

Wolfe's Lamarckism

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 14 Jun 1998

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adam louis stephanides — 14 Jun 1998, 13:58

On Fri, 5 Jun 1998 Craig Christensen wrote:

Maybe you can explain why Wolfe defends Lamarckism (explicitly and implicitly), but never really explains why.

and, I've read the same thing elsewhere in the archives. Could you point me to some examples of this? I'd like to read those over.

A couple of examples I've recently come across:

In CASTLE OF DAYS, p. 225, he explicitly states his belief in Lamarckism.

In URTH OF THE NEW SUN there's a brief passage that seems most easily explained Lamarckially (Lamarckianally?): "On Urth, the mystes know that each continent has its own pattern for mankind, so that if people from one shift their abode to another, they will in a short time--fifty generations or so--come to resemble the original inhabitants." (73 of hardcover)

--Adam

m.driussi — 14 Jun 1998, 19:46 · follows adam louis stephanides

So attempts to link "racial" characteristics to geographical details ("Caucasians are pale because they lived in caves and/or dark forests"; "Asians have a yellowish skin because of the yellow sands of the Gobi Desert"; "Tropical people are dark skinned in response to greater influx of sunlight year round") amounts to Lamarckism? Hmmm.

As opposed to something like, "The pale mutant by chance wandered off that way, into Europe by way of Central Asia, the reddish mutant went that way, into the Americas by way of Alaska, the yellowish mutant went . . . etc."? Is this form (a sort of Neo-Noah scenario) then "Darwinism"? (No, I'm not trying to open the debate on "single human/hominid genesis" versus "multiple location human/hominid genesis"!)

But I thought that the English moths of Industrial England were always cited as textbook examples of evolutionary process? That is, when the environment changed (through sooty pollution, in this case), some moths had camouflage and some moths didn't--those that did, survived, until all remaining population (or majority, at least) had the same advantage. Then when pollution was reduced, the process reversed itself.

=mantis=

adam louis stephanides — 15 Jun 1998, 12:12 · follows m.driussi

On Sun, 14 Jun 1998 mantis wrote:

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No, saying that the process would be complete within fifty generations seems to me most easily explained by Lamarckism. I don't believe that natural selection alone would operate that quickly in this case.

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But in the case of the moths, the selection pressures were a lot stronger--those who didn't have camouflage got eaten--so the changeover was much more rapid.

--Adam