Evolution and the Anthropocene – is there a finite point in spiritual development?

This video was recorded at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History on May 22, 2016

Audience member: 00:24 ... we're heading in.

Multiple panel members: 00:27 That's great, [inaudible 00:00:27]

David Sloan Wilson: 00:27 Yeah, that's great. The point I wanted to make to my colleagues here is that it's the nature of spirituality is that it inspires and moves us forward or impel or motivates us basically to do something. It's that forward motion, I think, that when you put a positive pull in front of you, such as the omega point or something like that, psychologically, that's an important thing in order to move us in a direction. I think Gaia is in much the same spirit. Whether you think of it as an end point or as a direction that we might be continuously traveling, the real litmus test, I think, is does it get you out of bed in the morning brimming with purpose? Brimming with purpose. (01:16) I think the challenge for someone such as myself, who is an atheist ... I'm a very committed scientist, so I'm going to restrict myself to methodological naturalism, the laws acting around us. The challenge for someone like myself is, is it possible to have a world view that is highly spiritual, in the sense that it gets me out of bed in the morning brimming with purpose, and at the same time is fully respectful of the facts of the world? (01:49) I think that religions are great as spiritual systems, always have been. [Jilhi 00:01:55] called them life forms. Jilhi said, “Philosophy is just death. A religion is a life form. It’s an organic. It mutates. It evolves. It diversifies.” It is all of these things. So if a religion is a lifeform in a way that a philosophy is not, can science be like that? The verdict is really out. (02:17) But I think [Shaidan 00:02:18] showed that ... I think what draws so many people to him, is that he created something which was accounted as really high from a spiritual perspective. At the same time, he claimed, at the time, to be fully scientific. I think that that's the Holy Grail for someone such as myself. Can you get something that's highly spiritual and at the same time is fully scientific? (02:49) I want to agree with you that scientists that are often part of the problem when you talk about something which is brimming with purpose, for example, that right away they go ballistic because that's just not in their wheelhouse. But [inaudible 00:03:03], there's all kinds of
interesting stuff taking place, by the way, and sometimes it goes under the name of the extended evolutionary synthesis. Just in biology, forget about people. That's really the question, this whole idea of purpose in evolution, intentional processes, and so on, in a way that's fully scientific. (03:20) So this is, I guess, the last answer to the last question, but we're living in very exciting times intellectually right now. What's happening now is very, very exciting, and so we're lucky to be present for it and to be participants. This event, I think, helped us to offer that to you.

Return to the web page for this video, Evolution and the Anthropocene – is there a finite point in spiritual development?