

Harvard Theological Review

<http://journals.cambridge.org/HTR>

Additional services for *Harvard Theological Review*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



Does Evolutionary Philosophy offer any Constructive Argument for the Reality of God?

Thomas W. Galloway

Harvard Theological Review / Volume 3 / Issue 04 / October 2010, pp 500 - 510
DOI: 10.1017/S0017816000014802, Published online: 03 November 2011

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0017816000014802

How to cite this article:

Thomas W. Galloway (2010). Does Evolutionary Philosophy offer any Constructive Argument for the Reality of God?. Harvard Theological Review, 3, pp 500-510 doi:10.1017/S0017816000014802

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

*DOES EVOLUTIONARY PHILOSOPHY OFFER ANY
CONSTRUCTIVE ARGUMENT FOR THE REALITY
OF GOD?*

THOMAS W. GALLOWAY

JAMES MILLIKIN UNIVERSITY, DECATUR, ILLINOIS

The doctrine of the evolution or gradual development of organisms has had a most interesting history in recent years. In speculative philosophy, as is well known, the evolutionary conception is by no means new. The work of Darwin and his immediate predecessors and successors has given it a definiteness, however, and a backing of facts which have since kept it in the forefront of thought.

Because it is a direct blow at arbitrary and supernaturalistic explanations and exalts orderliness as the supreme law of procedure, it has been deemed by many thinkers to be essentially atheistic and irreligious. Much of the early polemic literature raged about this point. Out of this debate gradually emerged the conclusion that the process of evolution and the theory of development do not contribute in any way, either favorably or unfavorably, to the solution of the question as to the possible existence of God, and to the validity of the higher spiritual aspirations of man. It has been realized that evolution can, in the nature of the case, have nothing to say as to ultimate origins, and it has therefore been concluded that it can neither be theistic nor atheistic, but must be merely agnostic. The view of the majority of thoughtful men on the subject today probably is, that the religious problems stand on the whole about where they did before the wide acceptance of the evolutionary doctrine; that religious views are, after all, purely a matter of philosophy, and as such take us back of the point where evolution must begin.

It has come to be frankly allowed that a man may be an evolutionist and at the same time believe in a theistic solution of the universe. Only in relatively recent years, however, is it appear-

ing that the evolutionary philosophy has something constructive to offer regarding the higher human qualities and the religious impulses.

In the mean time the fundamental principles of organic evolution have been applied to all departments of human knowledge and interests, with the result that the whole realm of knowledge has gained a significance and unity which it has never had under any other assumption. Our mental qualities and knowledge, our spiritual states and development, our habits, our social organization and customs, history, literature, religion, interpreted from the evolutionary point of view, receive a great illumination which is very satisfying to the rational quality in man. Such rational satisfaction is usually taken to mean truth, so far as we are able to measure truth. In the light of these facts it is desirable that we attempt to determine whether the doctrine of evolution and the scientific method can make any constructive contribution to the great religious questions of the ages, which are at bottom philosophical questions.

The most significant conclusions of the evolutionist are very simple, and of manifest truth. They are that organisms are plastic and variable; that some elements in the environment have great influence in modifying life and others have not; that many individuals and many types of organisms are eliminated because their variations are not in accordance with the needs of the organism as determined by the environment; that, in the long run, only those will persist, develop, and flourish whose structures and actions bring them into accordance with at least those factors of the environment which are of most moment to life. The result of this process must ultimately be a more or less close adjustment of the qualities of organisms to their surroundings. This adjustment, achieved by purely natural evolutionary processes, is called *adaptation*. Adaptation, in an evolutionary sense, means more than mere harmony, mere correspondence. It means that the environment is the moulding influence; that the organism is the thing moulded. It means that the course of evolution is, on last analysis, determined by the environment rather than by an internal arbitrary principle of development.

This principle of adaptation exalts the environment to its

proper place. Our philosophy has exalted the individual, forgetting that the present individual is the product of the environment working upon earlier simpler personal endowments; and so, back to the simplest point of beginning. It is necessary to exalt the individual so long as we are thinking primarily of the *interpreting* process. So soon as we begin to examine the process whereby the present interpreter has reached the point where he may interpret, and to discover why he may rightly interpret, it is uniformly found that greater and greater significance attaches to the action of the environment. This is the great contribution which modern biology has made to the philosophy of life:—while the environment alone may not produce life, all evolution must be in fundamental accordance with the potent realities in the environment; whatever furnishes the original impetus in organisms, the environment limits and guides the direction of progress.

We mean by environment, broadly, all the conditions, things, forces, and influences which act in such a way upon organisms as to cause them to respond by motion, by growth, or by any change which makes the organism different from what it would have been without their action. Through the continuous interaction of organism and environment, the organisms must of necessity become fitted or adjusted to the vital factors of the surroundings. The organism thus comes to have the environment, in a way, worked into the texture of its personality. Its personality must accord with the potent realities. No important external force or agency can long influence life without living things coming to show in their character the particular results of this element. On the other hand, no quality in organisms will arise, persist, become generally prevalent, and be the subject of further evolutionary development, unless it is in some way related to an influence in the total environment of the organism adequate to produce or preserve that particular personal quality, by making it useful.

The genuine evolutionist of the present day must then be a realist, and he cannot be far removed from the realism of the plain man, who is neither scientist nor philosopher, but a mixture of both. No evolutionist has ever been able to escape the recognition that all evolution involves the interaction of two equally

genuine sets of elements,—the internal and the external. This is just as true when he considers the evolution of forms lower than himself as when he considers his own personal evolution. He cannot escape the conclusion, as an evolutionist, that both his *selfhood* and the environing *not-self* are equally real, and furthermore, for all practical purposes, essentially as they appear to be. No consistent general evolutionist can deny the reality of the self nor the consciousness of self; the reality of the environment nor the consciousness of the environment. The selfhood of the self and the genuineness of things-in-themselves are exactly upon the same evolutionary plane. Theoretically, as judgments, they are of equal validity to the evolutionist. Existentially, he has no ground for giving one a standing above the other. In the denial of either he necessarily negatives the whole scientific procedure, and equally all that knowledge, whether of the self or of the not-self, by which he makes the denial.

It is entirely competent for the idealist, who considers the seeming external reality to be merely states of consciousness, to deny that there is any genuine evolution,—however impossible it would be for him to explain the progressive character of even those mental states which he recognizes; but it is wholly impossible for the consistent believer in the doctrine of organic evolution not to recognize both the self and the not-self, the individual and his environment, and the indissoluble and efficient relation which exists between the two.

Assuming, then, that things internal and external to the self are essentially as they seem to be; that the basal principle of organic evolution is correct,—namely, that the environment has the power of guiding evolution through its selective effect upon the responses, the desires, and the unconscious and conscious choices of organisms; and that all organic qualities therefore come to be marks and indices of certain real and adequate environmental agencies whose long action has made the qualities of survival value,—the scientist has succeeded in finding a satisfying reason *why* things should appear to the individual essentially as they are. No other form of philosophy has even remotely accomplished this in such a way as to satisfy reason.

The evolutionist does not—or should not—claim that the principle of natural organic evolution really solves any ultimate philosophical difficulty. It cannot explain the ultimate origin of anything. It must allow in the first beginning of which it can take any cognizance all the possibilities of the very latest manifestations. It cannot explain the fact of causation which it assumes. It cannot directly predicate or deny teleology, except by analogy. It does, however, aid tremendously in illuminating processes and relations,—which are after all our only known clew to the meaning of our personality and the validity of the whole process whereby that personality receives or rejects a presentation as true.

The present qualities of man, including his power of interpreting the universe, must have belonged to his remotest ancestor, or must have come by the interaction of the whole succession of personalities and the whole efficient environment. If they were originally in the individual himself, evolutionary philosophy throws no more light on the situation than the most arbitrary supernaturalistic interpretation. If the adjustment is the result of the compelling effect of the environment upon a plastic organism, and organisms come progressively into better and better adaptation to all the vital forces of the environment, the organism becomes, in all its basal structures, instincts, processes, habits, ideals, a progressive revelation of the reality and nature of the environment.

If, then, man is, in his whole nature, physical, mental, social, moral, and spiritual, the product of the evolutionary process; if the fundamental physiological qualities have gradually given rise, by perfection and selection, to sensation and ordered response; if from these consciousness has gradually come, bringing in its train memory, desire, reason, purpose, choice; if, from the simplest social relations, the sense of kind—using the personal qualities mentioned above—has produced the present social instincts, organization, codes, and moral standards; if his spiritual and religious nature, impulses, ideals, and standards are the evolutionary outcome of the synthesis and development of all the lower qualities; if at every step of this evolution the direction of it is controlled by the efficient power of the environmental reali-

ties,—then, all of these qualities—which can be shown to be generally possessed by mankind, to be persistent and even increasing in their efficient effect upon conduct, and to be of large survival utility—are adaptations to something *real* in the environment and *adequate* to have given them their value. The environment of organisms, in order to produce or preserve organic qualities, must be made up of factors of a grade and of a significance to life which would enable it to do this work.

For example, tactile stimuli in the environment could never have given rise to the eye nor to its sense of sight. Only the existence of light as an environmental reality having a profound influence upon life could account for the origin and useful persistence of the eye. On the other hand, light waves could never have produced, nor have selected after it had arisen, the sense of thirst nor the desire for water. Only the real existence of water, as a constant and powerful modifier of life, can produce and develop the racial thirst for water. None of the physical agents, alone or in conjunction, could have given rise to the consciousness of self. Only the reality of the self, as separate from and yet related to these agents, could have produced it. Nothing but the reality of organisms, like the self and yet different from the self, and the actual contacts between the self and them, could have produced a consciousness of kind and through it have given rise to the whole mass of social instincts of the individual. Nothing but actual reproduction and actual offspring could produce parental care of offspring and the organization of the home and all the elements of sympathy and sacrifice related thereto. None of these things mentioned could account for the power of reasoning, the sense of orderliness, the logical faculty in man, on an evolutionary assumption. Nothing short of real orderliness, efficient in its conditioning power upon life and conduct, could so control evolution as to produce a sense of orderliness, and that respect for it in the very structure of personality which we call reason. If the environment determines the course of evolution and thus has a vetoing power on organic possessions, human reason and human conclusions must, in the long run, be in accordance with truth. The very ground-structure of human reason is the reality and efficient orderliness of those environmental proc-

esses which have made reason and inference a means of survival and success.

Idealistic philosophy has long said, "There is a seeming harmony between an external objective world and personal consciousness as related to that world; but there is no possible way of knowing whether there is such a real world external to consciousness; nor, if there is such a world, can its real nature be known." Evolution says that if consciousness in man is an evolutionary product, actually developed by the action of an external world upon developing consciousness in organisms, such correspondence is inevitable and necessarily appreciable, and that the nature of this real environment must necessarily come, sooner or later, and come correctly into the ken of that consciousness.

Idealistic philosophy says, "There seems to be real and adequate causation. It seems to be true that certain conditions actually produce certain other conditions." But philosophy allows the question, "Is this anything more than a sequence? Is there necessarily any causation?" And it is unable to answer the question. Evolution says, "The idea of causation is itself a product. It is the result of race experience. It is unquestionably of survival value as a guide to conduct. It is therefore a genuine adaptation, and as such is an expression of reality. It has an adjusting value upon conduct; but it could not adjust an organism and make it successful in a situation which did not really exist."

Similarly, philosophy says, "There seems to be a *sanity* about the general order of things. It commends itself to the human mind as reasonable in its broad outlines. It in some degree satisfies." But philosophy also says, "This may be only seeming; of course the mind will approve the order of a world of its own creating." The evolutionist says, "The world appears as it does because it has been acting upon the developing organisms so long and so powerfully that the nature of the organism reflects the history of the past; and thus the mind approves the universe because it is really a product of that universe and could not possibly have done otherwise and persist." The apparent sanity of the world-order is necessarily a result of an evolutionary process in which the evolving object becomes the interpreter of an effective environment.

This is a very different proposition from the philosophically barren "ontological" argument, which predicates the existence of objects of thought, including God, upon the mere idea of them. Evolution predicates the reality of environmental factors upon the development, the utility, the persistence, and the increase of elements of personality which, if of evolutionary origin, must have had adequate environmental conditions to give them point. The mere ability to formulate an idea does not make it true; but the practical utility of such an idea resulting in its general acceptance and its replacement of earlier and simpler ideas, its persistence in practice, its later development coupled with increasing utility,—indicate a harmony with reality and an existential efficiency in that reality. Philosophically, we are back of the point where we started.

The evolutionist cannot raise a question as to the sanity, from a human point of view, of the world-order; he deals with the reasons for that sanity. To the evolutionist, then, the ground of belief in the reality of the external universe and the essential sanity of the relation of the individual to that universe is found not by way of our belief in an arbitrarily preëstablished harmony; nor by way of innate ideas and intuitions; nor through a supernaturally acquired belief in a God who would not deceive us, but by way of, and because of, the organic codification of race experience in the persistent qualities of organisms,—because of the moulding effect of the environment upon every organism which presents itself as a candidate for selection. All human qualities which enable man to succeed by modifying conduct *must* be in accord with real and potent factors of the environment.

These conclusions are the commonplaces of our present evolutionary philosophy. They furnish a rationally satisfying unification of the processes and qualities mentioned. Are we in a position to apply the principles to the realm of ethics, morals, and religion? That depends wholly upon whether these latter qualities are evolutionary derivatives from those qualities which lie below and are known to be in adaptation to reality. Unless in some way consciousness of God and moral obligation are derived from consciousness of self, of environment, of kind, and of ideas related to these; unless religious instincts, habits, ideas,

and ideals are organically related to the rational and social instincts, ideas, and standards, as these in turn are related to the physiological, we are not at liberty to say that our study of natural history throws any light upon the higher human possessions. In that case, there is no analogy. If they have been created *de novo*, they may be, so far as we know, purely arbitrary, unrelated, and unreal.

According to the non-evolutionary philosophy the religious and moral qualities get their value and claim because of their supposed *separateness* from the other elements of our nature. To the evolutionist the evidences of the connection—the inseparable relation of the religious and spiritual to the social, mental, and physiological are the *ground* of our valuation and interpretation of the religious qualities. If religion and morals are a part of the series of evolutionary qualities, their interpretation is not arbitrary, but is, by the strongest possible analogy, the analogy of life itself, as really a fundamental adaptation to genuine, external, and adequate factors as is any other human quality.

Applying, then, our analogy to the moral and religious qualities, impulses, desires, ideas, and modes of consciousness, the following may be said of them:

1. They have had, and do have, much power in moulding conduct, through their influence on choice. They bring about the substitution of unselfish for selfish behavior; of sacrifice for struggle; of internal control, by standards, for external compulsion or indulgence; of action under sense of responsibility to God for responsibility to man or for irresponsibility; of "I ought" for "I desire" or "I am accustomed."

2. If they chronically modify individual conduct, they must influence evolution.

3. They could not possibly arise, persist, and become the subject of evolution (as they undoubtedly have become) unless they modified evolution in some favorable direction,—that is, unless they were useful to the organism.

4. They could not influence evolution favorably (as they undoubtedly have done) except by bringing the organism into what is, on the whole, more perfect or more catholic adjustment to the more important elements of its environment.

5. The possession of these qualities would not have brought the human organism into an adjustment to its total environment more perfect and satisfactory than that possessed by the organisms that had not achieved these characters, unless there were real and genuine factors in the environment which would make these new and high qualities of distinct evolutionary value.

6. Furthermore, in order to make the religious qualities of individuals of survival value to organisms, there must be elements in the total environment of a *grade* to produce and select the religious and spiritual elements of personality. No new impetus is gained by evolutionary philosophy. Physical evolution cannot carry the organism into an intellectual realm unless the intellectual permeates or accompanies the physical in the environment. Causation must be adequate. Only spiritual reality can give rise, in an evolved organism, to spiritual qualities of personality.

7. In the absence of the power directly to measure, in terms of the science based upon the physical senses, the external reality of a moral order of right and wrong; the real existence of sympathy and self-sacrifice as an integral part of the universe-order; the validity of the spiritual forces; the existence of God, and the like,—the principle of adaptation allows us to say, by the profoundest analogy which we are yet capable of applying to life, that nothing but the really immanent God could make behavior based on the consciousness of God of value in the development of human life; nothing but real right and wrong, outside of us, could rouse the consciousness of standards, which we call conscience; nothing but spiritual reality could make the spiritual nature an adaptation. Were intelligence, morality, righteousness, love, and God not at the heart of the universe and fundamentally potent in modifying and guiding life, they, or ideas of them, could not have appeared and have persisted in man as the crowning glory both of the development of life and of self-appreciation.

The evidential value of this line of argument—when applied to this new realm in which consciousness, reason, conscience, sense of God, and all the higher and more recent personal and social emotions and desires and responses play their part—is to

the effect that God is the most important factor in the total human environment; that he is constantly and effectively present in every part of it; that there is some way in which the personality of God is coming to make itself more perfectly and consciously felt by the human individual; that, while God has always been at the heart of the total environment, the organism had to reach a certain stage of personality himself before the sense of God as a personality could emerge; that, as the physical environment is mirrored in the nature of organisms, so the power and nature of God are being progressively mirrored—and for exactly the same reasons—in the nature of man. This is the evolutionary explanation of the deep philosophy which says that God made man in his own image. It is the ground for the hope that we shall be like him when we see him as he is. Evolution is thus a continuous self-revelation of God to man; a continuous and progressive incarnation of the environment, and hence of God as the dominant factor in the environment, in man.