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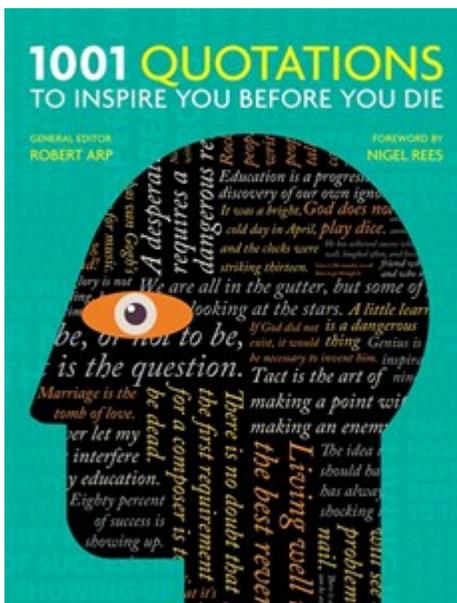
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02.24.2017

## [Creationism and Evolution in 1001 Quotations](#) [5]



A while ago, I wrote a [blog pos](#) [6]t about a chunky volume entitled

[\*1001 Ideas that Changed the Way We Think\*](#) [7] (2013), edited by Robert Arp. Although I contributed thirty-one brief articles on various scientific, philosophical, and cultural topics to the volume, nothing relevant to creationism and evolution was among them. But there was plenty in the book that was, from “Creation Myth” and “Miracles” and “Flat Earth Myth” through “Uniformitarianism” and “Geological Deep Time” and “Gradualism” to “Natural Selection,” “Last Universal Ancestor,” and “Sexual Selection” (all of which were credited to Darwin). As for the competition, “Christian Fundamentalism,” “The Genesis Flood,” and “Darwin’s Black Box” appeared as well. So a discussion of those articles seemed fitting for NCSE’s blog.

Well, now on my desk is a comparably chunky volume edited by Arp, [\*1001 Quotations to Inspire You Before You Die\*](#) [8] (2016). Like its predecessor, it contains 1001 entries—here famous quotations—each accompanied with about 200 words of commentary, often ornamented with a marvelous illustration. The entries are organized by category—“Life and Death,” “Love and Relationships,” “Literature,” “Art and Architecture,” “History,” “Politics and Society,” “Philosophy,” “Religion,” “Mind and Psychology,” “Education,” “Business,” “Technology,” “Science and Nature,” “Sports and Leisure,” “Entertainment,” and “Music”—and chronologically within the category. And like its predecessor, it contains a number (viz., 53) of commentaries by yours truly—all, as it happens, in the “Education,” “History,” and “Entertainment” categories.

I can’t say that I resent not having been asked to write about quotations in the “Science and Nature” category particularly, especially since the quotations that I was assigned posed a variety of interesting challenges. I was particularly pleased with my research on “Let us learn from the past to profit by the present, and from the present to live better in the future,” which was supposedly from the poet William Wordsworth. It sounded nothing like Wordsworth to me, and although I never discovered its author—it started to appear as sententious filler in newspapers circa 1838—I think that I discovered why it was misattributed to Wordsworth. The quotation appears, without attribution, just above a passage correctly attributed to the poet in Tyron Edwards’s 1908 *A Dictionary of Thoughts*. A careless reader might easily have assumed that it, too, was Wordsworthian.

Anyhow, what about the quotations about evolution and creationism? Well, Darwin is represented twice, with the famous “From so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved” from the *Origin*, and the relatively obscure “To kill an error is as good a service as, and sometimes even better than, the establishing of a new truth or fact” from a 1879 letter. Both are illustrated with pictures of a bearded Darwin. The commentary on the former errs, unfortunately, in saying that for Darwin “natural selection itself is the process” by which evolution occurs. And it puzzled me with a claim that although “[m]any contemporary evolutionary biologists” think that modern humans are insulated from natural selection, now “evidence [is] suggesting that humans themselves are still ‘being evolved.’”

There’s nothing else about evolution in the “Science and Nature” section, really, although Thomas Henry Huxley appears with a quotation from “Agnosticism” and Richard Dawkins is granted the last word with “Natural selection will not remove ignorance from future generations.” The commentary usefully explains the context of the latter: in 2006, Dawkins was answering questions from readers of *The Independent*, one of whom “had asked whether those who advocated the theory [*sic*] of intelligent design were ‘stupid’ and whether natural selection will work to ‘remove them from future generations.’” Clearly, Dawkins was rejecting the proposed diagnosis of stupidity in favor of a diagnosis of ignorance; the commentary observes, “he added that education may achieve what natural selection could not.”

Surprisingly, perhaps, there seems to be no quotation in the book about creationism as such. I don't count "After us, the deluge" (attributed to Madame de Pompadour), since she was hardly talking about the Noachian Flood, or "A week is a long time in politics" (attributed to Harold Wilson), since he was hardly talking about the hexaemeric week—although I suppose that you could argue that part of the reason that these quotations were deemed to be so noteworthy as to deserve enshrinement in a book such as *1001 Quotations* is that they resonate with themes from Genesis. (What? Yes, I said "hexaemeric": pertaining to the six days of the creation. Don't blame me; blame the *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "hexaëmeron." At least I spared you the diaeresis over the second e. Except, you know, until just now.)

But of course it would be silly to buy a book like *1001 Quotations* in the hope of getting a book of quotations relevant to the creationism/evolution controversy. (I was going to ask, Is there such a book? to which the answer seems to be no, but maybe it would be better to ask first, Is there any need for such a book? I'm not convinced that there is. And before you rush off to compile it nevertheless, be warned: my experience with the pseudo-Wordsworth quotation as well as many of the creationist quotations I've pursued here convinces me that it often takes a lot of work to identify the correct wording and real provenance of a lot of the quotations in uncritical circulation.) Buy it in the hope of getting a thoughtfully selected, lavishly illustrated, and (unlike its rivals) carefully explained selection of quotations. Isn't that enough?

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