paths." Like the

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genes Morris notes that are cobbled together to form novel expression, Morris cobbles these evidential pieces to make a broad argument for the existence of an innate directionality in evolution. In the cobbling of words together, Morris shows the same vitality that he is trying to describe (making the work of abstraction very hard for us reviewers). Complicated as the subject is, he succeeds in my abstracted view. Biological convergence is as significant as biological symbiosis.

Now something needs to be said about the quality of intuition that comes from the spiritual side of humanity. Evolution has been described by reason, this gave us Darwinism and Morris (chapter 11) writes about the resulting conflict with our spiritual instincts. Morris shows us that we don't live in a world that is limited to reason, as something else gets in the way called intuition that produces an irritation in the rational mind. Intuition is something we feel and is not explained by reason. Putting a place back in evolution for intuition returns balance to our account of evolution, even with the best science. And in any regard, it is clear that feelings impacted our evolution. Regarding the conflict between spirit-based feeling and reason, Morris (page 329) writes, "constructive approaches are more difficult, and are usually viewed with contempt, but I believe promise far more."

Feelings help reason, but for them to help we must embrace our irritations; this has been our evolution.

References

S. Conway Morris, 2004, *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe*. Cambridge University Press.