

Man and Evolution

Out of all the natural phenomena with which we are a conversant, the living beings have a comparatively more complex and marvelous mechanism. It may be said that life is the apex of perfection on the scale of natural motion.

Life

No thinker belonging to any school of thought has any doubt about the fact that_ living beings have characteristics which are not found in the non_living beings.

The main¹ characteristics of a living being are self_defense, adaptation to the environment, growth and procreation. The living beings of higher categories move from one place to another and those of still higher category are gifted with feeling and consciousness. That is why the laws of organic chemistry are different from those of inorganic chemistry, or for that matter of geology.

So far as observation and scientific experiments show, a living being is born only by another living being and not by lifeless matter. Similarly no living being is born suddenly and automatically. At the same time it also cannot be doubted that a living being appeared only at a special stage of the evolution of nature, which was naturally that of the beginning of life. Hence a question arises as to what is the origin of life?

In this respect various theories have been put forward. Some of them are as follows:

- a. At first, life came to the earth from some other planet in the form of living cells.
- b. The material necessary to form a living cell consequent on receiving the required energy under certain conditions, was accidentally transformed into a living being and from that life spread to the whole earth.

c. The first living being appeared suddenly by the will of God. Now all the developed living beings are His progeny.

d. Every species of the living beings appeared on the earth independently. Life to each one of them was granted by God. There are some other theories also.

We do not want to involve ourselves into the discussion as to which of these theories is correct, for a very extensive scientific investigation is necessary to come to a definite conclusion in this respect.

What we would like to point out is that the life of every living being, whether it is the result of any evolutionary process or not, is a sign of Allah. That is what has been emphasized by the Qur'an.

"There are significant signs in your own selves. Can you not see?"(Surah al-Zariyat, 51:21).

"Allah sends down water from the sky and it brings the dead earth to life. Indeed in this there is a sign for those who pay attention". (Surah al-Nahl 16:65).

Manufacture of living cell

if one day the scientists succeed in manufacturing a living cell, the doctrine of those who believe in Allah will not be affected, just as the flight of man to other planets, the making of artificial rain, the grafting of one man's limbs to another, the manufacture of an electronic brain and so many other small and big inventions do not mean a clash or a rivalry with Allah. Such things only mean fructifying the human creative power and exploitation of natural material and its hidden forces. The Qur'an itself urges to make use of ideas and skills and to utilize the gifts of nature.

As we have repeatedly said, scientific progress is a movement in the direction of divine guidance and is not in conflict with it.

Anyhow, it should not be forgotten that human creativity does not mean the invention of a totally new phenomenon or a norm. It only means the exploitation of the material and energy available in nature and the bringing about of the conditions necessary for the utilization of the laws and norms relating to them.

If really there is a possibility of the production of life by combining natural material under certain conditions still not known to man, then he may in future discover the law of the origination of life and the conditions and norms pertaining to it. If that happens, this discovery will not be different from the discovery and utilization of so many other laws already made in the fields other than that of life.

Obviously the discovery of a law and its utilization does not in any way lower the position of the law-maker.

At a lower level we see that the pair of a male and a female pave the way for the birth of a child. But do they affect Allah as the creator? A farmer cultivates his land. But does he replace Allah as the real creator of the crop?

If it is discovered that life can be produced from matter under certain conditions, that will only mean that matter in its evolutionary motion can go to the extent where it receives life and then can go further to a higher stage.

It is interesting to note that the Qur'an, describing the birth of man, expressly says:

"One of His signs is that He created you of clay". (Surah al-Rum, 30:20).

In fact clay becomes man, the highest living being, after passing through so many developments.

The Qur'an also talks of the birth of man from *'black clay'* and *Mastic clay'*. (Surah al-Hijr, 15:28 and Surah al-Saffat, 37:11).

It also says:

"We made every living thing of water". (Surah al-Anbiya, 21:30).

When the Qur'an has such a wide horizon, there is no reason why a Muslim who follows it, should be narrow-minded.

Life, a Divine phenomenon

It may be pointed out that the Qur'an expressly ascribes life to Allah.

"It is He who created death and life". (Surah al-Mulk, 67:2). "It is He who created you to die". (Surah al-Hajj, 22:66).

Do such verses mean that no one else can make a living being? In reply it may be said:

Firstly, the Qur'an ascribes to Allah all natural changes, from coming down of rain and taming rivers and mountains to the birth of a man.

On some other –occasions it ascribes these very changes to natural factors also. These two groups of verses are not contradictory, but corroborate each other, because the scientific laws which govern natural changes are simply the norms prescribed by Allah. His will does not mean that He directly brings about all changes and natural events. In fact he has created a system of natural changes. That is His will.

Secondly, if in the case of life we find that the Qur'an has given special attention to it, that is only a sign of its importance and high value. Allah describes it as the infusion of divine spirit. While discussing man, we will explain what is meant by that.

Thirdly, every evolutionary movement is a manifestation of Allah's will and His creative design, especially if the change is such that a material organism reaches a stage where it may receive life, become a living being and may at last attain human life.

Man and Evolution

The theory of evolution on the whole has a long history. Lamarck enunciated certain principles in this connection. But it was Charles Darwin, who carried out extensive studies of the living organisms and the way of their birth, and gathered enough scientific evidence to show that evolution has taken place actually. He held that:

(a) Every living being, wherever it may be, gradually adapts itself to its environment, and meets its natural needs, such as obtaining food and defending itself in accordance with the conditions prevailing in that environment. This effort sometimes causes changes in its body, like the appearance of the web uniting the toes of the duck when it was forced by its environment to swim in order to look for its food in the lakes, or the lengthening of the neck of the giraffe when it was forced to make use of the branches of lofty trees.

(b) Though these organic changes take place gradually over many generations, they later pass from parents to offspring.

(c) Among the living beings there is a severe struggle for the continuation of their life, for procuring food and for selecting a suitable mate. This struggle for existence, that is a clash with the factors of the environment of life and rivalry with other living beings, is a firm principle in the life of the animals and the plants and is one of the factors which lead to the change of their form.

(d) As the result of this struggle only those organisms survive which can adapt themselves better to their environment and can obtain the conditions necessary for their life in their natural abode. The weaker and

the less suitable organisms gradually die out.

This way gradually the various species are transformed, and only the fittest ones among them survive. That is how the evolution of the species takes place.

The dissemination of the theory of the development of the living organisms, including man, on the basis of these principles, roused a great deal of controversy during the time of Darwin and afterwards, and views in support of it and against it were openly expressed. At some times the tone of the debate in this connection was scientific but on other occasions it was rooted in religious or anti-religious prejudices, for it was said that what Darwin had asserted was in conflict with the Biblical account of the beginning of the world and the birth of man as given in the book of Genesis.

Anyhow, with new discoveries in archaeology and the expansion in the field of experiments, the theory of evolution has been considerably modified since the time of Darwin, especially in regard to the questions relating to anthropology.

Many new questions in regard to almost every principle mentioned by Darwin have arisen. For example, it is asked whether the appearance of a new organ or for that matter any other organic change, always results from the use of that organ and the attempt to adapt it to one's environment or it may be due to mutation or any other cause?

The acquired qualities are hereditary as a principle or genetic investigations have rejected this theory?

The organic changes, whatever may be their cause, are always aimed at survival and evolution or sometimes they may be due to the inconsistency with the environmental conditions and may culminate in death and extinction?

Natural selection is or is not like artificial selection which leads the existing generation to evolution? We find that the wild animals and plants are alike and of average type, whereas the artificial selection gives the animals and plants more variety and leads them to better evolution.

There are many other questions of this sort.

Anyhow, in spite of all the objections raised to discredit it, the theory of evolution has been accepted by the scientists as an objective principle of natural sciences. At the same time it is also certain that prominent and unbiased naturalists do not consider this theory to be final and incontrovertible. The way to further scientific investigation is not closed. All that they say is that the scientific inquiry has not so far discovered any new principles which may take the place of the principle of evolution.

Now it may be said that if an unbiased investigator carefully examines the results of the observations in regard to the genesis of the living organisms, he will come to the following conclusions:

Principles which may be discovered

(1) The living organisms in accordance with their degree of evolution have a historical succession. In other words, the more developed species have usually appeared over history after the less developed ones.

(2) This historical succession is similar to that found in all other things of the world. The entire cosmos has evolved from a simple state and gradually galaxies and solar systems have been formed in the environment devoid of all traces of life. Conditions conducive to the appearance of life have developed gradually. Similarly development has taken place successively from the plants to the developed animals. On the whole, the more complex organisms have followed the simple ones.

(3) There exists complete organic similarity between the first living organism and the most developed living organism known to us.

(4) The stages through which a human embryo passes during its embryonic development are fully akin to the stages through which living organisms have passed over history.

When we put all this evidence together, we can scientifically presume that the various species of the living organisms are the progeny of one another (transformism) and have not come into existence independently (fixism).

Scientific presumption, not incontrovertible principle

Anyhow, it would be fair to say that the conclusions at which we have arrived are no more than a scientific guess corroborated by some evidence. They cannot be regarded as decisive and final, for if an unbiased investigator looks carefully at the history of the origin of machinery, he will find that the development of various machines is not incongruous with the four conclusions mentioned above, though the origin of the machines was not on the basis of transformism in its modern sense, and the various kinds of machines have not been born of one another.

In fact the scientific study of the origin of machinery also leads to the following conclusions:

(1) The machines in accordance with their evolution have historical succession, for the more developed

ones appeared after the less developed.

(2) This historical succession is akin to the origination of all other things of the cosmos.

(3) There is complete organic resemblance between the first machine and the most developed machine.

(4) The stages of the manufacture of the latest developed machine on the whole resemble those of the development of other machines, though in a compressed form.

In spite of all these four points, everybody knows that the origination of the more developed machines in the wake of the simple ones has not come about on the basis of transformism. In other words the more developed machines are not the progeny of the more simple ones.

The evolution of the machines is the result of man's initiative, his efficiency and the evolution of his thinking. It is the outcome of the experience he has gained. But the machines of superior kind are not born of those that existed before them.

It is true that in the case of machines basically it is not possible that a more developed one is born of a simpler one, but in the case of living beings such a possibility does exist. But this possibility can only support a scientific guess. It is no proof that such a thing has actually happened, for mere possibility of a thing is not a proof of its actual occurrence.

We come across some other cases of evolution, in which the historical succession of their stages is related to the evolution of the thinking of the maker, and is the result of the gradual increase in an already existing ability.

An example of such an evolution is the gradual attainment of knowledge from childhood to later years.

In contrast, the evolution of the power of learning a foreign language is connected with the development of the capability of him who learns it, and not with that of the person who teaches him.

Conclusion

An unbiased investigator, whether he supports the theory of evolution or opposes it, has to admit that:

(1) As far as we know, all the existing things of the world, including the living organisms, have a historical succession in accordance with the degree of their evolution.

(2) We are aware of many cases in which a more developed organism is the progeny of a less

developed one.

(3) There are indications on the basis of which it may be presumed that this is a general rule applicable to all existing things.

(4) But still this is no more than a mere scientific guess, and the way to further investigation on the basis of contrary evidence, as mentioned above, is still open.

(5) On the basis of the doctrine, that the world has an Almighty Creator, who has brought the universe into existence and who manages it, there is a complete possibility that certain developed species might have come into existence independently in the same way as we have described the case of the machines. Of course, in this case the creation of the developed species is not to be the outcome of any mental development of the Creator or His gaining any experience. It is to be only on the basis that evolutionary motion exists in the creative design of the world. In other words, it is the will of Allah that gradually more and more developed species should come into being, in the same way as there exists an evolutionary motion in the development of an embryo.

Emergence of man

According to their general line of thinking, the scientists hold that man has evolved from the primates, which existed before him. We leave the study and evaluation of this evidence and other indications to the anthropologists, and confine ourselves to making a few general remarks in regard to the origin of man.

(1) What we have said about the theory of evolution is also applicable to what has been or is being said on the basis of this theory about the ancestors of the first man, but as we have already pointed out, this theory is no more than a scientific guess. It is still subject to further investigation and should not be considered to be one hundred per cent final.

(2) Anyhow, it is important to note that the emergence of man on the basis of evolution from other primates is not in conflict with the teachings of the revealed religions, especially with the belief of an Almighty Creator of the world. We have repeatedly mentioned in *Islamic Teachings* that Allah, as described by the Qur'an, is the Creator and Disposer of nature. Therefore the perfect system of nature is one of His signs and not an arrangement parallel to Him or negating Him. All the scientific discussions and efforts are aimed at only finding out this system of nature as it actually exists.

(3) The only point which has given rise to the conception that there is a contradiction between religion and the general principles of evolution is that the book of Genesis of Old Testament and certain verses

of the Qur'an apparently indicate that all men existing on the earth are the progeny of Adam, who was created independently and not evolved from any previous living beings.

In this connection the following points are worth consideration:

(a) What, in this respect, is mentioned in the book of Genesis cannot be taken seriously from religious point of view, because the genuineness of many parts of Old Testament is historically doubtful.

(b) The Qur'anic verses connected with the birth of Adam generally emphasize the point that his birth was an important event and that Divine spirit was infused in his material body made of clay. This kind of birth may only be described as mutation.

Thus a being made of clay came into existence. He was destined to be the master of the earth and no other visible or invisible being could place a total restriction on his leaning towards Allah or towards his base desires.

(c) There is only one verse in the whole Qur'an which describes the birth of Adam as somewhat miraculous. This verse says:

"Surely Isa is like Adam in the sight of Allah. He created him of clay, then said to hire: `Be! and he was". (Surah Ale Imran, 3: 59)

This verse has come in the wake of other verses relating to the Prophet Isa. The Qur'an invariably stresses that Isa was created by Allah and that he was not His son. The fact that he was born of Virgin Maryam and had no father is no proof of his being the son of Allah. His birth was a supernatural event, which took place by Allah's will, in the same way as another supernatural event, that is the birth of Adam, the living being having Divine spirit, occurred earlier.

It may be observed that this very verse shows that the birth of Adam and that of Isa are alike.

Can anybody claim that what the Qur'an has said concerning the birth of Isa repudiates the general procedure of the birth of men all over history? Does it deny that they are normally born of father and mother. Not at all.

In dozens of verses the Qur'an declares the system of reproduction and procreation to be a sign of the power and the wisdom of the Creator of the cosmos.

Hence from the Qur'anic point of view the miraculous birth of Adam, the first living being gifted with Divine spirit, should not be construed to mean that the Qur'an is opposed to the theory of the emergence

of the existing things of the world or the birth of living organisms on the basis of evolution. All that it means is that the emergence of man in an extraordinary way was a special favor of Allah.

Exceptional Organisms

Irrespective of all that relates to the birth of Isa or Adam, a naturalist may be asked whether it is possible or not that in the course of the emergence of usual organisms, some exceptional ones also come into existence?

We all know that as a rule every hand and foot of a man has five fingers; but we also know that some children are born with six.

Similarly we know that every human child is born with one head, but you must have read in newspapers that there have been some exceptional cases in which children were born with two heads.

When you put up such exceptional cases to the naturalists, they do not deny their existence, but explain them away simply as freaks of nature.

The credulous people easily accept this explanation, but those who have a critical mind ask: If it is true that the evolutionary emergence of the world and man is the result of the domination of the laws of nature over all the particles of this world and if these laws hold good everywhere, what is that factor which disturbs them?

Does an outside factor disturb the working of nature and the system of its laws, or the laws of nature themselves disturb their own working? In the first case, we must acknowledge that there exists some superpower transcending nature. In the case of the second alternative, a question arises as to why the possibility of the occurrence of some exceptional events, sometimes called miracles, should be so vehemently denied and considered to be contrary to the system of nature?

The above discussion shows that there is not the least contradiction between the general principle of evolution in respect of the world and man, and the teachings of the revealed religions, and what the Qur'an says concerning the birth of Adam and man. Incidentally the principles of evolution are still subject to further scientific investigation, for they are faced with much criticism especially as they were enunciated by Darwin.

As we have now finished the discussion of the origin of man, we take up a more basic question. The most important question, which is being overlooked in our times is: What is the true nature of man, what is his value and what way he should go?

First we refer briefly to the position of man in the West and then we propose to study the man of the Qur'an, so that keeping in mind the views of the contemporary schools, we may know the approach of Islam in this respect.

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