



Was
Darwin
Wrong?

Dear Dr. Lee Spetner,

Thank you for your detailed reply and your information in your last [email](#).

Before continuing with the point-by-point reply, one of the biggest 'misunderstandings'/'disagreements' must be removed. Without removing this obstacle there can be no progress in our discussion. I think it can be solved. I quote:

1. "As I wrote in my book, and as I repeated above, 'Evolution A' has never been observed and there is therefore no pressing need to account for it." [[Spetner,31 Aug 00](#)]
2. "There is no imperative to have a theory to explain Evolution A" [[Spetner,24 Jan 01](#)]
3. "NDT [neo-Darwinism], insofar as it deals with 'Evolution A', is attempting to account for something that has not been observed" [[Spetner,24 Jan 01](#)].
4. "My NREH makes no attempt to account for 'Evolution A', which has not been observed" [[Spetner,24 Jan 01](#)]
5. "The NREH accounts for what has been observed." [[Spetner,31 Aug 00](#)]

Contradicting 1,2,3 and adding to the confusion Spetner wrote:

6. "In a discussion of whether NDT can account for evolution, it is 'Evolution A' that must be accounted for." [[Spetner,31 Aug 00](#)]

and you defined "Evolution-A" as:

7. "One meaning of evolution is the descent of all life from a putative single primitive source. I shall denote the word used in this sense as **Evolution A**" [[31 Aug 00](#)].

Then you add that your 'Evolution A' is not macro-evolution. Taken together all this is very confusing! Consider the following statements:

8. **Since continental drift has not been observed, there is therefore no pressing need to account for it (4).**
9. **Since Creation has not been observed, there is therefore no pressing need to account for it by a Creator.**

To stop all that confusion let me make one thing clear:

10. **The primary fact in the study of life is the existence of millions of living and extinct species. That fact has to be explained. (2).**

Of course continental drift has not been observed!

Of course one does not observe a theory.

Of course neither evolution nor Creation have been observed!

Of course you did not observe your own brain with your own eyes! Your [reply](#) beautifully demonstrates my point. You made an *inference* presumably based upon knowledge of brain surgeons and pathologists as represented by photographs or drawings in textbooks plus a lot of

biological knowledge about how similar humans are 'constructed'/'created', etc. But you did not refer to a visual inspection of *your own* brain with your own eyes. What I am saying is that even something so close to your self is inferred, not observed.

Of course evolution of all life from the first living cell, a process of a few billion years, has not been observed! It looks as if you want to turn this into an objection against the existence of evolution. That logic equally dismisses 'Creation' because no human being observed a Creator creating the world. But the logic is wrong.

Lee, the observation that has to be explained is not 'Evolution-A', but a million of species on our planet. The primary fact in the study of life is the existence of millions of living and extinct species. My impression is that by your eagerness to refute neo-Darwinism, the wish to have a complete alternative theory, the wish to stay within the boundaries of science, plus your religious belief in Creation, you are driven to define out of existence the central problem of biology: the existence of a million species. Alternatively it could be that you are commenting on evolutionists claiming that 'evolution is a fact', which is indeed a confusing statement.

The authors of Creation myths knew the basic observation, although, significantly, they underestimated the number of species by a few orders of magnitude. The observation of the million species is the starting point for creationists *and* evolutionists. This observation predated the Creation/ Evolution Controversy, predated Darwin and even predated Linnaeus. Darwin explained this observation by Common Descent (CD) of all life. You focus on neo-Darwinism. Great! Significant! Important! Relevant! The point however is that you overlook that:

11. **neo-Darwinism is not the same as Common Descent.**

So **Common Descent** is not refuted by refuting neo-Darwinism (5). This is obvious from the fact that Charles Darwin did not invent "neo-Darwinism". Neo-Darwinism ('The Evolutionary Synthesis') was constructed between 1930-1950. Darwin published his *Origin* in 1859. So Darwin had a point independent of neo-Darwinism. A point well understood and accepted by the majority of his contemporaries. Darwin had a point even without natural selection. Darwin had a point although his theory of inheritance was wrong (that was the reason 'a new synthesis' was needed). In fact Darwin had five theories! To disentangle these five theories, Mayr's *The Growth of Biological Thought* (1) is obligatory reading.

Neo-Darwinism is about **mechanism(s)**. Evolution and CD are about the million species and the pattern of similarities/continuities and dissimilarities/discontinuities they display. The principle of **Common Descent** is independent of the *mechanism* of evolution. CD without a mechanism would be less convincing, but it still is a breath-taking revolutionary idea in the history of biology. CD is the most parsimonious explanation for the existence of all the current and extinct millions of species and their properties, including humans. There is no rival principle equal in force, internal consistency and coherence (3). Alternatives such as most creationist variants are hybrids between 'creation' and 'micro-evolution'. That means a lot of creation mixed with a little bit of 'micro-evolution'. That takes me to:

12. **There is no such a thing as 'half Common Descent' of life**

It's all or nothing. You cannot throw the origin of 365 species out of biology and transform them into theology. This violating the primary observation of biology. You can neither throw out the origin of the rest of the million of species out of biology, because species are species. If one species is created, why not all species? Please give me the list of those 365 species. More important however is that where-ever you draw the line, the line will separate organisms with fundamental genetic similarities. Even your 365 Torah-species will have extensive genetic similarities (genes and chromosomes and anatomy). The consequence of any arbitrary separation will be that **identical** and **similar** genes will have to be created again and again out of nothing, from scratch.

Anyway life on Earth is a whole, a unity because of the identical genetic code (discovered in the sixties) of all life (see for a short description: [review of Remine](#)). The parsimony explanation (see for a short description of the parsimony principle: [review of Henry Gee](#)) and unity of all life taken together are sufficient to accept Common Descent of all life on Earth. Everybody who rejects CD faces a huge

organisms should (unnecessarily) have exactly the same 4 DNA bases; why (unnecessarily) exactly the same helix structure of their DNA. I am glad that I don't have to explain the consequences of a rejection of CD. A creationist has to explain all this. That's why my questions (in my previous reply) **are** relevant:

- Do all birds have Common Descent? If not, where to draw the line?
- The same question for mammals.
- The same question for vertebrates.
- The same question for animals.

Why do humans and apes have so many unnecessary similarities if not by Common Descent? Any theory that does not explain the million species on Earth, is incomplete. So if you don't have a theory *within the domain of science* to explain the million of species, you fail.

Aside:

Another misunderstanding/disagreement is about Common Descent and the Origin of life. Fortunately (for you) Common Descent has neither anything to do with the origin of life, nor anything with "naturalism". Your idea that

13. "Common Descent is an attempt to account for the natural origin of life" [[Spetner, 24 Jan 01](#)]

is wrong because CD explains all life from the first life, so *assumes* the first life. Darwinism and neo-Darwinism do not explain the origin of life, which is a separate issue on the borderline of biology and chemistry. You should not mix up CD with the origin of life. That destroys one objection to CD. Neither is there a direct relation of Common Descent with naturalism (6):

14. the contention "life is the result of purely natural processes" [[Spetner, 31 Aug 00](#)]

CD primary says that all life is physically, genetically and historically connected. For example all humans share a common ancestor. That destroys another objection to CD.
End of aside.

The point of all this is to distinguish CD from neo-Darwinism, and to point out the basic observation in biology that has to be explained.

I stop here for the moment. I do have a couple of other urgent questions for you, but I think it is wise to keep them for the next time. The issues in this letter needed to be addressed first, in order to make any progress in our discussion. All is serious, relevant and honest. I hope I will learn from your reply soon.

Sincerely,
Gert Korthof

Notes:

1. Ernst Mayr(1982) *The Growth of Biological Thought*, page 505-510. The Belknap Press of HUP.
2. "There could quite easily be twenty million species alive today, and the number of extinct species must run into the hundreds of millions, if not billions". Simon Conway Morris(1999) *The Crucible of Creation*, page 1.
3. Common Descent is a powerful unifying principle in biology. See: Betty Smocovitis(1996) *Unifying Biology. The Evolutionary Synthesis and Evolutionary Biology*.
4. Robert M. Frost, Southern Geomatics Inc, pointed out that continental drift *has been observed* and is monitored regularly through the International GPS Service. Interesting on its own, the most

interesting part, and analogous with the micro/macro-evolution issue, is the extrapolation to geographic positions millions of years ago.

5. Michael Behe, biochemist and Intelligent Creationist, author of *Darwin's Black Box*(1996), attacks the neo-Darwinistic mechanism of evolution (there is no step-by-step route to Irreducibly Complex systems), but at the same time states: "I believe the evidence strongly supports common descent" (page 176).
6. I now believe that there is a strong connection between common descent and naturalism. Since common descent claims a uninterrupted chain of generations from the first form(s) of life to all living species, there is no place for supernatural interventions, which would disrupt the chain. [added 12 Dec 2002]

Postscript: Footnotes 2-6 have been added after 23 May 2001.

I am still waiting for Spetner's reply. I contacted him a few times. [5 Aug 2002]

I waited now for more than 1,5 year and no response from Spetner. I conclude without hesitation that Spetner has no answer. [added 12 Dec 2002]

korthof@wasdarwinwrong.com	home: www.wasdarwinwrong.com	http://home.planet.nl/~gkorthof/kortho36b.htm
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