

# Warm-Up Questions

- 1) What is religion?
- 2) What is science?
- 3) Are religion and science opposing fields?
- 4) Why do we need science?
- 5) Why do we need religion?
- 6) What are the flaws of science?
- 7) What are the flaws of religion?

# What do you know about the following?

- Natural selection
- Literal truth
- The Bible
- Book of Genesis
- Survival of the fittest
- Christian doctrine
- Victorian thought
- The Scriptures

# **EVOLUTIONARY THEORY**

Read the following text silently. If you finish reading, wait for the next slide.

*Silas Marner* appeared in 1861, just two years after the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. In the London intellectual world, debate about evolutionary theory was at its height.<sup>1</sup> Christians tried to maintain their faith and believe in the literal truth of the Bible, but this was difficult to do in the face of scientific evidence that contradicted the Book of Genesis.

Evolutionary theory was by no means new when Darwin published *The Origin* in 1859. Thomas Malthus's 'Essay on the Principle of Population' (1798) introduced the idea of the struggle for survival. Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1833) presented fossil evidence that some species had evolved into others, which meant that, contrary to what the Book of Genesis tells us, all the creatures on earth were not created at the same time. In 1844, Robert Chambers's *Vestiges of Creation* explained a version of 'development theory'. The English philosopher Herbert Spencer coined<sup>2</sup> the phrase 'survival of the fittest' in 1852, seven years before Darwin published. The research that resulted in *The Origin* was undertaken in the 1820s, when Darwin went to the Galapagos Islands. Darwin only published *The Origin* in 1859 because Alfred Wallace's research had led him to the same conclusions. If Darwin had not published his findings in 1859, Wallace would have published before him.

The idea of evolutionary theory, then, had been brewing<sup>3</sup> in British

intellectual circles for over half a century, but its crystallisation <sup>1</sup> in *The Origin* gave a new centrality to the debate. The issue was of fundamental importance on social and political levels, because Christian doctrine saturated <sup>2</sup> Victorian thought to such an extent that all arguments used the scriptures for support. Biblical texts were cited to



justify the subjection of women, the class system and the British Empire. In a very real sense, any challenge to the veracity of Christian scripture was a challenge to the foundations of British society.

On personal and philosophical levels, evolutionary theory's threat to Christian belief created profound problems. If there was no God, no heaven and no hell, how could people be persuaded to be good? Were we – the human race –

*Charles Darwin showing an ape how alike the pair of them are, unnamed artist in The London Sketch Book (1874)*

destined for extinction like so many of the species discussed in Lyell's *Principles of Geology*? If we were evolved from apes, did that mean that our nature is basically bestial, violent and immoral? Did it mean that we – the human race – were no better than other species? And, above all, if there was no immortal soul to be damned or saved, what was the meaning of this short life on earth?

At first glance, *Silas Marner* seems to have little to do with mid-Victorian intellectual controversies. However, if we look a little closer, we can see references to the debate about the origins of mankind. Silas loses his faith because what he believed to be true – that God intervenes in human matters – is proven false by empirical evidence. In this he resembles many of the thinking people in Britain at the time the novel was published. Furthermore, when Silas's gold is stolen, the company at the Rainbow pub divides into two camps of opinion: those who believe that there is a natural explanation for the robbery and those who believe it was supernatural in origin. Thus the discussion at the Rainbow – among uneducated country folk in the first decade of the nineteenth century – bears <sup>1</sup> a comic resemblance to the debates about evolution versus creation that were rocking <sup>2</sup> London in the 1860s.

# TASK

In the modern world science has been providing humans with answers that religion has failed to proceed with. Write an essay discussing **EITHER** the equal importance of science and religion **OR** the domination of the one over the other

- Your paper should not be over 250 words
- It should include an introduction and a conclusion