

EDITORIAL

A MECHANISM FOR RAPID CHANGE?

In a highly recommended book¹ Del Ratzsch notes that creationists and evolutionists often criticize each other for positions that are more imagined than real. One of the most common misconceptions is the alleged creationist belief in fixity of species.² One may read dogmatic statements that creation theory cannot be true because Noah's ark could not hold all the species of beetles, etc. Such arguments seem misguided to many creationists. I doubt any creationist believes that the ark needed to hold 250,000 or more species of beetles. One reason this criticism seems misguided is that creation theory includes the expectation of change in species. Whether every species of beetle depended on the ark for survival is an interesting question that will not be pursued here.

The Bible includes several statements that indicate that change in species is to be expected. Genesis 3 records the story of the sin of Adam and Eve, followed by the curses pronounced on nature. As a result of those curses, the serpent was to crawl on its belly, and thorns and thistles would be produced. If these conditions already existed, they could not be attributed to the curses resulting from sin. Thus, these species would change. Another suggestion that plants would change is found in Genesis 2:5, which states that certain types of plants had not yet appeared.³ The text seems to be referring to the spiny xerophytic plants now common in Israel, but the changes that produced this type of plant had not yet occurred at the time Adam was created. In Genesis 6:12 we read that "all flesh" had corrupted its way, the earth being filled with violence. This justifies God's decision in verse 7 to destroy not only humans, but the beasts also. Apparently, all of nature was adversely affected by the changes brought about by sin.⁴ Since plants provided the only food given to the animals in Eden⁵, the predatory habits of many species are another change that has occurred since the creation. The pain associated with childbirth is another change implied in the curses of Genesis 3:14-19. The idea that significant changes in species have occurred as a result of sin has an important place in creation theory.

Alleged belief in fixity of species is not the only criticism of creation theory. Ironically, creationists are also sometimes criticized for believing in too rapid a rate of change. If predation, parasitism and pathogenicity

are all the result of sin, this means they must have arisen in a relatively short time, compared with the long ages of conventional evolutionary theory. Evolutionists have generally held that species ordinarily change very slowly, although this view is changing, slowly. Recent studies show that species may change much more rapidly than has been inferred from the fossil record⁶, although the extent of change observed is relatively minor. Can species change quickly enough so that a chronology of several thousands of years is sufficient to explain the shift from the Edenic state to the violence we now observe in natural populations?

The rate at which species may change must be related to the mechanism by which the change occurs. Although we do not yet understand much about the molecular mechanisms underlying morphological and behavioral change, it seems unlikely that random point mutations are the major driving force. Perhaps there is some other mechanism, not yet understood. With this in mind, the reader is invited to consider the article in this issue by Todd Wood. Dr. Wood outlines a hypothesis to explain rapid change in species. Could movable elements be related to some mechanism originally designed for helping species adapt to changing environments, and could this mechanism somehow have degenerated into what we see today? Perhaps it is too soon to tell. At this point, the idea has not been tested, and so must be considered only a hypothesis. However, the idea surely is worth serious consideration.

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ENDNOTES

1. Ratzsch D. 1996. The battle of beginnings: why neither side is winning the creation-evolution debate. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
2. Small changes as observed in natural populations are frequently presented as evidence against creation; for example, see (a) Berra TM. 1990. Evolution and the myth of creationism. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press; (b) Miller KR. 2002. Finding Darwin's God. NY: Perennial Books. See also articles by James Meritt and Mark Isaak on www.talkorigins.org.
3. Younker RW. 2001. Genesis 2: a second creation account? In Baldwin JT, editor. Creation, Catastrophe and Calvary. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, p 69-78.
4. Romans 8:19-23.
5. Genesis 1:29-30.
6. Hendry AP, Kinnison MT. 1999. The pace of modern life: measuring rates of contemporary microevolution. *Evolution* 53:1637-1653.