

Human Evolution Between Darwin and Blavatsky

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Abstract

The article reviews the common and different positions in Charles Darwin's theories of human evolution and Helena Blavatsky's on this fundamental issue. Both the common and overlapping elements in the statements of the two, as well as the differences, are emphasized. Until today sensational point of view on the development of man as a being and essence in his connections, influences and interactions with the surrounding world on Earth is presented. A hypothesis is formed about the evolutionary development of man as a support, as a foundation for the positive growth of human civilization.

Keywords: evolution, man, theories, Blavatsky, Darwin, matter, spirit, body, psyche, races.

1. Introduction

Much is known today about man, his origin and development. However, not everything is known, and the most popular theory of human evolution, that of Charles Darwin, is regularly criticized and even denied. In this regard, the theosophical understanding of the origin and evolution of man is revealing, different and highly debatable in terms of modern understandings. It is presented in Helena Blavatsky's major studies *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*.

The reasons for the topic of the article are primarily justified by the fact that Blavatsky herself does not deny Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. She points out common elements between Darwin and theosophy in terms of evolution and explains why the theosophical doctrine of the origin and development of mankind is different.

The leading difference is dictated by different approaches to human evolution. For Darwin evolution is a material process, for Blavatsky it is primarily a spiritual process. While Charles Darwin's basic idea is that the life and development of man and all creatures on earth are the result of purely material natural selection, according to Blavatsky the leading role in the terrestrial evolution of all living and non-living things is played by energies and forces of a higher than terrestrial order, or to put it simply, they have both terrestrial and extraterrestrial origins. It is these higher entities that use natural selection, enrich it and develop it to create the being man, the evolution being first spiritual and then material.

These are spiritually, mentally, and physically advanced entities that have surpassed man's development many times over. Their existence is conditioned by the very nature of the universe, which Blavatsky explains in relative detail and in a very fragmentary manner in the two volumes of his *Secret Doctrine* (Blavatsky, 2005, I-II). All nature, animate and inanimate, and according to Blavatsky there is no inanimate nature, is part of the infinite impersonal essence, mind, called noumenon, Absolute or Brahman in Indian philosophy. Periodically – about 4 billion

years – phenomena manifest from it. These are the galaxies, the planets, their inhabitants. After another 4 billion years, all these merges, dissolve and “fall asleep” in the Absolute for another 4 billion years to be reborn on a higher plane of existence. In Indian philosophy these periods are known as Manvantara, the period of activity, and Pralaya, the period of the universe falling asleep. Life is eternal, and the basic laws by which it evolves, including in the solar system, are free will and rebirth in a week world where everything is a circle and each successive round of evolution takes place on a higher spiritual, mental and physical plane. The law of cause and effect, known in the East as karma, also operates for the evolution of the Earth according to the Secret Doctrine.

Helena Blavatsky recognized the evolutionary line outlined by Charles Darwin in *The Origin of Species* (Darwin, 1950: 751), but only up to the emergence of mammalian species. From there on, the split in the positions of Darwinists and theosophists began. In *The Secret Doctrine*, the evolution of life on Earth is seen as a set of natural selection resulting from the action of natural forces, combined with the movement of monads into different forms and states, and inextricably linked to the development of the mind, to psychic evolution. Blavatsky argues that man as he appears today in outward features appeared 18 million years ago, that he is the result of a threefold evolutionary process-spiritual, mental, and physical, that man gave rise to the great apes, and that he appeared on Earth before mammals.

2. Evolution according to Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, known as the Theory of Natural Selection, explains how species, including humans, evolve and adapt over time. According to Darwin, organisms have variations in their traits that can affect their ability to survive and reproduce. Those that have favorable traits are more likely to survive and pass those traits on to the next generation. The process of natural selection leads to the accumulation of variation, which eventually leads to the development of new species. Darwin postulated that modern man, *Homo sapiens*, is the result of a long evolutionary process in which ancestors adapted to a changing environment. His theory laid the foundations of modern biology and remains a fundamental principle for understanding biodiversity on Earth.

3. Other theories of evolution

In addition to Charles Darwin’s theory, there are other important theories of human evolution. The theory of “multiregional evolution” proposed by Richard Leakey (Leakey, 1994: 171) and others argues that modern humans arose independently in different regions of the world, with interbreeding between different hominid species. Another theory, known as “source Africa” (Tuttle, 2024), supports the idea that modern man arose in Africa and then spread to the rest of the world, replacing local hominid populations. The “explosive evolution” hypothesis (Colbert, 1953) emphasizes the rapid changes in genetic code and adaptive traits that lead to the emergence of modern man. Some contemporary research emphasizes the importance of epigenetics (Ashe, Colot, Oldroyd, 2021) and the influence of the environment on human evolution.

4. Human evolution according to the Secret Doctrine

The Secret Doctrine describes three directions of evolution or manifestation of the phenomenal universe from the noumenal world of the Absolute. In this eternal and unknowable entity, ideas arise, and then manifest cosmic matter evolves from eternal matter. Atoms and materials are formed around which cosmic bodies, including the planet Earth, are created at the next stage. The third evolutionary stream is connected with the evolution of self-consciousness, of humanity.

The evolution of man, as Blavatsky repeatedly stresses, is monadic or spiritual, psychological and physical. This totality of evolutionary directions is unified by thought and could be described as the evolution of the noumenal thought of the Absolute, of reason in the Divine reality in the manifold phenomena of the manifested world. Hence the main principles of Helena Blavatsky's theosophical doctrine – all phenomena in the manifested universe are related and unified in their origin, material basis and development; every phenomenon in the manifested universe has its prototype in the noumenal essence of the Absolute. Manifestation passes through seven periods – seven eternities. From our point of view, we are really talking about eternities, since each of the seven periods is very long. In each, activity alternates with rest, as in daily human life day alternates with night and work with rest.

5. Blavatsky quotes Darwin

Helena Blavatsky's two major studies, *Isis Unveiled* (Blavatsky, 2005, I-II) and *The Secret Doctrine*, can be seen as a kind of dialogue between Blavatsky and Darwin, and between Blavatsky and the defenders of Charles Darwin's theory. Repeated acknowledgements and references are made to controversial and uncontroversial tenets of evolutionary theory in *The Origin of Species*, emphasizing their differences and similarities with the theosophical understanding of evolution.

Blavatsky points out that “the idea of evolution-analogous, if not identical, to Darwin's evolution, the idea of the struggle for existence and primacy and the ‘survival of the fittest’ among the Multitudes at the top as well as among the Multitudes in the lowlands, runs like a red thread through the two volumes of our earlier work written in 1876 (Blavatsky is referring to *Isis Unveiled* – *my note*). But this idea is not ours; it belongs to the deepest antiquity. Even the Puranic writers have wittily interwoven allegory with cosmic facts and human events. And he who studies symbology can discern their astro-cosmic hints, even if he cannot grasp their full meaning. The “Great Wars of Heaven” in the Puranas, the “Wars of the Titans” in Hesiod and other classical writers, also the “struggle” between Osiris and Typhon in the Egyptian myths, and even the battles in the Scandinavian legends, all refer to the same theme. Norse mythology refers to this as the battle of the Plamen, sons of Muspel, who fought on the field of Vigred. They all refer to the Heavens and the Earth, and have an ambiguous and even a threefold meaning and esoteric application to what is on the summit as well as to what is in the lowlands. In particular, they refer to astronomical, theogonic and human struggles, to the adjustment of the heavenly bodies and the primacy among nations and tribes. The “struggle for existence” and the “survival of the fittest” have prevailed from the moment of the manifestation of the Cosmos in being, and, of course, these facts could not have escaped the observant eyes of the ancient sages(...) As we wrote long ago, “This is the basic and cornerstone of the secret cycles. It proves that the Brahmins and the Tanaim... reasoned about the creation and development of the world perfectly according to Darwin's method, anticipating his school as far as natural selection, gradual development and transformation of species were concerned” (Blavatsky, 2005, II-260).

Such “admissions” by Blavatsky are not one and two in both *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*. But, as she herself admits, “Darwin's theory of the transmission of acquired abilities is not only not taught, it is not accepted by occultists” (Blavatsky, 2005, I-236). Blavatsky explains why and where and in fact the dividing line between Darwinists and occultists: “physical evolution according to esoteric teaching develops gradually from spiritual, mental and psychic evolution. It is this inner soul of the physical cell, the 'spiritual plasma,' that dominates the seminal plasma and is the key that in time should open the biologist's door to the terra incognita now called the deep secret of embryology (Blavatsky, 2005, I-236).

According to theosophical doctrine, “all things have their origin in Spirit – evolution initially begins at the top and follows a downward arc, not the other way around as Darwin's theory

teaches. In other words, a gradual materialization of forms takes place until finally the final abasement is reached. This is the point from which the modern theory of evolution enters into speculative hypotheses” (Blavatsky, 2005, I-134).

In both *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, Helena Blavatsky provides a detailed analysis of Darwin’s and Darwinists’ attitudes and claims about the evolution of the Earth and human evolution specifically. In fact, this is the main thread in these two voluminous books, so a complete analysis would take up space no less than at least one of Blavatsky’s volumes. One of the purposes of this “dialogue” between Blavatsky and Darwin is to substantiate the theosophical doctrine of the seven races of man.

6. The seven human races

Evolution is summarized by Blavatsky with the following clarification: “Man was not ‘created’ the complete being he is now, however imperfect he still remains. There was a spiritual, a psychic, an intellectual, and an animal evolution, from the highest to the lowest, as well as a physical development – from the simple and homogeneous, up to the more complex and heterogeneous; though not quite on the lines traced for us by the modern evolutionists. This double evolution in two contrary directions, required various ages, of divers natures and degrees of spirituality and intellectuality, to fabricate the being now known as man” (Blavatsky, 2005, II-117).

“Race” in *The Secret Doctrine* does not mean skin color and other physical marks, but a person’s belonging to a certain period of development on Earth, to a mode of reproduction, a set of physical, mental and spiritual abilities. The beginning is set in the First race, when the lunar rulers Barhishadi – the monads of the subtle world of the Moon or Pitris, in their own image and likeness gave the first forms to the most developed earthly beings. These are not the forms of man today, but his forerunners, consisting of lunar monads. In *The Secret Doctrine* it is written about this that the Great Chohans called the Lords of the Moon, of the airy bodies. “Bring forth men, men of your nature. Give them their forms within. She (the Nature of the Earth – *my note*) will build coverings without” (Blavatsky, 2005, II-101). These forms are “bodies” of finer and less dense matter than present matter. The first race on Earth is described in *The Secret Doctrine* as chhaya, shadows of the lunar Pitris, without mind and physical body, “a monstrous creation of indescribable beings” (Blavatsky, 2005, II-152). The other group of lunar rulers, the Agnishwata Pitris, do not create earthly “people” because they are too divine and belong to the higher fiery world, and the likenesses of men in the first race are not physically ready to accept the fiery fifth principle of the higher manas. Regarding the consent of some and the refusal of others, in the Book of Dzian, to which Blavatsky claims to refer, it is noted: “They (Barkhishadi Pitris – *my note*) went, each to his appointed land; seven of them, each in his part. The Flame Lords stayed behind. They didn't want to go, they didn't want to create” (Blavatsky, 2005, II-104).

The nature of the Earth is gradually creating around the monads of the lunar Pitris denser bodies, which are not yet the present dense bodies, but only ethereal forms. The “people” of the first race have a third human principle – an etheric body. They have no physical and astral body – first and second principle, no feeling and desire body – kama rupa or fourth principle. They do not have a fifth principle – manas, and the monad embodied in them – the sixth and seventh principles or atma and buddhi, is a pure spiritual essence. This likeness of men has no relation to climate: “Being so ethereal and so little human in their constitution, they could not be damaged by any element – neither water nor fire,” “they could not be destroyed by death” (Blavatsky, 2005, II-181). In describing the first race, Blavatsky compared people to huge monsters that could fly and walk. They are the subject of legends such as that of Lilith or the wife of the Sun, Sanjna, the daughter of Vishwakarma in the Vishnu Purana.

The First Race gives birth to the Second Race from people dissolved and absorbed by their own “afterborn” offspring: “They developed the Second Race unconsciously, as some plants do. Or perhaps similar to the amoeba, only on a more ethereal, significant and large scale” (Blavatsky, 2005, II-153-154). Blavatsky points out and emphasizes that this process of “Buddling”, as it is called in ancient books, has long been absent in higher animals and humans. “But there are analogies” Blavatsky points out, pointing to “the first stages of germ cell development” (Blavatsky, 2005, II-153-154) as one possible analogy.

In the Second race or the race of the Afterborn, in which the first race “disappears”, the construction of a denser body begins. But it is also not the dense physical body of today's man, but only a denser ethereal body or even more precisely - an astral body or second human principle. “They became the second humanity – composed of the most diverse giant half-human monsters - the first attempts of material Nature in the construction of human bodies” (Blavatsky, 2005, II-181). Again, so-called “human beings” are not affected by climate. For the second race, Blavatsky already speaks of gender, but only to point out that the second race is an asexual, sexless race of hermaphrodites. Several examples from ancient works are listed in confirmation. Aristophanes is quoted as saying of Plato's *Pyrrhus*: “In ancient times our nature was not as it now appears. She was bisexual; the form and name corresponded and equally belonged to both the male and the female principle... Their bodies... were round and their mode of motion was whirling. They were terrible in their strength and endurance, and possessed a monstrous lust for power. Because of this, Zeus split them in two and thus made them weaker” (Blavatsky, 2005, II-175-176). Aristophanes' passage refers to both the second and the third human race, at the end of which there is a separation of the sexes, Blavatsky clarifies.

The Second race lives on a continent of eternal spring around the present North Pole, but “in consequence of the displacements of the great waters of the planet, the oceans changing their beds, the majority of the second race perished in this first spasm of evolution and the hardening of the Planet during the human age” (Blavatsky, 2005, II-181). In the first sub-races of the Second race, reproduction takes place by budding and separating the grown embryo from the parental aura. In the last sub-races of the second and in the first sub-races of the third race, another process of reproduction begins – birth through “drops of sweat.” “The early Third Race was formed from drops of ‘sweat’ which, after repeated transformations, developed into human bodies. This is no more difficult to imagine and understand than the growth of the fetus from an elusive embryo and its subsequent development as a child and then into a strong and heavy man” (Blavatsky, 2005, II-229).

Helena Blavatsky does not specify the duration of the existence of the First and Second races of likenesses of human beings, justifying the silence by saying that “the true duration of the first two and a half races is hidden from all but the High Initiates.” In the early 30s of the 20th century, Nikolai Roerich revealed: “The first and second races existed for 300 million years” (Roerich, 1997: 40).

If the first sub-races of the third race are formed from “drops of sweat”, then in the subsequent sub-races the reproduction changes. The drops of sweat turned into “large drops that grew, expanded, and became globular bodies - huge eggs. In these eggs, the human fetus grew over the course of several years” (Blavatsky, 2005, II-229). The human being “hatches” from the egg and immediately begins to walk, much like birds do today. Almost until the end of the third race, beings are hermaphrodites, androgynous. People's bodies are getting denser. At the end of the third race, the sexes separated and reproduction began to take place as it does today – through birth. This happened 18 million years ago, Helena Blavatsky repeatedly emphasized, arguing with her contemporary scientists – Darwinists, who categorically do not accept such an origin and development of humanity on Earth.

The still greater “event” in the Third race is the endowment of human beings with intelligence. It is performed by the sons of fire and wisdom, who refuse to create at the beginning of the First race. In *The Secret Doctrine*, Helena Blavatsky explains their refusal with humanistic motives: “they did not want to create unwilling, irresponsible people, as the ‘obedient’ angels did; but they could not bestow upon human beings (of the First race – *my note*) even temporary reflections of their personal merits, for even these merits, as belonging to another and much higher plane of consciousness, would leave all again man irresponsible, therefore this would prevent any possibility of further progress. No spiritual and psychic evolution is possible on earth – on the lowest and material plane – for the one who on this plane is inherently perfect and cannot accumulate merits or vices” (Blavatsky, 2005, II-312). In the Third race man acquires a formed physical body – first principle, astral body – second principle, ethereal body – third principle, already has desires and feelings – kama rupa, fourth body or principle, and the Divine Monad in him – his seventh and sixth principles, atma and budhi “waits” to be “fertilized” by consciousness and self-awareness. This is done by bestowing the Divine Spark on man from seven sons of wisdom, of fire, known in the East as Kumaris. To them is due to man’s acquisition of the third race of the fifth principle, of manas, reason. This “gifting” with the Divine Spark does not happen simultaneously and does not cover all people of the third race. Some of the sons of wisdom choose to bestow the Divine Spark only on humanity in the fourth race.

In the third race, only the people of the Third race with the readiest principles receive a higher rational essence. In some human beings, only a spark is sent, and others are neglected as most unprepared. They become “low-brow” though they speak, and it is they who initiate sexual intercourse with animals to give birth to the human-like apes - the true original sin, or the first fall of man, according to theosophical doctrine. It is only when the other sons of wisdom also endow men in the fourth race with the reason that human beings understand the sin of intercourse with animals and cease it.

The other great crime against humanity, or great sin, was created during the Fourth race, when the then developed spiritual senses, the third eye, were used for harm, murder, and all kinds of evil influences. The Third race lives on the continent of Lemuria, notes *The Secret Doctrine*, specifying that the boundaries of this vast land stretch over more than half the globe – above all where the world’s oceans are today. Helena Blavatsky emphasizes that on this continent, at the end of the Third race, the so-called Golden Age developed, which remained a legend in the traditions of the peoples of the world. Then the society is harmonious and happy, based on the principles of universal brotherhood, equality, love and mutual aid. At the beginning of this century the supreme sons of wisdom themselves rule mankind, teaching them agriculture, arts, construction, and how to live. When the third race reaches the apogee of its development, its decline began, and with it the demise of the continent of Lemuria. The continent and the race perish from volcanoes, and the fourth race – the Atlanteans and their continent Atlantis perish from floods and storms.

The Fourth human race began about 5 million years ago. The height of people decreases from 7-8 to 3-4 meters, and at the end of the race to 2.5-2 meters. The Atlantean civilization is of people with a red-brown skin color, who are also in the beginning directly led by the sons of wisdom. But gradually the Atlanteans split into two main groups, commented Blavatsky and added that the spiritual and psychic abilities that the Atlanteans possessed, thanks to their developed third eye, began to be used for murder, subjugation and glorification of the human ego. This lets to the demise of the Atlantean civilization, regardless of its extremely high achievements. Blavatsky points out that the Atlanteans achieved a lot in the arts, construction, flying. According to her account, the people of the fourth race were far ahead of today’s humanity in terms of technology. Atlantis and the fourth race gradually perished, with only the last island, Poseidonis, submerged by natural cataclysms in three days.

The beginning of the Fifth human race, to which today's humanity belongs, according to theosophical doctrine, was established by the Divine Egyptian dynasties about 80 thousand years ago and continues to the present day. In this fourth round of Earth evolution, the development will continue in two more races – the Sixth and Seventh, before humanity, the entire animal, vegetable, and mineral world pass to a higher spiritual, mental and physical plane – the fifth round of the Septenary Earth Circuit.

7. Conclusion

Although Blavatsky's theory was created in the 19th century, it still awaits its researchers. The goal is clear – what is the origin and essence of man on planet Earth, why does humanity exist and what is its place in the infinite universe.

The theory of the seven races, set forth by Helena Blavatsky in her writings, has attracted interest from a variety of researchers. However, it still awaits its serious investigators, even though it has met only criticism from modern science, whose representatives claim that it lacks empirical evidence. In spite of these claims, a thorough acquaintance with and analysis of Helena Blavatsky's writings reveals a vast field for in-depth work by any well-meaning researcher. Helena Blavatsky's theosophical doctrine affirms that the world is knowable in its diversity and unity, and knowledge has no limits. This gnoseological optimism is an important prerequisite for overcoming pessimism and denial towards the world, society and man in the present problematic world reality.

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