

THE MYTHOLOGY OF SCIENCE: SPONTANEOUS GENERATION

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INTRODUCTION

Thales of Miletus believed it. Aristotle believed it. Descartes believed it. Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley believed it. A.I. Oparin, Julian Huxley, George G. Simpson, Theodosius Dobzhansky, Isaac Asimov, Harlow Shapley, and Linus Pauling believed it. George Wald, John Tyler Bonner, Loren Eiseley, Stanley Miller, Sidney Fox, Francisco J. Ayala, Ernst Mayr, Preston Cloud, Francis Crick, James Watson, and Stephen J. Gould all believe it.

What is “it”? “It” is **spontaneous generation**—the concept that has become the cornerstone of the theory of evolution. But what is spontaneous generation? John N. Moore of Michigan State University has suggested:

Abiogenesis is a synonym for spontaneous generation; that is, abiogenesis means life coming from non-living matter. Similar terms have been used to refer to spontaneous generation of life at the submicroscopic level, such as neobiogenesis, biopoiesis, and eobiogenesis. Using different names for spontaneous generation just adds to the confusion, not to the understanding. Biogenesis means life coming from living matter. In contrast to spontaneous generation, the law of biogenesis is a thoroughly documented law of biology (1976, p. 65).

In other words, spontaneous generation is a natural process whereby nonliving matter gives rise to that which is living.

WHY DO SOME SCIENTISTS BELIEVE IN SPONTANEOUS GENERATION?

Generally, scientists who believe in spontaneous generation do so because they have accepted organic evolution and therefore have no choice in the matter. As Isaac Asimov once said: “After all, from the mere fact that we are here we are **forced to assume** that once upon a time at least one case of spontaneous generation took place (assuming, further, that one eliminates supernatural creation from consideration)” (1972, p. 1191, emp. added, parenthetical comment in orig.). George Wald of Harvard confirmed this when he wrote:

The reasonable view was to believe in spontaneous generation; the only alternative, to believe in a single, primary act of supernatural creation. **There is no third alternative.** For this reason, many scientists a century ago chose to regard the belief in spontaneous generation as a philosophical necessity (1954, pp. 45-53, emp. added).

In a later statement, Dr. Wald commented: “The only alternative to some form of spontaneous is a belief in supernatural creation...” (1958, p. 100).

But why did scientists a century ago choose to believe in spontaneous generation? No doubt their decision was due to the fact that it allowed them to accept Darwinian evolution. Even Darwin believed in spontaneous generation. He wrote:

Though no evidence worth anything has as yet, in my opinion, been advanced in favour of a living thing being developed from inorganic matter, yet I cannot avoid believing the possibility of this will be proved some day in accordance with the law of continuity (see Francis Darwin, 1903, 2:171).

Darwin, too, realized that he had no choice—if he wished to retain his belief in organic evolution.

IS BELIEF IN SPONTANEOUS GENERATION POPULAR TODAY?

Is spontaneous generation a common belief among scientists today? It is if those scientists are evolutionists. As Harold Blum remarked: “That life was ‘spontaneously generated’ from non-living matter at some time in the very remote past, and that this process has not been repeated for a long time are two basic tenets accepted by the great majority of biologists” (1957, p. 251).

At the 1959 Darwin Centennial Convocation at the University of Chicago, participant Hans Gaffron said: “It is the general climate of thought which has created an unshakable belief among biochemists that evolution of life from inanimate matter is a matter of course” (1960, 1:46). Harlow Shapley commented: “The **assumption** that life originated from non-living matter must be made by the modern scientist if he believes that the question ‘What is life?’ belongs in the natural sciences at all” (1960, 3:75, emp. added).

IS BELIEF IN SPONTANEOUS GENERATION SCIENTIFICALLY JUSTIFIED?

Isn't all of this a bit odd? After all, the controversy over spontaneous generation was supposed to have been settled a long time ago. Francesco Redi, in the seventeenth century, performed classic experiments disproving the false concept of spontaneous generation that was so prevalent in his day. Lazzaro Spallanzani and Louis Pasteur, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively, also performed

important experiments disproving the concept of spontaneous generation. In fact, Dr. Pasteur, in his victory speech to the French Academy of Sciences, stated, in part: “The theory of spontaneous generation will never recover from the mortal blow dealt to it by this simple experiment.” And, when viewed honestly, the theory **never did recover!**

After Pasteur, reputable men of science discarded the idea that nonliving matter gives rise to living organisms. Wheat kernels and bits of cheese do not give rise to baby mice; decaying meat does not give rise to maggots; and dewdrops do not give rise to fireflies. Spontaneous generation, as far as experimental science is concerned, has been disproven. Evolutionists Green and Goldberger put it this way:

There is one step [in evolution—BT] that far outweighs the others in enormity: the step from macromolecules to cells. All the other steps can be accounted for on theoretical grounds—if not correctly, at least elegantly. However, the macromolecule to cell transition is a jump of fantastic dimensions, which lies beyond the range of testable hypothesis. In this area, all is conjecture. The available facts do not provide a basis for postulation that cells arose on this planet. This is not to say that some parapsychical forces were not at work. **We simply wish to point out that there is no scientific evidence** (1967, pp. 406-407, emp. added).

The admission is that there is **no evidence from experimental science** that justifies belief in spontaneous generation. But, as Gaffron admitted:

A natural scientist who wants to study this evolutionary process **has no choice** but to start and to proceed from **the assumption** that the living came from the non-living. This, in spite of the fact that what stares him in the eye—all life about him—is **so fantastically complex that it is hard for him to believe it truly happened** (1960, p. 46, emp. added).

When Dr. Wald wrote an article on the origin of life some years ago for *Scientific American*, he made the following comments:

Most modern biologists, having reviewed with satisfaction the downfall of the spontaneous generation hypothesis, yet unwilling to accept the alternative belief in special creation, are left with nothing... To make an organism demands the right substances in the right proportions and in the right arrangement. We do not think that anything more is needed—but that is problem enough. One has only to contemplate the magnitude of this task to concede that **the spontaneous generation of a living organism is impossible**. Yet here we are—as a result, I believe, of spontaneous generation (1954, pp. 45-53, emp. added).

Even though “the spontaneous generation of a living organism is impossible,” evolutionary scientists continued to advocate and defend the concept.

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How could advocates of the long-defunct idea of spontaneous generation continue to defend such a concept? The answer is that they simply used a little “scientific hocus-pocus” to suggest that spontaneous generation is impossible **only in the present-day scheme of things**, but that it was possible long ago. As Louis Levine commented: “The postulated origin of living matter **assumes** the occurrence of a chemical evolution” (1963, p. 106, emp. added). In answering the question as to how spontaneous generation was possible in the distant past, but is not now, the response usually offered goes something like this:

The general answer is that the conditions no longer exist which once made the spontaneous generation of life possible... Admittedly, (it is not likely that) the precise chain of molecular reactions from which life first arose will ever (again) be established. In the nature of things, “proof” will be impossible forever (Blum, 1957, p. 251).

The argument suggests that even though spontaneous generation is not occurring now, who’s to say that it did not happen long ago when conditions on the Earth might have been quite different? Sir Fred Hoyle, Britain’s eminent astronomer, addressed this matter when he stated:

The question of the origin of life from inanimate matter was taken up again by physicists, chemists and biologists in the first few decades of the present century. The need for an empirical approach within the scope of modern science is well recognized, though **a large part of the myth and mystery** which pervaded religious and philosophical attitudes of earlier epochs **is present even in the contemporary scientific answers which have been proposed...** “Mystical” spontaneous generation has been implicitly conceded for the initial formation of a biological system from inorganic matter.... It is doubtful that anything like the conditions which were simulated in the laboratory existed at all on a primitive Earth, or occurred for long enough times and over sufficiently extended regions of the Earth’s surface to produce large enough local concentrations of the biochemicals required for the start of life. **In accepting the “primeval soup theory” of the origin of life scientists have replaced religious mysteries which shrouded this question with equally mysterious scientific dogmas. The implied scientific dogmas are just as inaccessible to the empirical approach** (1978, pp. 24,26, emp. added).

Evolutionary anthropologist Loren Eiseley summed up the matter in his classic text, *The Immense Journey*, when he wrote:

With the failure of these many efforts, science was left in the somewhat embarrassing position of having to postulate theories of living origins which it could not demonstrate. **After having chided the theologian for his reliance on myth and miracle, science found itself in the unenviable position of having to create a mythology of its own: namely, the assumption that what, after long effort, could not be proved to take place today, had, in truth, taken place in the primeval past** (1957, pp. 201-202, emp. added).

Now, who is it that is saddled with a myth? Who is it that is “outside of empirical observation and experimentation”? Perhaps Fuller and Tippo were right when they remarked: “The evidence of those who

would explain life's origin on the basis of the accidental combination of suitable chemical elements is no more tangible than that of those people who place their faith in Divine Creation as the explanation of the development of life. **Obviously the latter have just as much justification for their belief as do the former**" (1961, p. 25, emp. added). Suddenly the scientific method found itself face-to-face with Divine Creation—and there was nothing any scientist could do to prevent it.

Eiseley recognized that the evolutionists' belief in spontaneous generation is not based on scientific evidence.

One does occasionally observe, however, a tendency for the beginning zoological textbook to take the unwary reader by a hop, skip, and jump from the little steaming pond or the beneficent chemical crucible of the sea, into the lower world of life with such sureness and rapidity that it is easy to assume that there is no mystery about this matter at all, or, if there is, that it is a very little one. This attitude has indeed been criticized by the distinguished British biologist Woodger, who remarked some years ago: "Unstable organic compounds and chlorophyll corpuscles do not persist or come into existence in nature on their own account at the present day, and consequently it is necessary to postulate that conditions were once such that this did happen although and **in spite of the fact that our knowledge of nature does not give us any warrant for making such a supposition...** It is simply dogmatism—asserting that what you want to believe did in fact happen" (1957, pp. 199,200, emp. added).

In any other area, such admissions would be tantamount to defeat. But not in evolution. As Marshall and Sandra Hall observed:

Evolutionary scientists are willing to bend natural laws, manufacture abstruse and impossible theories, go to any length to deny God and to see that everybody else does, so we can have an absurd world where **they** can function because they are absurd people. They say spontaneous generation had to happen. It doesn't. It hasn't. It won't. It can't. But it did. They say (1974, p. 21, emp. in orig.).

Then, almost as an afterthought, the Halls added: "It is not easy to overthrow a belief, however absurd and harmful it may be, which your civilization has promulgated as the scientific truth for the better part of a century" (1974, p. 74).

CONCLUSION

It appears that the current mythology of science happens to be the superstition that spontaneous generation can occur, and in fact, has occurred—when all available scientific evidence shows that this is not the case. Harry Rimmer called our attention to this fact as long ago as 1935.

There is no life without vital antecedents. This is perhaps a waste of your time, so well is the law established, but it brings us face to face with the enigma of vital origins: for if life only comes from life, from whence did the first life come? We certainly know nothing of its nature and origin that has been or can be established by what we may call true scientific demonstration (1935, pp. 72-73).

Dr. Rimmer's words are as true now as they were in the 1930s. Professor L. Victor Cleveland agreed wholeheartedly with Rimmer when he wrote: "So far as all the scientists on the earth can prove, **there is no such thing as spontaneous generation**, or abiogenesis—life must come from antecedent life. Life produces life of the same kind, whether you look at protozoa or elephants" (as quoted in Meldau, 1959, p. 94, emp. added). In the book, *100 Great Scientists*, the following statement can be found: "To today's biologist, with his extended knowledge of the intricate physiochemical complexity of the living cell, **the sudden, spontaneous appearance of even a simple living organism, is inconceivable...**" (see Greene, 1964, p. 126, emp. added).

Perhaps R.E. Dickerson, writing in *Scientific American*, expressed the evolutionists' views best in regard to the relationship between science and spontaneous generation when he noted: "The evolution of the genetic machinery is the step for which there are **no laboratory models**; hence one can **speculate endlessly, unfettered by inconvenient facts**" (1978, 239[3]:85, emp. added). It seems that where the origin of life and evolution are concerned, that is exactly what we now have—speculation, unfettered by inconvenient facts. And, as difficult as it may be to believe, science has a mythology all its own.

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