

Nancy Finney

Evolutionary Ideas

Anthropology 206

Evolution has been a debate in the sciences ever since Darwin made his claims of natural selection. Evolution is a heated topic due to its discrepancies with creationism and other religious beliefs. Roy Ellen explains, “Anthropologists should certainly prepare themselves to engage in debate, and part of this preparation will require that they reassess the scientific credentials of what they do.” (2002, p. 8) Then it is of no surprise that the three articles here are all related to and discuss evolution.

Ernst Mayr discusses evolution in his article with a brief summary of Darwin’s ideas, but his main focus is on the Zeitgeist aspect of Darwinism. Learning about natural selection and Darwin’s ideas allowed each person’s ideas of time to be completely changed. (12, 2007) Mayr specifically looks at the conflicts between religion and Darwinism. He explains that Darwinism “makes unnecessary the invocation of any teleological forces leading to a particular end.” (13, 2007) While examining the rejection of supernatural phenomena, variation and elimination of determinism, Mayr makes for quite a persuasive article.

In “The Perimeter of Ignorance” Tyson discusses evolution as it is a fact, and in some ways mocks modern-day religions for believing in Intelligent Design. Mainly Tyson discusses the “God of the gaps” idea, which basically means that God is the explanation for anything that we cannot at this time understand. Tyson explains that the problem with this method is that science always has new answers, and eventually it will have answers to all of the things that are currently explained as God. What this in fact does is create disbelief in God, which obviously could cause a lot of problems for religions that condone Intelligent Design. Giving many ludicrous examples, Tyson shows that it makes much less sense to believe in Intelligent Design than to question it. For

example, “I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with senses, reason and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.” (Tyson, 2007, p. 39) If God has given us these abilities, we should utilize them and question and discover.

Duenwald’s article is a bit different than the previous two, as it does not argue for evolution but instead accepts it and applies it to everyday situations where it can be used. In this article she analyzes different scientists’ works that discuss reasons that could make it more or less likely to give birth to a boy or girl. For example she explains that glucose levels, diet, and even weight could affect the sex of a child. “Scientists have observed that couples who have sex a few days before or after the woman ovulates tend to have boys, while those who have sex at or very near the point of ovulation tend to have girls.” (Duenwald, 2007, p. 100) She doesn’t actually state that any of these methods are proven, but instead shows that it may not be God’s handiwork at play. It could be science that determines sex.

All of these articles discuss evolution in many different ways, and all accept evolution. Mayr’s *Zeitgeist* approach is an interesting one to discuss because evolution is also known as “change over time” and his article takes that to a dual meaning, in that our views of time have also changed over time. Evolving is perpetual on many levels in this article. Tyson’s article is written with both humor and seriousness, as he starts out explaining the importance of rejecting the “God of the gaps” idea, but later mocks Intelligent Design. Duenwald’s article takes the ideas that Darwin gave and puts them in a new context of evolutionary theory. Instead of discussing change over time, she explains different scientists that are not accepting Intelligent Design in the determination of the sex of an unborn child. She shows how the first two articles, if understood, can

bring new ideas to the scientific world. Again, Roy Ellen explains, “Anthropology as a discipline is not only engaged in the scholarly dissection of patterns of belief, but depends, to varying degrees, upon evolutionary theory to make sense of its own data.” (2002, p.3)

All of these writers have used evolutionary theory to make sense of other ideas and approaches in science.

Works Cited

Duenwald, Mary. 2007 "Had King Henry VIII's Wives Only Known..." in Annual Editions: Physical Anthropology 2007/2008, pp. 100-101, E. Angeloni, ed.

Ellen, Roy. 2002 "Dangerous Fictions and Degrees of Plausibility – Creationism, Evolutionism and Anthropology," in Anthropology Today, Vol. 18:5, pp. 3-8.

Mayr, Ernest. 2007 "Darwin's Influence on Modern Thought," in Annual Editions: Physical Anthropology 2007/2008, pp. 100-101, E. Angeloni, ed.

Tyson, Neil Degrasse. 2007 "The Perimeter of Ignorance," in Annual Editions: Physical Anthropology 2007/2008, pp. 38-41, E. Angeloni, ed.