

There is a better explanation than evolution

If there is an intelligent designer, then the only question is why and how did he design the different species?

The option of designing

Our basic question is, how can we explain the diversity of living entities? Did ignorant matter develop into different living entities on its own, or did a transcendental intellect beyond matter determine in advance the form and behavioral characteristics of living entities? The theory of intelligent design presumes that an intelligence – far more sophisticated than ours – has beforehand designed all the functioning of the living world (from the tiniest particles of molecular biology to complex food-chains). In compliance with this theory the living world did not gradually evolve to its present state, but came into existence by the implementation of an original, organic “design”.

In the case that a higher intelligence played a role in the formation of our surrounding world, then eventually, we can learn quite little about this intelligence and its creative process based on perception and observation. Scientific tools and instruments, observations, researches, experiments and logical conclusions are very much helpful to understand the functioning of the discernible world; however, they cannot give reliable, definitive answers to questions concerning the origin of the world and of pre-organisms.

Answers from the past

In the great cultures of humanity, peoples world perception and morality was specified by holy scriptures. All these scriptures are on the same opinion that the world has an individual, intelligent source. On the Indian subcontinent, Vedic scriptures like the Puranas, the Upanishads and other Sanskrit writings played a major role in forming the mentality of the people. Followers of the Vedic scriptures accept these writings as divine revelation, knowledge that comes from a superior source. In any case, it may be interesting to learn some of the viewpoints of these writings concerning issues that go beyond the limits of sense perception.

In what follows, we would like to introduce the Indian, or rather Vedic approach to the origin of life and what the aim of existence is. To do this we have principally relied on the books of the Indian monk and spiritual teacher A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who has presented this profound philosophy to the western public in a very easy to understand way in his almost sixty volumes of books written in the 1960's and 70's. Vedic literature describes scientific, moral and metaphysical topics in great thoroughness and length, which is truly unique in the cultural history of the entire humankind. At the same time the Vedic scriptures offer a logical alternative to the presently prevailing theory of evolution.

Build of living entities

Texts of Vedic literature do not merely speak of different biological forms, but also about the very essence of all living entities: the soul. Moreover, they mention the mind as well, which acts as a mediator between the soul and body. Every living entity is an eternal individual of transcendental nature. This real identity of the living entities that is independent from matter is called the soul, or in Sanskrit, atman. One of the most well-known and respected writings of India, the Bhagavad-Gita, which is also widely-known to the world, gives a description of the soul's characteristics in detail. For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time, thus he has not come into being and does not perish – not even when the body is slain. One of the inseparable characteristics of the soul is that it is conscious; it perceives the world surrounding him. It can have a connection with loads of material bodies, but this situation is only temporary: for some time it pervades with consciousness a particular transitional body, like the Sun's rays pervade the universe, but one day the soul migrates from that body and continues to exist independently without that previously abandoned body.

According to the Vedic approach, life itself is the characteristic of the soul and as long as the soul is present in a particular material body, that body seems to be a living one. Only because the soul is present in a body, the living entity is capable of stimulus perceiving and reacting accordingly. Without the soul the body merely remains a lifeless corpse. Nowadays, near death experiences also refer to the separated nature of body and consciousness, during which people have out-of-body experience and perception beyond material senses.

There is an identical soul in all animal and plant species, just like there is in human bodies. Therefore, a real sage, by virtue of true spiritual knowledge, sees with equal vision a lowborn person, a cow, an elephant, or a dog, in other words each and every living entity.

Besides the body and spirit soul Vedic literatures speak of the mind as well, which is a subtle manifestation of matter. The mind is a storehouse of the thoughts, emotions and intentions of the living entities. Our thoughts are not the results of mysterious linking processes that take place among different brain cells, but come into existence on a higher, more subtle level. The brain is only a secondary mediator, which transmits orders originating from the soul and mind to the body. All living entities of our world consist of three components: (1) the physical body, constructed from cells, (2) the more subtle mind, (3) and the non-material soul of transcendental nature.

Journey through bodies

An essential part of the Indian way of thinking is the doctrine of reincarnation. Bodies of living entities go through numerous changes, like birth, growth, duration, reproduction, then dwindling, and finally vanishing. The embodied spirit soul continuously “migrates” even in this material body from boyhood to youth, then to old age. At the end of all these bodily changes, the atman migrates to another body after death comes – nevertheless it remains that same personality. As the metaphor of Bhagavad-Gita states: living entities or spirit souls give up their old and useless material bodies, just like a person puts on new garments, after giving up the old ones.

In this cycle of reincarnation, besides human beings, animals as well as plants are also affected. Since the very first second of their earthly existence all souls are compelled to wear bodily costumes. During their journeys they exist in different material bodies, one life after the other. Gradually, after a large number of births as plants and animals, they advance to the human form of life.

The Padma Purana gives an accurate classification concerning the number of different living entities (quasi: species) of the universe. There are nine hundred thousand kinds of aquatics, two million plants, one million one hundred thousand insects and reptiles, one million kinds of birds, three million quadruples and four hundred thousand human forms. By adding up all these numbers the total makes eight million four hundred thousand living entities which populate the entire universe. In accordance with the Vedic taxonomy, the number of these living entities neither increases, nor decreases. If any of these species become extinct somewhere, they come into existence in some other part of the universe.

Biological forms do not change their basic build through millions of years, but – as determined ‘constructions’ – provide space (i.e. bodily forms) for those souls who are getting to that specific level of existence. From a biological point of view, species do not change, do not transform into other species, but exist parallel to each other since time immemorial. According to the Vedic approach the evolutionary process as described by the modern theory of evolution, never took place. However, the soul gets onto higher levels during which it acquires the bodies of more and more complex living entities. Nonetheless, this is not the development of different bodily forms, but the advancement of self-consciousness, what we can also call: ‘spiritual evolution’.

Thus, through the process of reincarnation the soul that has come to lower levels of existence, being in a state of complete ignorance, gradually gets onto more and more advanced levels of consciousness. In this way its intellect broadens and from darkness it moves towards light, towards human consciousness.

Origin – a descending one

With good reason the question may arise: if biological forms did not come into existence by the self-structuring of matter, that is, not by evolution, then how did they manifest? Here we give a summary of the answer of Vedic philosophy to this particular question.

We can describe the process of materialization, the souls' acquiring of biological bodies as inverse evolution, or devolution. The naming refers to the point that the direction of the process of evolution is absolutely opposite compared to what the well-known Darwinian interpretation assumes. Darwin thought that more complex living entities evolved from less complex ones through cumulative changes that gradually took place during tens of thousands of millennia. According to the theory of Vedic devolution all this happened in a totally reversed way. Body-frames present in our world come into being with the help of more complex living entities by the process of gradual simplification.

The Vedic approach is a theistic one, which accepts an individual God as the source of universe and living beings. The very first element of this 'devolutionary' line is exactly this Supreme Being. In compliance with the holy scriptures of India this prime Being exists eternally and independently from everything else, which is inconceivable for the restrained mind of the materially conditioned human being.

The devolution theory of Vaishnavism, which is based on the doctrines of Vedic scriptures, starts out with an individual Supreme Being who has unlimited potency and abilities. He has been given lots of names in compliance with His qualities, for instance Isvara: the Supreme controller, Krishna: the all-attractive, Bhagavan: proprietor of all opulence. This person, in His unique and peerless position, sets in motion the evolutionary process of the material world by emanating a personal expansion from Himself, His own replica. This expansion of His is in a subordinate position in comparison to Him, but still has omnipotent potency. This expansion called Vishnu continues to originate material universes. Vishnu who exists beyond the boundaries of our limited world expands another person from Himself and he is called Brahma. Brahma, 'the created creator' has the task to populate the different planets of the universe with various living entities.

According to Vedic cosmology the beginning and annihilation of the world is a cyclic process. Every destruction is followed by a new beginning, every creation ends with annihilation – unendingly. The material realm exists between the time period of creation and annihilation, plus this period lasts for three hundred billion years. It is Brahma's task to create all the eight million four hundred thousand forms of living entities and in this way provide a chance to all those souls who became disembodied at the time of the previous destruction to obtain another material body. However, not even Brahma acts solely and directly to create all the species, but has intermediary agents to accomplish this task.

Brahma has extraordinarily complex knowledge as he has in his mind the structure of all the living entities of the universe. At the same time, he is able to create offspring in a non-biological way (i.e. not sexually), merely from the potency of his mind.

Descendants of Brahma are called Prajapatis, 'forefathers' and that refers to the fact that it is due to them that the universe is filled with living entities. These descendants of Brahma are beings who have special qualities (in comparison to men), but they are not equivalent with him. Prajapatis have a special quality to give birth to such living entities that are different from their own species. This seems controversial to us, since in our own experience living entities are only capable of giving birth to similar living beings. Nonetheless, thanks to our present knowledge of genetics we are aware that the forms of living beings are

mostly determined by the structure of genetic information. Furthermore, genetic manipulation has proven that with conscious interference this information can be altered as well. In pursuance of Vedic description there are living entities in our universe, which carry within themselves the capacity to give birth to species that are different from their own kind.

To sum up, the plans and designations considering the build and other characteristics of different living entities originally derive from the Supreme Being, who empowered Brahma with all this knowledge. Brahma handed over that knowledge to his own children as well as the capacity to create various species. Thus, it is due to the Prajapatis that the eight million four hundred thousand living beings are called into existence in the universe. Therefore, the process of progeneration of living beings makes progression in the way of simplification.

According to Vedic scriptures all souls originate from a perfect, eternal spiritual realm that they have abandoned because of their wrong decision. They have desired to become acquainted with the material world and to find pleasure in it. Putting on material bodies one after the other makes it possible for the soul to experience the happiness and distress of mundane life in the most diversified ways. Reaching the human form of life the soul gets an opportunity for liberation from the bondage of the material world. Souls following the instructions of Vedic scriptures can be purified in one human lifetime and after regaining their love of the Supreme Being they can get back into His association, into the variegated and blissful abode of eternity.

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