



FAITH AND SCIENCE

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH FORUM

At The University of Hong Kong

Distinguished Lecture Series on  
Big Questions in Science

# Evolution

## Random or Determined?

**Prof Simon Conway Morris FRS**

Faraday Institute / Cambridge University

**4<sup>th</sup> May, Friday**

**7:00 pm, Rayson Huang Theatre, HKU**

Received wisdom is that evolution lacks any predictability. This applies to all species, including humans: we are just another historical accident. Central to this idea is the claim that mass extinctions radically redeploy the trajectories of evolution. In reality, the evidence points in exactly the opposite direction. While mass extinctions are destructive on the day, they are ultimately creative, accelerating what was going to happen anyway. Moreover, evolutionary convergence suggests the number of evolutionary outcomes is surprisingly limited. It seems that something like a human is very much on the evolutionary cards.

This raises important questions: Where are all the aliens? Why are there are such profound differences between us and even our nearest primate relatives? It seems that the study of evolution will only flourish when it is put into much wider contexts.

**Simon Conway Morris FRS** holds an ad hominem Chair (in Evolutionary Palaeobiology) in the Department of Earth Sciences at Cambridge University, where he is also a Fellow of St John's College. A world expert on the Cambrian Explosion, his research considers the constraints on evolution, and the historical processes that lead to the emergence of biological complexity. This is of relevance to numerous fields, leading him to foster research interests in areas such as animal cognition and extra-terrestrial life.

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Enquiries:  
[kytmok@hku.hk](mailto:kytmok@hku.hk)

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