

**THE HYPOTHESIS OF
THE UNIVERSALITY
OF LIFE**

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The Hypothesis of the Universality of Life by William Shearon

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**BY
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MAN'S RECALCITRANCE.

We seem always to have been very much given to going quite out of our way to select involved explanations of natural phenomena, when any question was first presented, albeit much simpler explanations would have been more logical, and often nearer the truth. We should not say, however, that a logical explanation is always the right one.

Innumerable examples could be given of man's reluctance to grasp new ideas if they are in the least contrary to his spurious dignity, or if they do not fully accord with his petty desires. At some time in the past, it is conceivable that such an attitude may have assisted the human race to higher levels, but it must have been in the very remote past.

An unswerving and rigorous course, if half right, may have been more or less successful, when another, possibly nearer the right one, but pushed with less determination, may have failed entirely. The man who struggles in the water may suddenly learn to swim out of danger, while the one who pursues the inactive policy may learn only to float. Thus considered, the active course might have been an aid to him. However low its order, it was better than no aid at all.

Nevertheless, after man opened his eyes, it behooved him to use them to the best possible advantage. He evidently did not do this in many cases, but kept on in the old way, hanging doggedly to a flimsy raft, refusing to board the life boat which continually floated near him.

At this late date, I ask a momentous question: have we not, times without number, mistaken the direction of an action? I see ahead the rocks of incredulity and know them all too well. They loom so large in questions of a certain kind they often deter the most stout-hearted, but a decision must be made at some time. Why not now? Surmise strengthened by interpretations of available facts must always keep far ahead of actual proof.

Man's origin has been to me, ever since I can remember, a question of intense interest. I might say that as I grew up, it became one of anxiety. This was because I felt it an easier thing to solve than the still greater riddle of his destination, yet the solution of the one ought to throw great light upon the solution of the other. I have been like the child, afraid of the storm, who puts on a bold front, but now that the commotion in my mind has somewhat subsided, I willingly confess the previous condition of agitation.

The direction of an action is a fundamental factor in almost any problem. The answer to the question of that direction, in this particular case, is the burden of this argument. I can well conceive that for ages man thought, if it interested him in the least, that he really saw things, in the sense that the eye is not a receptive organ. He doubtless made up his mind that light travels from the eye

to the object. I heard just the other day a question asked, which showed plainly that the questioner thought this very thing. So, it is not what man used to think, but it is what some of us think at the present time.

However, we need not view this in a Pharisaical mood. Every one of us is guilty of the same thing in principle, if not in this particular way. We twist and turn things, until they are sometimes turned completely around. I would not dwell so long here, if it were not so very important.

Have we not progressed far enough to summon all determination, and to begin at least to search for our true bearings? If we read the compass and find good reason to believe that we are on the wrong course, we should immediately set about making a change. Even though we cannot be sure the changed course is exactly the right one, if we know the new one to be no worse than the old, we make no great mistake.

We shall then have the advantage inherent in the exploration of new routes, upon which there may eventually be found unfailing guideposts, if we would follow their directions, when found. Although this would be the case, we have been traveling in a small circle so long, that it is with failing heart we bear down on the rudder for an outward turn into new waters.

Some of us have become convinced there are no new waters, but we have only to elevate our observation post a little to find that the great enigma becomes more and more extended in area, and if we sound the depth, we find it greater also in that direction. So, there are new waters, ever new.

Man is partially shut off from correct perceptions by age-old, wholly inexplicable and inexhaustible sources of egotism, in its narrowest and meanest meaning. He has other much more important and very real limitations from the fact that he is literally an unfinished work, the foundation having been little more than laid. The process of building is going on to-day in greater degree than it has ever gone on in the past; the debris of odd ends and chips piles higher and higher, seemingly with the tacit consent on the part of everybody, or the refusal of anyone to clear it away, though it threatens to block our mental highways. Yet it would require but a slight change in our mode of thought to remove the obstruction, to plow through it, or to go around it.

We have inherited a passive mode of thinking in certain matters, a sort of involuntary thinking, from our anthropoid ancestors, it must be. We have contented ourselves with that, although long ago we were presented with the priceless gift of reasoning power, or with the privilege of selective conduct, however narrow the limits of that conduct may be. The result of our shiftlessness is a long train of evils, consisting of half-knowledge and superstition.

Thus, we are cocksure that man was made in the image of God, while all the time, without stint or lay-off, without the slightest reason, we have vehemently denied that any other creature was so made. To my mind, this attitude is one to be abhorred and fought unceasingly with the greatest vigor. Considered in the false meaning which we have given to it, it is degrading, inimical to all our best thoughts. It can be the result of little else than egotism running riot, with a plentiful mixture of blind, willful perversity.

Whatever man is now, or will be at some future time, he came into being as only one of the products of the living world. He grew up to fit into a niche in nature; nature moulded him, just as it did all other creatures. It is true out of do-or-die necessity he learned to use advantageously some things found about him, but he was not alone in this; so did other creatures.

If anything was created for his especial benefit, we have no means of knowing it; the facts do not indicate it. If it were done all over again, a much superior being might result. In some respects he has won the race, but at this time this is about all that can be truly said. With the aid of gifts bestowed upon him, the gap between man and other creatures may grow wider and wider (some have dropped out altogether), but originally the racers were composed of homogeneous material, assembled on the same loom by the agencies of the same Weaver.

I fear we put the cart before the horse when we conclude that the world, or any part of it, was made for man's exclusive use. The world was not made especially for man, but it has been used as the proving ground for a great experiment. Man is one of the instruments which survived the test, and is, at least in some respects, the best.

Man simply had to be made so that he would roughly fit into the world, though he is not yet completely adapted to the part. There are pests that prey almost exclusively upon him, or seem to. Why not conclude that man was made for them? I believe that it could be proved, if necessary, that he was not the last thing created—or woman either.