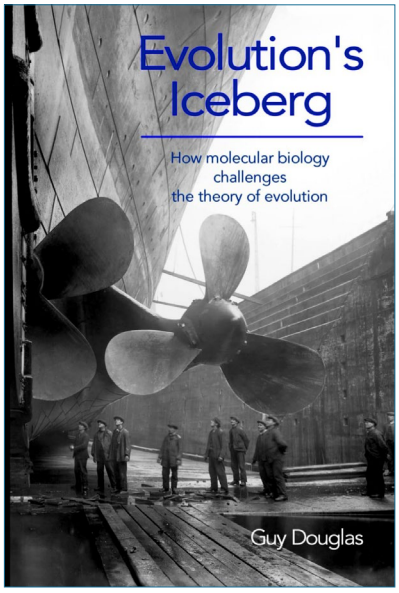
Evolution still afloat despite colliding with scientific facts



Evolution's Iceberg: How molecular biology challenges the theory of evolution

Guy Douglas

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Philip B. Bell

This readable book takes an innovative approach to analyzing and exposing key problems with neo-Darwinian evolution. Its author, with Bachelors' and Masters' degrees in electronic engineering and digital electronics, respectively, inevitably approaches his subject with a scientific, engineering perspective. Consequently, as Douglas himself indicates, he is more interested in keeping the focus on the *how*, rather than the *why*, questions.

The book's subtitle highlights molecular biology as the principal avenue of enquiry. Nevertheless, there are lengthy forays into other aspects of evolutionary theory (some chapter-long) which, arguably, are rather off-topic. That said, Douglas shows himself adept at handling many diverse subjects. Unsurprisingly, there are glowing endorsements from several respected names from the Intelligent Design community in the UK.

The author's thesis, outlined in the Prologue and Introduction, is simple. Although the maritime architects and shipbuilders of the famous, but ill-fated, ship RMS[1] *Titanic* (figure 1) (*Harland & Wolff* and *White Star Line*) had supreme confidence in its unsinkability, this confidence was unfounded. The *Titanic* sank after hitting an iceberg on 15 April 1912, taking with it 1,517 lives. Likewise, evolutionists since the nineteenth century have been supremely confident in Darwin's theory but are seemingly oblivious that it "has collided with the 'iceberg' of 21st century molecular biology" (p. 12). The introduction is excellent, with "a very clever analytical structure" (quoting from Prof. David Galloway's endorsement). The reader is immediately drawn in through the legendary account of the *Titanic*, then prompted to compare its state and fate with that of evolution:

> "There is a real sense in which most people today consider the *Theory of Evolution* to be an 'unsinkable ship'" (p. 12).

Evolution's Iceberg is divided into three main parts: *1) Don't rock the boat!* Critiquing evolution is not anti-science (three chapters); *2) Damage below decks!* Five failed predictions of neo-Darwinian theory (five chapters); *3) She's sinking!* But few people know this, or that there's a better theory (two chapters). Each chapter closes with helpful summaries in bullet-point form. The book closes with an epilogue, drawing the various threads together.

This review will follow the author's three-part structure.

Don't rock the boat!

Guy Douglas begins with an examination of science; what it is, its limitations, and so on. Even leading-edge science can get things badly wrong; examples are the Space Shuttle *Challenger* disaster (1986), the Chernobyl nuclear reactor explosion (1986), Phlogiston, the initial rejection of ideas like continental drift and the catastrophic explanation for the

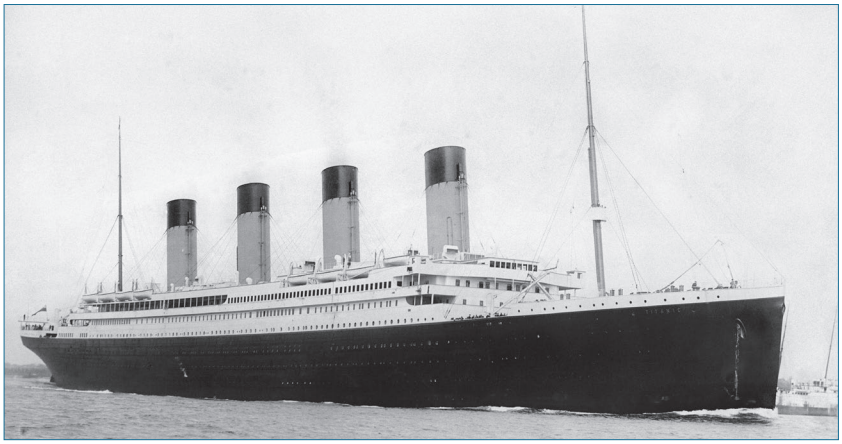

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Figure 1. The failed prediction of the 'unsinkable' RMS *Titanic*, in spite of the over-weening confidence of its builders, becomes a potent metaphor in Guy Douglas' new book as he explores the many failed predictions of the 'ship' *Evolution*.

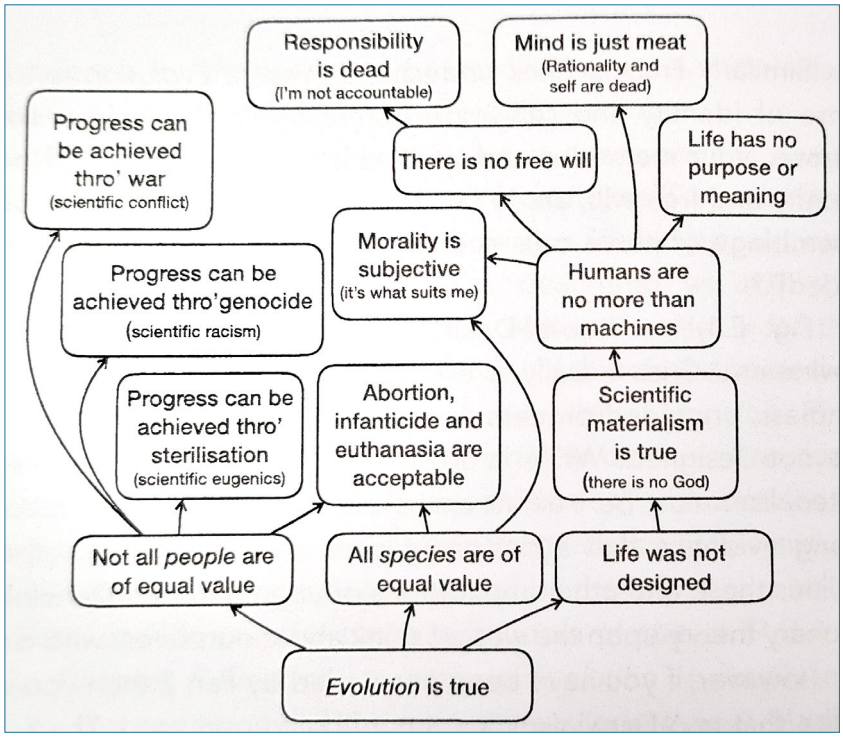

Figure 2. *A Tree of Death*. Read the diagram from the root upwards: "*If* Evolution is true *then* Not all people are of equal value." "*If* Evolution is true *then* Life was not designed". (Figure and caption are from figure E. 1, p. 304)

Channeled Scablands in the US, and many more. The image of infallible scientists is wrong, as is the view that they are all dispassionate and wholly objective! Arguments that science is self-correcting are foolish, which is why occasional paradigm shifts are necessary.

Many once-confident scientific claims have been overturned. For instance, evolution cannot explain most of what its advocates claim it can; they are in denial of much counter-evidence.[2] In other cases, scientists fear ridicule if they question the paradigm. Douglas discusses bias in science, low- and high-confidence science (pp. 33–34, following Rob Stadler[3]), the influence of assumptions, and so on. High-confidence criteria, appropriate for laboratory science, should not be used in the realm of historical science. And peer review cannot guarantee the correctness of scientific pronouncements, although many people view establishment scientists as "the new priesthood" (chapter 2).

Evolution involves "thinking the unthinkable" (chapter 3). Although neo-Darwinism qualifies as low-confidence science, its proponents often try to lend it credibility by comparing it with high-confidence engineering achievements. It is crucial to carefully define terms because the word 'evolution' is used in different ways. Douglas employs the terms 'microevolution' and 'macroevolution' but carefully defines them, also distinguishing them from the concepts of 'mutations and natural selection', 'universal common descent', and 'particles-to-people evolution' (summarized in a useful table, p. 66).

Ironically, some evolutionists invoke religious arguments:

> "Now here's an odd thing. While there were a small number of objectors to the theory on purely religious grounds, it's actually Darwin and his contemporary defenders today who typically bring God into the argument! Lots of god-wouldn't-have-done-it-that-way examples can be found in [Jerry] Coyne's *Evolution is True*" (p. 69).[4]

Quite right, and Douglas correctly notes that such arguments are theological, not scientific:

> "Or to put it another way, shouldn't we expect scientists to be concentrating on the *how* of evolution rather than the *why*? That's to say, working out in detail *how* testicles, wings and cheetahs, and even a pathway for making vitamin C, evolved. But apparently not. Coyne claims that … *the onus is not on evolutionary biologists to sketch out a precise step-by-step scenario documenting exactly how a complex character evolved*.
>
> This is an astonishing statement. It prompts questions like, 'So, whose job is it?' and 'What *do* evolutionary biologists do, then?' [emphasis in original?]" (p. 70).

One thing they should never do, of course, is rock the boat. Keeping the faith is a vital duty.

Damage below decks!

Part two begins with a chapter about the problems with chemical evolution. Readers familiar with books by such authors as Charles Thaxton *et al.*, Michael Denton, and Nick Lane (to name just a few) will find nothing new here, but it is useful material, nonetheless. *Stairway to Life* covers this subject matter in far greater depth.[5]

Chapter five is a critique of the supposed creativity of natural selection. Douglas covers many familiar examples: peppered moths, the Galápagos finches, Endler's Guppies, cichlid fish, polar bears, antibiotic resistance, blind cavefish, flightless birds, and sickle-cell anemia. As in many other books of this sort, Richard Lenski's long-term *E. coli* experiments also get an airing, leaning much on Michael Behe's discussion of the same in his 2007 book, *Edge of Evolution*.[6]

The mutations in such experiments are informationally downhill. Douglas also follows Behe in discussing the waiting time problem with natural selection,[7] then irreducible complexity. These uncomfortable facts are fatal flaws in evolution, in spite of many attempts to deflect the challenges.

A whole chapter is devoted to showing that the alleged tree of life is not documented by fossils. All well and good but, to this reviewer's mind, it has only the most tenuous of links to the book's subtitle. Unfortunately, millions-of-years dates are reported uncritically and without comment. He also devotes many pages describing 19th-century biologist Ernst Haeckel's embryonic recapitulation ideas and showing why they are wrong. Much detail is given about blastula formation, gastrulation, neurulation, and gut formation, in six representative vertebrates—interesting, advanced-level stuff but, again, not what most would have in mind when thinking of molecular biology.

Nevertheless, the detailed discussion drives home the point that Haeckel was quite wrong in asserting that similar embryos and universal common descent are supported by embryology.[8] Well into the chapter, Douglas discusses "Different genes—different trees" (pp. 211–213) to show their lack of congruence, contrary to evolutionary expectations. Orphan genes (see also the discussion in Jonathan Wells' *Zombie Science*[9]) and Hox genes are of no help in increasing species fitness or providing good evidence for common ancestry. Mutations in fruit flies clearly decrease fitness, since the resulting freaks are disabled in various ways. All of these examples serve to further illustrate the damage to the evolutionary framework, threatening to sink the vessel.

Douglas' final discussion in this section of the book concerns the failure of hominid fossil discoveries to document ape-to-human evolution, in spite of so many claims that it does just that. This is dealt with in great detail in Rupe and Sanford's *Contested Bones* (2019).[10] Again, one may wonder about the relevance of this to the subtitle of *Evolution's Iceberg* because molecular biology is not discussed until 35 pages into the chapter and is then limited to five pages—claims of 99% ape–human similarity, junk DNA versus the findings of the ENCODE project,[11] and the waiting time problem.[7]

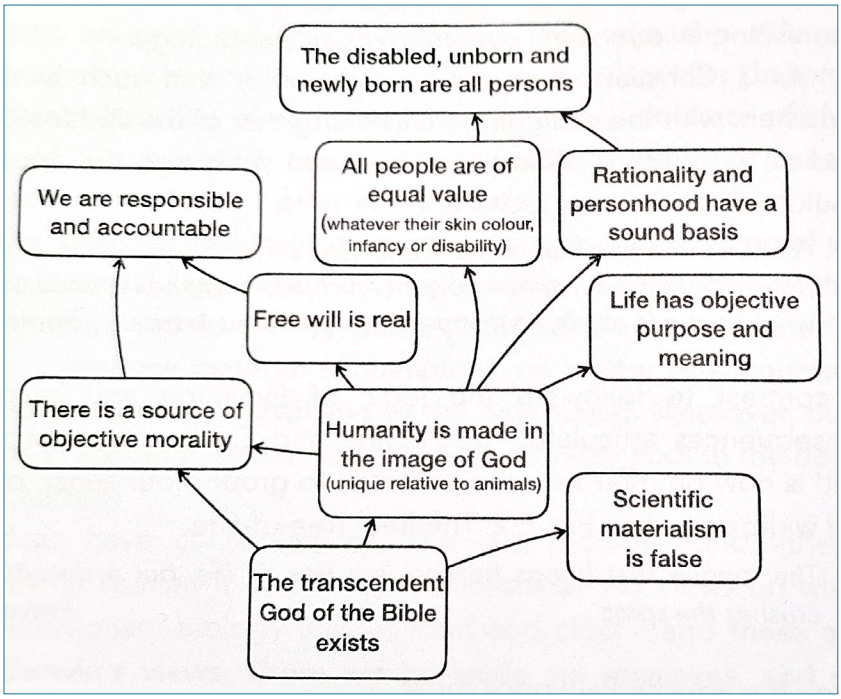

Figure 3. *A Tree of Life* that offers good 'fruit'. The existence of a transcendent designer is consistent with the God of the Bible. If such a God exists, then lots of good 'fruit' is available to support human wellbeing. Once more, read the diagram from the root: "*If* the transcendent God of the Bible exists *then* scientific materialism is false". (Figure and caption are from figure E. 2, p. 304).

She's sinking!

By the last part of the book, Douglas has demonstrated, in some detail, that key neo-Darwinian predictions are failures, but "few people know this, or that there's a better theory" (p. 265). Not only so, "what is true about *Evolution* is rather trivial: that natural selection is a tinkerer, not a designer or creator. And, by implication, the grand claims of *Evolution* are simply untrue" (p. 269).

This being the case, the penultimate chapter asks, "Why is *RMS Evolution* still afloat?" Douglas sees part two of his book as a long counter-argument, demonstrating that *RMS Evolution* is fatally damaged below decks by the 'molecular biology iceberg'. While a lot of this material (chapters 4–8) is not strongly relevant to molecular biology, we agree that it reveals great damage to evolutionary theory, nevertheless. It is indeed pertinent to ask *why* evolution is still generally accepted.

One reason is the sheer hype attending evolution as an idea. As with the Titanic, *RMS Evolution* is simply *believed* to be unsinkable. The media has a lot to answer for here, but there is also the influence of groupthink among scientists. Douglas is surely correct when he suggests that "most don't know there's been a collision" (p. 275)! He outlines various outcomes when an occasional scientist actually decides to investigate the 'damage below decks' or, worse, has the temerity to point it out: people find themselves cancelled, they may lose academic tenure, get ostracized by their colleagues, or lose their job entirely. For the most part,

dissent is simply not tolerated. I am reminded of David Gelernter (eminent professor of computer science at Yale University), who recently reneged on his long-held Darwinian beliefs:

> "During a conversation organized by the Hoover Institute in June, Gelernter explained that pro-Darwinian academics will 'destroy' you if you challenge the theory. … 'What I've seen, in their behavior intellectually and at colleges across the West, is nothing approaching free speech on this topic,' he continued. 'It's a bitter rejection … a sort of bitter, fundamental, angry, outraged, violent rejection, which comes nowhere near scientific of intellectual discussion. I've seen that happen again and again.' 'I'm a Darwinist, don't you say a word against it, or, I don't wanna hear it, period.'"[12]

Douglas includes a useful table comparing evolution to world religions to demonstrate that 'Darwin's dangerous idea' really does qualify as a religious philosophy (p. 286); it has its own prophet, 'Holy text', priests, 'Holy wars', heresies, 'Holy days', and even the idea of Utopia!

So much for the question of *why* wholesale rejection of evolution has not occurred. The author's main concern, in the concluding chapter, is to advance Intelligent Design as "the main challenger to unguided Evolution" (p. 293). In his mind, ID is not only superior to the positions of "atheistic evolutionists" and "evolutionary creationists" (aka theistic evolutionists), but also to "old earth creationists" and "biblical creationists"—all of which he covers in an appendix (pp. 307–315). His overview will be very familiar to regular readers of this journal. For example, he refutes the ID-is-not-science claim by giving an overview of the "Kitzmiller vs Dover Area School District" case (2005, US), comparing the nonsense of the pro-evolutionist claims made at that time with the aims of the SETI program.

In his Epilogue, Douglas ably shows that the resistance to acceptance of evolutionary problems (that threaten to sink evolution) is owing to the materialistic worldview of its adherents. He declares his own colours on the book's last page as "a Christian" (p. 303), also including two contrasting figures, the 'Tree of Death' (assuming evolution to be true) versus the 'Real Tree of Life' (p. 304)—these are thought-provoking, but the implications are left for readers to ponder (see figures 2 and 3).

Deep time

There are a few areas where the author of *Evolution's Iceberg* diverges from a biblical creationist view. One suspects that he supports the big bang theory (e.g., p. 106), although he does acknowledge that, along with abiogenesis, these are one-off events that "are believed to have occurred in the past" (p. 37). In a few parts, one would gain the impression that he supports deep time (see following paragraph) although it must be said that this material is largely confined to chapter six.

In personal discussion with Guy Douglas, he informed me that he leans towards a 'young earth' view. Nevertheless, readers of *Evolution's Iceberg* will likely conclude that he is in sympathy with the concept of deep time. Near the end of the book, in an endnote (pp. 362–363) to Appendix A, he says that the age of the earth is not within the scope of the book. However, 'millions-of-years' dates are mentioned at many points. For example, regarding diversification of cichlids in African lakes, credence is given to deep time (p. 129). Lots of unqualified references to millions of years appear in his discussion of the fossil record (pp. 162–163, 172–173). Moreover, references to the "abrupt appearance" of this or that animal group appear without caveats that might indicate the author disagrees that these animals have "appeared suddenly". He even writes that the fossil record documents 12 extinctions during the radiation of the ancestors of modern horses (p. 180). Readers will likely draw the conclusion that the author is an 'old-earth creationist' with a strong belief in ID.

In summary, this well-researched, well-written critique of neo-Darwinian evolution employs a novel approach that many readers can appreciate. Informed readers will be reassured that its author is well informed and adept at handling the various avenues of scientific thought, accurately and perceptively; notwithstanding this reviewer's disappointment that the concept of deep time was not challenged.

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