

The Human Face of Alfred Russel Wallace, Part 1

There are two separate and substantial Creations, one of Light and one of Darkness, and man's life in this transitory world, and this world itself, is an outgrowth of the Worlds of Darkness; man's changing material fate is a miscarriage of his spiritual destiny, a counterfeit of another life in the immortal Worlds of Light. This is one of the universal doctrines restored by Zoroaster to the righteous of Persia in the first millennium B.C.E. and recorded nearly a thousand years later in the Gathas of the Zend Avesta. It was not the only time immortal Spirit made such an observation. That doctrine was also restored by Buddha to the righteous of India, by Mani to the righteous of Babylonia, by Jesus and his forerunners to the righteous of Israel, and by other Teachers of Light to the righteous of China, Greece, Northern Europe, Egypt, Arabia, Oceania, the Americas. Oral tradition, and the sacred literature derived from that tradition, abounds in allegories on the spiritual origin and evolution of man.



Alfred Russel
Wallace (1878)

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The cosmology implicit in this universal doctrine gives rise

to an endless interpretation of human events. I am invoking it now to assist me in a modest plan: to trace the history of the evolution of an idea through the heterogeneous texts of three authors. The first one is by Alfred Russel Wallace; it is an excerpt from the collection of essays he published one century ago this year (i.e., 1895) titled *Natural Selection* (pages 167–83):

We know positively that man was contemporaneous with many extinct animals, and has survived changes of the earth's surface fifty or a hundred times greater than any that have occurred during the historical period. . . . But while these changes had been going on, his mental development had, from some unknown cause, greatly advanced, and reached that condition in which it began powerfully to influence his whole existence, and would therefore become subject to the irresistible action of natural selection. This action would quickly give ascendancy to mind...and from that moment man, as regards the form and structure of most parts of his body, would remain stationary. But from the moment that the form of his body became stationary, his mind would become subject to those very influences from which his body had escaped. . . .

We may trace back the gradually decreasing brain of former races, till we come to a time when the body also begins to materially differ. There we shall have reached the starting-point of the human family. Before that period he had not mind enough to preserve his body from change, and would, therefore, have been subject to the same comparatively rapid modifications of form as the other mammalia. . . . Man may continue to exist through a series of geological periods which shall see all other forms of animal life again and again changed...while he himself remains unchanged, except in two particulars – the head and face, as being immediately connected with the organ of the mind and as being the medium of the most refined emotions of his nature.

I wonder what my reader thinks of that proposition. To me it is nearly perfect. It seems impossible to deny, for it has the integrity of a statement *ipso jure*, an outgrowth of the law of natural selection itself. And, of course, it is just that. His formula reconfigures clearly an event that is evidently complex: the face expressing a mind developed in a culture that manifests, however imperfectly, an expression of spirit. In chapter 9 of the same collection, Wallace suggests that man is gradually moving or evolving toward participation in the Eternal. He contemplates the possibility that the development of the specifically human portions of man's structure and intellect have been determined by the directing influence of more highly intelligent beings, perhaps encompassing layers of them, and that some general and fundamental law underlies the law of natural selection "too deep for us to discover it." Behind Wallace's idea is the general and ancient idea of the Fall of Man and the generations of humans who long for redemption.

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