



The Origin of Life: Darwinism vs. Design

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(Part of an apologetics course designed to give roots to the faith of Christians, assist seekers in their quest for truth, and gently and respectfully challenge those who hold to competing worldviews)

For more information on the Richmond Center for Christian Study,
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Why does this issue matter?

1) God is jealous for his glory

This is God’s creation – “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” (Psalm 19:1)

God rightly wants credit for what he has done – “I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.” (Isaiah 42:8)

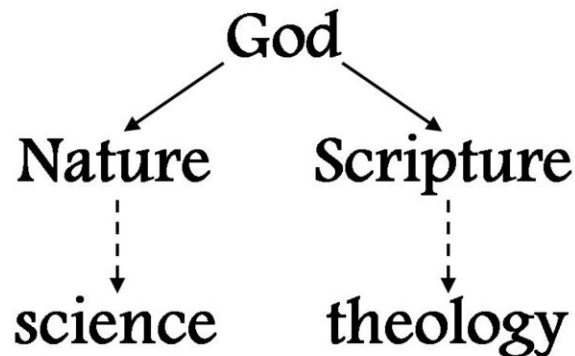
2) Removes barriers of skepticism (and gives roots to the faith of believers)

If it’s really true that life was designed, then suddenly certain notions that were previously seen as merely religious (e.g., God speaking, taking on human flesh, and even raising Jesus from the dead) are now seen, not as mere faith statements that certain people believe, but as historical truth claims that might very well describe the nature of the world we all live in.

Do Science and the Bible contradict each other?

How does God speak? “Two Books of God”

Nature (general revelation) & Scripture (special revelation)



Nature & Scripture – infallible (God’s revelation)

Science & theology – fallible (man’s interpretation of God’s revelation)

When our science and theology conflict, we have to go back to Nature & Scripture and ask, “How have I misinterpreted what God has spoken?”

Five Views of Origins

Naturalistic Evolution	Atheistic, only matter and energy exist, life can arise only by chance or necessity
Deistic Evolution	God created universe but never intervenes, life is left to arise by chance or necessity
Theistic Evolution	God used evolution to bring life about, intervenes at the origin of life and (maybe) the human soul
Progressive Creationism	God created the universe, then created various forms of life at different points in history
Fiat Creationism	God created the universe and all of life pretty much instantaneously

Cultural note: The Darwinism that is so prevalent in our world today promotes a specific brand of evolution – Naturalistic Evolution (the idea that everything concerning the origin of life, and even the universe, must be explained without appealing to divine intervention).

What case are we trying to make?

I want to lay out a scientific case that the reality of how life came about on this planet resides somewhere in the realm of Progressive and Fiat Creationism, in other words, that God actually intervened and created various forms of life as independent acts of creation, rather than saying that life somehow came about by chance or natural forces, descending from a common ancestor.

So we are focusing here on what God has revealed *through Nature* regarding life's origin.

Who has the burden of proof?

Prima Facie Principle – One must assume that what appears to be true is indeed true, unless there is sufficient evidence to the contrary; thus the one who argues against what appears to be true (i.e., against the *prima facie* view) has the burden of proof.

Everybody acknowledges the Appearance of Design.

“Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose.”

~ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, 1

“Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved.”

~ Francis Crick

Since the burden of proof rests with the person who would argue against what appears to be true, the burden of proof in the question of the origin of life rests squarely on the Darwinist.

Cultural note: It is often assumed in our culture that you should assume that life came about by natural processes alone rather than by divine intervention, and even then the standard for proof is placed abnormally high. But the *Prima Facie* Principle shows that it is really the other way around.

Why Darwinism Fails

What makes a sound argument?

- 1) True assumptions
- 2) Valid reasoning

Darwinism fails in both of these...

Example of how Darwinism fails in its underlying assumptions

Darwinism assumes Methodological Naturalism.

Methodological Naturalism – “Only naturalistic explanations are allowed. Anything else [i.e., appealing to design] is declared unscientific.”

This assumption is woven into the fabric of most science textbooks.

“There are varying religious accounts of how [the origin of life] happened, but there is only one scientific account, and it can be summed up with a single word: evolution.”

~ David Krogh, *A Brief Guide to Biology with Physiology*, 254
(standard freshman level biology textbook at VCU)

Krogh is suggesting that evolution is the only explanation that even qualifies as scientific.

“The earliest fossils of multicellular organisms appear in approximately 600-million-year-old rocks in southern Australia. These had shells, gills, filters, efficient guts, and circulatory systems, and in these ways they were relatively advanced.... They must have had ancestors that do not appear in known fossils, but in which these organs and systems evolved.”

~ Daniel Botkin & Edward Keller, *Environmental Science*, 126
(most commonly used science textbook at UR)

Botkin and Keller rule out design as a possible explanation for why these “relatively advanced” organisms suddenly appear in the fossil record, and simply assume that they “must have had ancestors that do not appear in known fossils.”

Thus, design is ruled out ahead of time!

The danger in this approach, of course, is that if you rule out certain options before the evidence is considered, you risk ruling out the truth.

If the purpose of science is to discover the truth, ruling out an option ahead of time cannot be considered good science.

Why do many scientists assume Methodological Naturalism?

One reason is because of the “God of the Gaps” problem.

Appealing to God “fills the gap” in our scientific knowledge.

When we find a scientific explanation, God is no longer necessary.

Famous example – Newton suggested that God gave the planets periodic “nudges” to keep them in orbit.

Later we discovered how planets stay in orbit naturally, so God got “squeezed out” of the explanation.

To avoid the “God of the Gaps” problem, many scientists simply don’t consider appealing to God in the first place (assuming Methodological Naturalism), including the question of the origin of life.

Why should we *not* assume Methodological Naturalism when considering the origin of life?

Two types of science:

- 1) empirical sciences (asks how things operate now that they are here)
(e.g., chemistry, physics, biology)
- 2) historical sciences (asks how things got here in the first place)
(e.g., archaeology, forensic science)

With empirical sciences, it is proper to assume Methodological Naturalism, since we are asking how things operate *by nature* now that they are here.

With historical sciences, it is not proper to assume Methodological Naturalism, since we are asking a fundamentally different type of question – how certain things got here *in the first place*.

When the archaeologist asks “How did these cave markings get here?” he is not required to limit his explanations to natural causes like wind erosion, but is allowed to consider the possibility that they came about through the work of some sort of intelligent agent.

When the forensic scientist asks “How did this dead body get here?” he is not required to limit his explanations to something like a heart attack, but is allowed to consider the possibility that it came about through the work of an intelligent agent (e.g., a murderer).

So when considering how life got here *in the first place* (a question properly belonging to the historical sciences), it is scientifically appropriate to consider design as a possibility.

Historical note: The reason Newton and others have run into the “God of the Gaps” problem is not because they appealed to the work of an intelligent agent, but because they appealed to the work of an intelligent agent *in the realm of the empirical sciences*.

Example of how Darwinism fails in its reasoning

Darwinism reasons that “similarity implies common ancestry.”
This is a *non sequitur* (i.e., it does not follow).

Similarity could just as well be explained by a common designer, just as two paintings that are strikingly similar might suggest that they were painted by the same artist, or just as two computer programs that have strikingly similar code might suggest that they were programmed by the same computer programmer.

This kind of failure in reasoning is pervasive...

“Some classic evidence for evolution is seen in the similar forelimb structures found in a very diverse group of mammals – in a whale, a cat, a bat, and a gorilla.... Look at what exists in each case: one upper bone, joined to two intermediate bones, joined to five digits. Evolutionary biologists postulate that the four mammals evolved from a common ancestor, adapting this 1-2-5 structure over time in accordance with their environments.”

~ David Krogh, *A Brief Guide to Biology with Physiology*, 265
(standard freshman level biology textbook at VCU)

Krogh is suggesting that, since these animals have a similar forelimb structure, they must have descended from a common ancestor. In fact, he even calls this “classic evidence for evolution,” although he also refers to this as a “postulate.”

Observation: If you have the burden of proof, you can’t afford to have “postulates” serve as “classic evidence” for your case.

“Unmistakable signs of a common ancestor quickly appear when one looks at the details [comparing human and mouse genomes]. For instance, the order of genes along the human and the mouse chromosomes is generally maintained over substantial stretches of DNA. Thus, if I find human genes A, B, and C in that order, I am likely to find that the mouse has counterparts of A, B, and C also placed in that same order, although the spacing between the genes may have varied a bit. In some instances, this correlation extends over substantial distances; virtually all of the genes on human chromosome 17, for instance, are found on mouse chromosome 11.”

~ Francis Collins, *The Language of God*, 134-135

Collins is pointing out the similarity between human and mouse DNA and referring to this as an “unmistakable sign of a common ancestor.”

Then Collins goes on and says, “While one might argue that the order of genes is critical in order for their function to occur properly, and therefore a designer might have maintained that order in multiple acts of special creation, there is no evidence from current understanding of molecular biology that this restriction would need to apply over such substantial chromosome distances.”

Note that Collins says “There is no evidence from current understanding of molecular biology that this restriction would need to apply over such substantial chromosome distances.” In other words, Collins is saying “There’s really no evidence for design, so we should just conclude my position.” That might work if you don’t have the burden of proof, but not if it’s your job to prove your case.

A scientific case for design: Irreducible Complexity

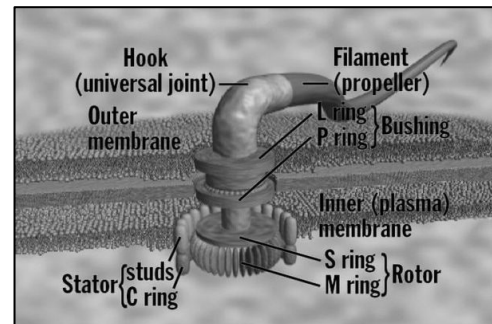
Reminder: It is not the design advocate's job to make his case; it is the Darwinist's. But the fact that a positive scientific case can be made for design anyway is "icing on the cake."

Irreducibly complex system – “system composed of several interdependent parts, wherein the removal of one of those parts would cause the system to cease functioning.”

Irreducibly complex systems exist in nature, like this bacterial flagellar motor.

The motor spins the flagellum (i.e., tail) so the bacterium can move.

If one of the 40 parts of this motor is missing or defective, it will not work.



Darwinism requires that biological systems had to arise in a step-by-step fashion through natural selection, without the intrusion of a designer.

In fact, Darwin himself said in his *Origin of Species*, “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.”

But irreducibly complex systems could not have arisen by natural selection.

Natural selection only favors those parts that benefit the system *as they arise one step at a time*.

But in an irreducibly complex system like the flagellar motor, none of the parts become beneficial until they are all already in place.

So natural selection is out of the picture when it comes to the construction of the flagellar motor and other irreducibly complex systems like it.

This, of course, infers design.

A scientific case for design: Biological Information

DNA is a code.

“Now we believe that DNA is a code. That is, the order of bases (the letters) makes one gene different from another gene (just as one page of print is different from another).”

~ Francis Crick (co-discovered of double helix structure of DNA)

Information Theory – tells us that information *always* comes from design.

“The creation of information is habitually associated with conscious activity.”

~ Henry Quastler (pioneer in Information Theory)

Charles Lyell (Darwin’s mentor)

Lyell’s method for studying biological origins:

Look for “causes now in operation”

In other words, if we observe that certain occurrences *in the present* are always caused by X, then we should assume that such occurrences *in the past* are also caused by X, and not by Y.

Lyell and Darwin did not know about DNA, but scientists today would do well to apply their method to the information embedded in the DNA molecule:

We observe that codes/information *in the present* are always caused by some sort of intelligent agent, and never from mere natural causes.

So, considering these “causes now in operation,” we should conclude that codes/information that we find *from the past*, like the information found in the DNA molecule, must also have been caused by some sort of intelligent agent.

Resource Recommendations

Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*

Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory In Crisis*

Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*

Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design*

Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth?*

DVDs from Illustra Media: (also view online at <http://youtube.com/illustramedia>)

The Privileged Planet

Unlocking the Mystery of Life

Darwin's Dilemma

Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed (DVD with Ben Stein)

Discovery Institute – <http://discovery.org>