



Imagine my surprise

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## Evolution forgot the democratic process

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Evolution has to be healthy, doesn't it? Something starts at point A and, over a period of time, it changes according to its need to survive so that at any point B, say now, its accommodations may be viewed with awe. But apply it to democracy or theories on how man came to be and honestly, you could be sick. Only the mammoth gives cause for hope.

Opinionpanel Research reported this week that almost one in three students in the UK shuns scientific evidence on the origins of man, preferring instead the explanations offered by creationism and intelligent design.

They don't give a monkey's for Darwin's theory on natural selection. They have even less time for biological evidence linking all organisms to a common ancestor, thereby relating us not only to the gibbon, but also to flies.

Twelve per cent believe God made the world in the past 10,000 years and put man in it. Another 19% believe God's hand can be seen in all living things, whose existence is otherwise beyond our comprehension. Only 56% put their money wholesale on the theory of evolution. And the reason this is terrifying is that the beliefs of this 31% are rooted in extremes of religion that teach metaphor as fact, and we know where that takes us.

Twenty years ago, at point A, almost no one in the UK was a creationist. Now, at point B, with the rise of Christian fundamentalism, faith schools and sappy political correctness in classrooms, which gives a fair say to everyone even when what they're saying is nonsense, a third of a generation is. If creationism must change to survive, what it might become in another generation is almost too scary to contemplate.

I'm not saying belief in God is scary. Plenty of fine scientific minds have considered the existence of a higher power and decided it is not only feasible but likely, and the idea has brought comfort to squillions. Anyway, you could argue, how we came to be is of much less consequence than how we're turning out. But the worry is that students who buy into creationism aren't prepared to test the evidence against it, and minds closed to the truth have been dangerous since the year dot.

The prime minister put his finger on it a couple of weeks ago in his alarming speech to the News Corp executives in Florida, on the current political state of the world, as viewed by him. The real divisions, he said, were no longer between left and right, but between advocates of modern, open societies and closed, traditional ones - and they are, even if they aren't the only ones.

The upshot of this, he went on to say in one of his alarming bits, is the blurring of party lines that voters are finding both confusing and upsetting. The resistance from natural supporters of both the right and the left to the disappearance of their advocates in parliament - imagine his surprise - was proving to be very strong.

Either he's as dumb as plankton or he thinks we are. It's not the convergence of right and left we find so chilling. It's the disappearance of choice. Parliament, from my kitchen table, increasingly looks like a body of people whose job is stay in or grab power at any cost; whose favoured tactic is to steal each other's traditional policies, coat them with a reasonableness they wouldn't have had if the other side were championing them, and pull them like rabbits from a hat.

This unhappy twist in the evolution of the democratic process has meant that those who opposed the invasion of Iraq or were appalled by the indiscriminate bombing of Lebanon had no effective voice among either the government or the opposition. It has killed off the passionate politician who entered parliament knowing what

he or she stood for and who stood by their guns whatever the price. Where are the firebrands of right and left who kept debate alive and their parties honest? Dead as bloody dodos.

All is lost unless they can be recovered in the manner of the woolly mammoth. Not everyone will be thrilled to find that, if the recovered sperm of this currently extinct mammal - which stands 11ft tall and weighs seven tons - is used to impregnate an Asian elephant, something similar may once again stalk the earth after 27,000 years. But it will be a master stroke of genetic engineering, and this has to be encouraging when evolution fails so often to take us in the happiest direction.

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