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Spontaneous Generation

by Bryan Hodge

At one point in the not too distant past, many of the “learned class” believed in a doctrine called “spontaneous generation” or “A-biogenesis.” That is, it was well accepted that life could spontaneously arise from non-living or inanimate matter. Prominent men believed this: Men such as William Harvey (English Physician), Francis Bacon (English Philosopher), Rene Descartes (French Mathematician), and Aristotle (Greek Philosopher/Educator/Scientist).

In the book, “The History of Evolutionary Thought” by Bert Thompson this is told, “Jon Baptista van Helmont (1577-1644 A.D.) an outstanding Belgium scientist, physician and chemist brought forth experimental evidence to support his view that mice could develop from wheat kernels. He performed an experiment in which he wrapped some wheat kernels and cheese tidbits in a sweat-soaked shirt and stuffed the whole mass into an open container. He left the container, and when he examined it some 20 days later, he noted that due to some mysterious influence of human sweat, the kernels had “spontaneously generated” into baby mice!¹

Let’s move now to some efforts against this ignorance. Louis Pasteur (1822-1895) was born in Dole, Jura, France on December 27, 1822. In 1854 Pasteur was appointed professor and Dean of Science at the University of Lille. He is sometimes called the “Father of bacteriology.” The word “pasteurize” comes down to us from his name and refers to the process of heating milk to kill off harmful microorganisms. But, let us begin in the 1850’s. The wine industry in France was troubled financially due to souring wine. They thought “spontaneous generation” was to blame. Pasteur determined that these organisms had not “spontaneously generated” but were present in the air, and that as these organisms come in contact with the wine, souring occurred ... He then showed how by heating the wine the organisms could be killed. Bert Thompson records Pasteur’s words, “Never will the doctrine of spontaneous generation recover from the mortal blow struck by this simple experiment ... can matter organize itself? In other words, are there beings that can come into the world without parents, without ancestors? ... No, today there is no circumstance known under which one could affirm that microscopical beings have come into the world without germs, without parents resembling them.”²

Another, an Italian physician by the name of Francesco Redi also did experimentation in this area in the year 1668. He took three jars and placed in them meat and fish. One jar he left open. One jar he covered with a mesh net. The third jar he sealed airtight. Only in the open jar (where female flies could land to deposit her eggs on the meat and fish did maggot develop. Maggots did not “spontaneously generate.” In the book, “A History of the Warfare of Science with

¹ For a more thorough study see Chapter 4 of “The History of Evolutionary Thought” by Bert Thompson (Star Bible and Tract Corp., Ft. Worth, TX) c. 1981, page 95.

² Ibid, page 98.

Theology in Christendom,” Andrew White wrote, “by researches which could not be gainsaid, he showed that every one of these animals come from an egg ...”³

Two other men also contributed in understanding. John Needham (1713-1781) put some gravy in a corked sealed vessel. He left it for a period of time and returned, finding microorganisms. He concluded “spontaneous generation.” An Italian, Lazzaro Spallanzani (1729-1799) did the same experiment. He, however, boiled the contents for a long period, and sealed the vessel airtight. The results: no microorganism contamination.

Yes, people really did believe in such, and some do today. No one has ever demonstrated “spontaneous generation.” But, you see if one does not want to believe in God, you must explain life in some way.

Conclusion

Folks, something does not come from nothing. Life does not come from non-life. Never is such seen today. “Spontaneous generation” has never been demonstrated, in fact the evidence speaks powerfully against it. Those who claim that life naturally can so arise from non-living matter should be put to the test, and pressed to prove it (1 Thes. 5:21), or at least made to acknowledge that such a theory is beyond science. Dr. Paul Weisz, in his book, “Elements of Biology” has well said, “All science begins with observation ... something that cannot be observed cannot be investigated by science.”⁴ Dr. F. J. Ayala said, “A hypothesis is ... scientific only if it can be tested by experience ... a hypothesis or theory which cannot be ... does not belong to the realm of science.”⁵

God says that things reproduce after their kind (Gen. 1). We know that this occurs.

³ “A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom” by Andrew D. White (D. Appleton and company) c. 1896, page 42.

⁴ “A Study Course in Christian Evidence” by Bert Thompson and Wayne Jackson (Apologetics Press, Inc., Montgomery, AL) c. 1992, page 50.

⁵ Ibid.