

COMMENT

## 'Knowing What's Real...'

THIS YEAR, 2009, IS THE 200TH anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859. 'Origin' is Darwin's epochal scientific work that showed for the first time how the immense diversity of life on this planet, including humans, developed through natural processes without the hand of any god or designer sitting above the material world people live in. This was a great contribution to science and to human thought, and to the development of the scientific method.

Darwin's work was a critical part of all this. Before Darwin, there was no scientific way to explain how the incredible variety and complexity of life in this world came into being. There was no way that people could understand how hummingbirds and flowers, worms and trees, dolphins and elephants, human beings and bacteria all evolved out of simple forms of life over billions of years. Versions of biblical notions held: that the earth is only a few thousand years old and was created in seven days; that god had created each form of life; and that once created they could never change. In truth creationists are a tribe backed by all religions.

Far from depriving people of a sense of wonderment, the truth of Darwin's discovery allows people to appreciate life in all its amazing complexity and beauty. As Darwin himself put it so poetically in *The Origin of Species*, 'It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us... There is grandeur in this view of life...'

Yet today there is a powerful anti-rational movement in the West, particularly in America that is trying to suppress evolutionary theory and the scientific method overall. George W Bush, who infamously claimed that "Jury is still out on evolution" may no longer be president. But there are people who never get tired to promote the biblical story of creation as literal truth.

"When people are deprived of a scientific approach to reality as a whole, they are robbed of both a full appreciation of the beauty and richness of the natural world and the means to understand the dynamics of change not only in nature but in human society as well." Thus observed Ardea Skybreak, a defender of Evolution theory.

Evolution of all living things can be explained by entirely natural process and requires no super natural explanations. But irrationalists and religious bigots won't see reason so long as they get political and social backing from the powers that be. □