

Lamarck, Lysenko, Darwin, and Christ

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 08 Jun 1998

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Dan'I Danehy Oakes — 08 Jun 1998, 09:19

Hi --

One possible reason for Wolfe's holding to (some version of) Lamarckian evolution is (the Catholic version of) Christian theology. It is absolutely central to (Catholic) Christian dogma that each and every one of us inherits from our first ancestors an acquired characteristic, that characteristic being "original sin," the result of disobedience, the Fall.

Incidentally, I also hold to (a modified form of) Lamarckism -- and not only because of Catholic teaching, but also simple common sense. Wolfe, here and there, tells an evolutionary fable about birds learning to build nests. I don't know what I think of that, but I sure as hell do know that each of us has a whole lot of inherited characteristics, which were not passed on to us through our parents genes, but rather through their "memes" (to borrow Richard Dawkins' semi-useful term) -- through language and culture.

Once upon a time someone found out how to keep a fire under control in their cave or hut or whatever; this knowledge has been passed down and, indeed, has itself evolved until carefully-controlled fires run our planes, trains, and automobiles. But "controlling fire" is an acquired characteristic, and one that each new generation has to acquire -- but our acquisition is heritable, because we bypass genetic heritage and pass it on through the extrabiological matrix of culture, language, etc.

The same holds true, to a lesser extent, for many prelinguistic animals -- cats and birds can readily be seen teaching their offspring how to perform various survival-oriented activities. They, we, inherit the ability to teach and to be taught, but the actual content of the teaching, the extrabiological inheritance, is inherited but always acquired.

Zat make sense?

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Oracle World-Wide Education	Is it all right to shout
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