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### February 24, 2008: Ending the Evolution Wars

Bruce Ledewitz

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Title: Ending the Evolution Wars

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2/24/2008--I have suggested reading a statement to high school biology classes that would make the point that evolution need not be regarded as proving materialism and disproving religion, despite the opposite insistence of the New Atheists (and, ironically, that of religious fundamentalists, who also argue this absolute inconsistency in order to defeat Darwinism).

My statement, suggested below on August 1, 2007, is not as good as the following from the noted British paleontologist Simon Conway-Morris' book, *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe* (Cambridge 2003), on page 2. This would be a great statement to read in biology class.

"Yet despite the reality that, as it happens, we humans evolved from apes rather than, say lizards, let alone tulips, the interpretations surrounding the brute fact of evolution remain contentious, controversial, fractious, and acrimonious. Why should this be so? The heart of the problem, I believe, is to explain how it might be that we, as product of evolution, possess an overwhelming sense of purpose and moral identity yet arose by processes that were seemingly without meaning. If, however, we can begin to demonstrate that organic evolution contains deeper structures and potentialities, if not inevitabilities, then perhaps we can begin to move away from the dreary materialism of much current thinking with its agenda of a world now open to limitless manipulation. Nor need this counter-attack be anti-scientific: far from it. First, evolution may simply be a fact, yet it is in need of continuous interpretation. The study of evolution surely retains its fascination, not because it offers a universal explanation, even though this may appeal to fundamentalists (of all persuasions), but because evolution is both riven with ambiguities and, paradoxically, is also rich in implications. In my opinion the sure sign of the right road is a limitless prospect of deeper knowledge: what was once baffling is now clear, what seemed absurdly important is now simply childish, yet still the journey is unfinished."

Conway Morris is making several points in this dense paragraph. For one thing, evolution is a fact but a fact in need of interpretation. It does not interpret itself. Second, humans do possess an overwhelming sense of purpose and moral identity. This is as much a fact as any other fact and cannot simply be dismissed as an illusion, as the New Atheists would like to do. Third, there is a depth to evolution itself, since it has led to beings of meaning such as ourselves. The universe, it would appear, selects for meaning. Fourth, materialist atheism is not a value neutral appeal to the facts, but a claim with an agenda of its own—to treat the world and all that is in it as things to be used, including ourselves, without dignity of its own.

Finally, and only a scientist of Conway Morris' stature can say this with authority, these thoughts are not anti-scientific. Not even a little.

I should add, to be fair, that I don't think much of these conclusions require agreement with Conway Morris about the inevitability of something like human intelligence and morality. It happened and the onus is on materialism to establish that we are just one of those things. But the word inevitable bothers me.