

**HUMAN CREATIVITY:  
EVOLUTION OR BIBLICAL CREATION?**

**PAUL D. ACKERMAN  
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY  
THE WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY  
WICHITA, KANSAS 67208**

*We make, but thou art the creating core.  
Whatever thing I dream, invent, or feel,  
Thou art the heart of it, the atmosphere.*  
George MacDonald

**ABSTRACT**

The problem of accounting for human creativity in an evolutionist paradigm is examined. A variety of approaches are documented followed by a contrasting biblical-creation perspective. Examples of research evidence supportive of the biblical framework are explained. In sum, God-as-Creator and man-created-in-the-image-of-God are pivotal truths for providing an epistemology for meaningful human creativity.

**THE EVOLUTION FRAMEWORK: SIMPLE BEGETS COMPLEX**

In spite of great diversity all theories in psychology are founded on or at least accept Darwinian evolution. The evolutionist framework gives all psychological theories a common feature when it comes to explaining the origin and development of human psychological capabilities. The common feature is an insistence that complex functions develop from chance arrangements of relatively more simple ones. B. F. Skinner has stated the general applicability of the Darwin framework as a basic tenet of current scientific theorizing in all fields succinctly,

It is characteristic of the evolution of a species, as it is of the acquisition of behavior and of the evolution of a culture, that ineffective forms give rise to effective.(1)

This "simple begets complex" scheme is the defining principle of evolution which views the vast cosmic array as having originated from an explosion and subsequent collisions of hydrogen atoms 15 to 20 billion years ago. The colliding hydrogen atoms were jolted into more complex atoms which in turn collided to produce still more complex arrangements of matter until there were stars, galaxies, and planets. On at least one planet, random collisions between relatively simple elements continued to produce more complex forms until life appeared. Simple life systems evolved into more complex ones through internal random fluctuations selected for by environmental suitability ("survival of the fittest") until intelligent life appeared. On planet earth, man is the current pinnacle of this process, at least in terms of intelligence and creativity.

Within psychology, all theoretical explanations respect this simple-to-complex framework. For example, theories of language origin in mankind start with the grunts, squeaks, and howls of relatively simple animal communication.(2) Evolutionists theorize that later, after humans discovered fire and therefore sat around looking at each other face to face each night with nothing else to do, the primitive communication system of grunts and gestures evolved upward to the complex language of the present day.(3) Such speculation is contrary to the scientific and historical evidence.(4) Observations of animal communication reveal no spontaneous tendency to evolve upward; the earliest known languages and languages of so-called primitive people today are, if anything, more complex than their modern or civilized human counterparts;(5) and studies of languages over time reveal that they tend to simplify rather than become more complex.

The evolution of language, at least within the historical period, is a story of progressive simplification.(6)

In a similar mode of simple to complex evolution, the origin of human problem solving,

intelligence, and creativity is theorized to have started with simple reflexes and instinctual responses to specific stimuli. Over millions of years our ancestors somehow evolved the ability to inhibit or delay these automatic responses in the presence of their eliciting stimuli allowing for greater response diversity. This ability to postpone responses combined with increase memory storage and ability for generalizing and abstracting were the key evolutionary stepping stones in the origin of human intelligence and creativity.(7)

## **HUMAN CREATIVITY: WHAT IS ART FOR?**

An excellent illustration of how human creativity is handled in an evolutionist framework is Ellen Dissanayake's, WHAT IS ART FOR?. Of course, art must be explained in terms of biological usefulness. It must result from some activity that incurred a reproductive advantage on our primitive ancestors. Dissanayake points out that "some theorists... propose that human skill and creativity were originally developed through using and shaping objects to serve as weapons and implements".(8) Another possibility is that art has developed as a mechanism for coping with boredom. With increased intelligence and understanding there comes a point on the scale of life where the experience of boredom appears. Successfully coping with it through safe symbolic manipulation (art) might incur biological survival value on the species.(9) Recognizing the merit of these hypotheses, Dissanayake adds her explanation for art--"making special". "The beginning of art as a behavior can be said to lie in the tendency to make special or recognize specialness."(10) Dissanayake presumes that the tendency to make special would be an inherited predisposition, selected for according to Darwinian principles under which societies and individuals possessing the trait of "making things special" would survive better than those not possessing such a trait.

We can next consider how the behavior of "making special" might have arisen and what its selective advantage could have been. Evolutionists have puzzled over the selective value of the extravagant songs of birds, which would seem to be far more elaborate than necessary for simple transmission of information about species, sex, breeding condition, and so forth. Countless species convey these data in much simpler and equally effective ways. ...

Birds who sing longer or more elaborately than others could be super-advertising their territorial proprietorship, ... insistently demonstrating their vitality and intense interest in what they are communicating. ...

In a similar manner, making special (as, say, embellishing, repeating, or performing a particular act with virtuosity) might well have originated as a demonstration of the wish or need to persuade others (and oneself) of the efficacy or desirability of what was being done. Taking pains is a way of being more certain to achieve one's intention. ...

The fact of one's taking pains convinces others and oneself that the activity is worth doing: it is reinforcing. When allied to life-serving activities--tool manufacture, weaponry, ceremony--elaboration (as reinforcement) would enhance survivorship.(11)

In other words, "making special" shows others and yourself that you mean business, have a lot of vigor and energy, and are worth mating with.

## **Creativity In Its Evolved Form**

When it comes to the evolutionist understanding of human creativity in its current evolved state, one can look to how modern psychologists handle the topic. A good example of a scientific view of art from within the evolutionist framework can be seen in B. F. Skinner's consideration of poetry.

A person produces a poem and a woman produces a baby, and we call the person a poet and the woman a mother. Both are essential as loci in which vestiges of the past come together in certain combinations.

... I have been using a poem simply as an example. I could have developed the same theme in art, music, fiction, scholarship, science, invention--in short, wherever we speak of original behavior.

... If I deserve any credit at all, [for the presentation] it is simply for having served as a place in which certain processes could take place. I shall interpret your polite applause in that light.(12)

In other words, Skinner is saying that it is not really proper to say that a poet wrote a poem, but rather one should say that the poem (or "poeming") happened at the particular time and space location of the poet. Before that, of course, the poet happened as a result of a field of blind natural forces. For Skinner, the poet simply represents the focal point of a

time and space field-event particularly conducive to the occurrence of poems. In passing it should be noted that Skinner sees full well the link between his view of human creativity and the more fundamental issue of creation by God vs. evolution by chance.

For the second time in a little more than a century a theory of selection by consequences is threatening a traditional belief in a creative mind. And is it not rather strange that although we have abandoned that belief with respect to the creation of the world, we fight so desperately to preserve it with respect to the creation of a poem?(13)

Skinner is right, of course, but the knife cuts both ways: as it becomes increasingly apparent that the weight of scientific evidence renders all options ludicrous except "in the beginning God--with His creative mind--created the heavens and the earth," then the concept of a human creative mind gains credibility.

Most psychologists do not view the issue of human creativity as starkly as Skinner, but on analysis their notions boil down to the same evolutionist stock. Carl Rogers, for example, says essentially the same thing as Skinner:

My definition, then, of the creative process is that it is the emergence in action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the other.(14)

Relative to Skinner, Rogers is quite vague in his perspective on human creativity. To distance himself from the barrenness of Skinner's materialism while staying loyal to the evolutionist framework, Rogers has no alternative except to take recourse to some mystical or occult force inherent in man.

The mainspring of creativity appears to be the same tendency which we discover so deeply as the curative force in psychotherapy--man's tendency to actualize himself, to become his potentialities. By this I mean the directional trend which is evident in all organic and human life--the urge to expand, extend, develop, mature--the tendency to express and activate all the capacities of the organism, to the extent that such activation enhances the organism or the self.(15)

If an evolutionist is not comfortable with Skinner's stark materialism or Rogers' mysticism, the only option left is "vapory nonsense" as Dissanayake has called it. An excellent example of vapory nonsense is Abraham Maslow's definition of human creativity:

And since self-actualization or health must ultimately be defined as the coming to pass of the fullest humanness, or as the "Being" of the person, it is as if SA creativity were almost synonymous with, or a sine qua non aspect of, or a defining characteristic of, essential humanness.(16)

Now, from a scientific viewpoint, what does that mean? What is "fullest humanness?" In terms of the Bible and the God of the Bible one can understand "fullest humanness," because in Christ and the biblical revelation there is an objective frame of reference to define it. But apart from Scripture's objective--and absolute--framework, we can only have subjective opinion. Deny the Creator and you either lose the meaning of human creativity to materialist reductionism or to vapory nonsense.

Whatever the failure of modern social scientists in denying the biblically defined foundations of human creativity, there is no repressing it in the scientific efforts of the field's many practitioners. After a consideration of the biblical framework of understanding creativity, we will look at an example of creative research pointing the biblical view of man as intrinsically creative.

## **A BIBLICAL CREATION PERSPECTIVE ON HUMAN CREATIVITY**

"In the beginning God" and "man created in the image and likeness of God" are pivotal truths, and essential, foundational doctrines for understanding human creativity. We are created in the image and likeness of God; the first and one of the most frequent things the Bible tells us about God is that He is the Creator; therefore, one aspect of our creation in God's likeness is creativity.

Man is created in the image of the creator God and therefore takes joy in creativity and discovery about the world God has made. In order to be properly creative and correctly understand the discoveries God allows us to search out, we must remain faithful to his Word and commandments. If we are not faithful, we will not understand the world properly. To the extent social scientists ignore or deny God as Creator, they have problems with the concept of

human creativity. As man is faithful to God, he uncovers mysteries that cause him to glory in the wonder of God's creation. Scientific work becomes not only productive and a blessing to man, but a form of worship as well.

### **In God's Image: Joy Of Discovery**

God created us in his own image. He designed us in such a way that we can understand and enjoy the miracle of his creation. Interest in artistic expression, scientific discovery, and technological advance is central to our created identity. In God's image, we long to express ourselves, to know, and to understand. Consider the wonders of art and literature, and the performances of great actors, dancers, and musicians. One even finds creative genius in false philosophies and religions. Through science and technology, we seem to live in a world full of miracles. Man has created space ships, airplanes, artificial hearts, computers, air conditioners, light bulbs, and polio vaccine. The foundational Scripture for this creative productivity is Genesis 1:26-28 which reveals that man is created in the image of God and that God has commanded us to increase in number and to subdue and rule over the earth.

Scientific evidence in support of the biblical framework declaring creativity and joy of discovery as basic to our nature is found in the following, delightful experiments with little babies.(17) Psychologists now routinely recognize that infants in the first days of life can learn to perform simple responses in order to receive rewards. T.G.R. Bower taught babies to turn their head in order to receive a peek-a-boo from an adult. Other studies have shown that infants will learn to turn their head to the left or the right to receive a sweet, turn on a projector to give them something to look at, or make a mobile turn. One psychologist took this research a step farther by presenting infants with puzzles to solve.(18) The researcher wired a light to a switch-apparatus which infants could activate by turning their head to the right or left. The "puzzles" were defined by the direction or combination of head turns required to make the light come on. For example, infants might have to turn their head to the right to switch the light on. After they solved this puzzle and knew how to make the light come on whenever they wished, the rules would be changed so that only a left head-turn switched on the light. More and more complicated problems were presented until, for example, babies might have to learn that only a combination of two right head-turns followed by two left head-turns would switch on the light.

This research revealed that infants in the first months of life are not only able to solve puzzles like this, but they are intensely interested in and derive much pleasure from doing so. Once infants learn what combination of head-turns switch on a light, they show little interest in it and seldom make the head moves necessary to switch it on. It seems that the joy lies not in seeing the light but in the search for the solution to the mystery of how to control it. When the researcher changes the combination of head-turns required to switch on the light, the infant will discover this fact when they try the former solution and discover that it no longer works. When this happens there is a sudden burst of activity by the baby until he finds the new combination. At the moment of discovery when infants learn the new solution, they smile.

In the process of detecting a contingency the baby smiles vigorously. These smiles seem to be caused by discovery of the contingency and to manifest the pleasure that the baby feels at having successfully detected what to do to make a particular event happen. The smiling, in other words, indicates an intellectual pleasure, a pleasure at having discovered something about the causal structure of the world, and pleasure at being in control of some part of the world. . . . I think there is clear evidence that babies do derive great pleasure from problem solving, from intellectual mastery of some bit of their environment, from comprehension of some aspect of the causal structure of the world around them.(19)

What a joy to be that creature created in the image of God. Our dominion over the earth through science and technology and our dominion through the arts and humanities is not merely a matter of obedience to God's command in the Garden of Eden to subdue and rule over the earth.(20) It is a part of our created identity. It is also, for the believer, a part of our entering into the fullness of our Savior's joy.(21)

### **THE FRUIT OF REJECTING GOD AS CREATOR**

Ellen Myers has recently written about the devastating effects of God-rejecting evolutionism/humanism on man's creative activity in the arts and sciences.(22) First, God as the foundation of creativity is rejected. Then, the concept of human creativity degenerates as we saw above. Finally, the products of man's creativity are affected. In all areas of art we see a loss of purpose, plot and ethical meaning. In fiction and drama, heroes do not triumph over villains but the central characters are villains, rascals, or authority-rejecting "anti-heroes." In contemporary visual arts, music, and drama we see the promotion of meaninglessness, ugliness, absurdity, despair, profanity, pornography, drugs, the occult,

senseless violence, and suicide. Traditional values and institutions are subjected to unceasing satire and ridicule. Even as the craft and technology of modern art forms, especially music and film, have developed to an astounding level, their content and message have sunk lower and lower. In contemporary drama it is an extreme rarity to find any character depicted as having a stable, faithful and wholesome family life. It is virtually impossible to find a fictional family whose members are portrayed as kind, considerate, soft-spoken, and exhibiting simple good manners.

How have we fallen so deeply from the zenith of Western Christian art? It is because our modern society denies that man has been created in the image and likeness of the God of the Bible, and instead sees him as but another "evolved" animal. Thus his goal is not restoration in God's image and likeness and preparation for eternity with God and Christ. His "recreational needs" which have become his only artistic rationale reject the artistic portrayal of purity, beauty, innocence, heroism, martyrdom, honesty, faithfulness, abiding love, worship and glory. Man reduced to animism only "needs" what animals need: eating, drinking and merrymaking before death (I Cor.15:32). Thus man the creator dies when he kills God the Creator in his heart and mind.(23)

Myers points out that the same decline and corruption of creativity can be expected in the sciences. As she documents, primarily on the basis of the work by science historian Stanley Jaki, modern science owes its existence and flowering to the culturally ingrained faith in the God of the Bible as a "personal orderly, trustworthy Creator and Sustainer."(24) To sum up, the scientific meaningfulness of human creativity as well as its products depend on God as the Creator Who made man in His own image and likeness.

## REFERENCES

1. Skinner, B.F., "A Lecture on 'Having' a Poem", CUMULATIVE RECORD: A COLLECTION OF PAPERS, Third Ed., Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York, NY, 1972, p.355.
2. Liebert, Robert M. & Neale, John M., "Cognitive Development", PSYCHOLOGY, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, NY, 1977, p.230.
3. This is Louis S. B. Leakey's view as expressed in dialogue with Robert Ardrey printed in PSYCHOLOGY TODAY, September 1972, p.73ff. See especially pp.75-76.
4. Morris, Henry M., "Language, Creation and the Inner Man," THE BATTLE FOR CREATION ACTS/FACTS/IMPACTS, Vol. 2, Ed. by Henry M. Morris & Duane Gish, Creation Life Publishers (now Master Books), P.O. Box 1606, El Cajon, CA 92022, pp.286-298.
5. Simpson, G. G., "The Biological Nature of Man," SCIENCE, Vol. 152, April 22, 1966, p.477. (cited in Morris, op cit, p.292)
6. Baugh, Albert C., A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. 1957, p.10. (cited in Morris, op cit, p.293)
7. Stenhouse, D., THE EVOLUTION OF INTELLIGENCE, Barnes & Noble Import, New York, 1974.
8. Dissanayake, E., WHAT IS ART FOR?, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1988, p.112.
9. Ibid., p.125.
10. Ibid., p.128.
11. Ibid., p.103-104
12. Skinner, B.F., op. cit., p.354-355.
13. Ibid., p.354
14. Rogers, Carl R., "Toward a Theory of Creativity", in C.R. Hausman, & A. Rothenberg, THE CREATIVITY QUESTION, Duke University Press, Durham, N.C., 1976, p.297.
15. Ibid., p.298.
16. Maslow, Abraham H., "Creativity in Self-Actualizing People", in A. Rothenberg, & C. R. Hausman, THE CREATIVITY QUESTION, Duke University Press, Durham, N.C., 1976, p.92.
17. Bower, T. G. R., A PRIMER OF INFANT DEVELOPMENT, W. H. Freeman and Company, San Francisco, 1977, pp. 42-45.
18. Ibid., pp. 43-44. The research in question was conducted by a Czech psychologist named H. Papousek. Details of Papousek's work may be found in H. Papousek, "Individual Variability in Learned Responses in Human Infants," in R. J. Robinson (Ed.), BRAIN AND EARLY BEHAVIOUR, Academic Press, London, 1969.
19. Ibid., pp. 42-43.
20. Genesis 1:26-28.
21. Matthew 25:14-23.
22. Myers, Ellen, "Biblical Creation and Society: Part II", A special issue of the CREATION SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES QUARTERLY, Vol. 12, No. 2, Winter 1989.
23. Ibid., in press.
24. Myers, Ellen, "Biblical Creation and Society: Part I", A special issue of the CREATION SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES QUARTERLY, Vol. 12, No. 1, Fall 1989, pp.40-44.

