

Wolfe, Dollo and Evolution

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 05 Jun 1998

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Robert Borski — 05 Jun 1998, 17:34

To Mark Millman:

Thank you for presenting the Lamarkian position, and nicely so at that--now I don't have to do it.

I do think however some discussion of Dollo's Law needs to take place, because it's crucial to an understanding of FIFTH HEAD in several senses.

I'm therefore enclosing my Dollo's Law entry from CAVE CANEM:

Dollo's Law: an actual tenet of evolutionary theory, formulated by the Belgian biologist Louis Dollo (1857-1931), also known as the Law of Irreversible Evolution. It basically states that organisms cannot re-evolve along lost pathways, but must (because the same fortuitous train of mutational events, being totally random, will never repeat) find alternate routes. Whales, in other words, will never again walk on land with re-evolved pelvic appendages that derive from the current remnant structures that correspond in us to legs. They *might* however evolve appendages that derive from other biological provenance--especially if there were some pressure to do so, say, if the oceans began to dry up. While various non-Darwinian theorists have attempted to use Dollo to promote their cause, Dollo was simply seeking to explain convergence of form in diverse species (e.g., ichthyosaurs, dolphins, fish). Note, however, Wolfe uses Dollo correctly.

VRT subsequently uses Dollo's Law to explain how he learns to use a pencil, but it also plays an important role in decoding one of Number Five's dreams (I, 42). In the dream, Number Five is imprisoned in a courtyard, the paving stones of which are mortuary tablets featuring the names of his ancestors (a church like this exists in Port-Mimizon and it is probably where most of Number Five's family is buried), and with columns too narrowly spaced together for him to squeeze through. There are words written on the columns, but only one of them is discernable: carapace. As Wolfe makes sure to tell us in V.R.T, Dollo's Law is based on the study of fossilized turtle carapaces. Thus the dream combines elements of stasis, death and unattainable goals; possibly also implying that the various Wolfe clones, having forsaken their consciences, can never reacquire them.

Lupines interested in reading more about evolutionary theory might also pick up any of Stephen Jay Gould's fine work, usually found in most libraries. He does go down smoother, however, if you'd had at least some biology beyond the high school level.

Hey, at least our version of Maitre isn't a creationist!

Robert Borski