

Breaking through Darwinism's Defenses

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In recent years, the theory of evolution has come under attack by some who claim that life could have come about only through intelligent design. Darwinists typically counter this attack with several standard arguments. The god-of-the-gaps argument goes something like this: In the past, people often pointed to some god to explain what they could not understand. Even some early scientists pointed to God to explain things when they could find no other explanation. However, further study often made it possible to explain what was happening using only natural laws and forces. The unexplained phenomenon turned out to be a gap in our understanding of how nature works, and God was not needed to bridge the gap. Today scientists are understandably reluctant to use some god as an explanation. Is it not best for scientists to continue to look for an answer rather than give up and say a god did it?

Then there are the rules-of-science and the its-a-fact arguments. Darwinists argue that they are just playing by the rules of science. Science investigates natural causes, not divine intervention. This is because only natural causes can be studied using repeated experiments. They also claim that rejecting evolution is like rejecting the fact that the earth is a sphere or that it travels around the sun. Only zealots, people blinded by their beliefs, reject such things. Although there is some debate over which theory best explains how evolution happened, Darwinists insist there is no disputing that it happened.

Having been persuaded by these arguments, many people will not listen to any evidence for a Designer no matter how good it is. The arguments act as a defensive wall. For the message of intelligent design to get a fair hearing, the flaws in the wall need to be exposed. This can be done by pointing out two things. First, the arguments in the previous paragraphs shift the discussion away from intelligence and over to the supernatural. They are arguments for excluding God and miracles as causes, not for excluding intelligence. Second, they obscure the difference between investigating ongoing phenomena and investigating events in the past. Once these mistakes are out in the open, the philosophical bias of the Darwinists will become apparent to most people, and they will be willing to listen to the case for intelligent design.

The first flaw is a case of misdirection. Evolutionists often contrast natural and supernatural causes and since they exclude the supernatural because of the limits of science, they are left with only natural causes. No one disputes that miracles are unique events and that we cannot put God under a microscope. But does this limit us to only natural causes when we enter the realm of science? Evolutionists would like us to think so. However, they are overlooking something.

Consider your own experience. When you go for a drive in the country, it is readily apparent which fields are wild and which ones are cultivated. You probably have observed the wind scatter dandelion and maple seeds, and you probably have seen farmers plant seeds. Through experiences like these, we learn that intelligent agents and natural forces are very different in what they are capable of doing. This is why we often can tell whether impersonal forces or intelligent agents caused an event simply by looking at the results.

Take the example of archeologists who come across a statue buried in the ground. They do not assume that only natural forces were involved in producing the statue. If someone insisted that wind and water erosion, cracking due to freezing water, and other natural

forces must have created the statue, people would say, "He's overlooking the obvious. The statue was carved by an intelligent agent."

Evolutionists insist that life developed through a process involving only natural forces and random events. But how do they know that no intelligent planning and activity were involved in the history of life? Think again of the archeologists. Even if pottery, foundations for homes, and human remains are not found in the area, the archeologists would still conclude that a person made the statue. This is because only an intelligent being can create an image or design and then take the steps needed to produce that design. Similarly does not the enormous complexity of living things suggest the need for intelligent planning and activity, and therefore the need for a Designer?

Now we turn to the second flaw. Scientists use only natural laws and forces in their theories about ongoing phenomena (like the motion of the planets). Theists do not have a problem with this. That is because they recognize that scientists are not investigating the ultimate cause when they look at how things work day after day. They are not trying to find out whether or how God is involved. They are simply seeking to explain and describe the various instruments and laws that God has established. This kind of science is called empirical science. The three arguments mentioned in the first two paragraphs all assume that the science being discussed is empirical science.

Again the Darwinists have overlooked something. There is another kind of science. It is called forensic or historical science. The difference between empirical and forensic science can be seen with the help of the following illustration. If you are interested in antique cars, you might want to know how a Model "T" Ford works. You also might be interested in its history and ask how was it built. The methods used to answer these two questions are very different. The car can be observed in operation and disassembled to find out how it works. However, there are no Model "T" factories in operation today. With cars, you can look for answers in historical records, but for many objects these records do not exist. This makes your search for answers much more difficult and means that the answers you come up with might be educated guesses.

Scientists ask these how-does-it-work and how-did-it-get-here questions about nature. In the category of how does it work, biologists ask questions like "How do animals interact with their environment?" and "How do the kidneys work?" Their how-did-it-get-here questions would include "How did birds and mammals come into existence?" and "How did the finches on the Galapagos Islands come to differ from their counterparts on the mainland?"

When we theorize about how things work, our focus is on the present. Experiments are done over and over to test out various possible explanations. When we theorize about the origins of something, our focus shifts to the past. This shift is critical. Past events are always unique and unrepeatable, and no one can travel back in time and directly investigate the events. Therefore, investigating the past always involves looking for clues and trying to reconstruct the event.

An illustration from police work will help. Let's say some scientists are helping to investigate a car crash. The crash might be due to natural causes. That is, it might be an accident, but it also might be a crime. The scientists try to reconstruct the crash using available clues and their knowledge of what natural and intelligent causes can accomplish. Through repeated experiments, forensic scientists try to reproduce the evidence collected at the scene. If the results of their experiments match the evidence, this can lead the investigators to the person or thing responsible. In the case of a car crash, there may be telltale signs (like corrosion or metal fatigue) that a part failed naturally. Then the investigators conclude that the crash was accidental. In some cases, however, there is

evidence of tampering (like marks from a knife or a saw). Then the investigators conclude that since this could not have happened naturally, a person must have caused the crash.

Evolutionists are like the forensic scientists who investigate a possible crime scene. The experiments that they perform in the present (like using x-rays to cause mutations in fruit flies) and the evidence they uncover (like fossils and the microevolution of moth and finch populations) give them clues to a possible reconstruction of the past. Unfortunately, when it comes to the history of life, many scientists are willing to consider reconstructions that involve only natural forces and random events, and they want us to accept these reconstructions as a true picture of reality.

If anyone else tried this approach, we would not be impressed with his case. Let's suppose that in his summation, a defense attorney said, "You have heard the evidence, and much of it was scientific. As you deliberate, remember that science investigates only mindless natural forces. Therefore, you cannot use any of the scientific evidence to point an accusing finger at the defendants or any other person." This attorney is misrepresenting science. Past events can have either natural or intelligent causes, and the evidence may point us in either direction.

No attorney would get away with this kind of approach, but evolutionary biologists often do. Darwinists do not allow the evidence to lead them in the direction of an intelligent cause. Yet many fail to see this for what it is. It is the result of the Darwinists' philosophical beliefs. Their commitment to naturalism (the belief that nature is all that there is) leads them to exclude intelligent planning and activity from their theories about the history of life.

In presenting the message of intelligent design, we not only need to show people the flaws in evolution, we need to present a positive case for design. In doing this, we should be careful. Many Christians create barriers to communication by the approach they take in the creation-evolution controversy. They want scientific theories to be founded on "biblical principles," or they try to prove biblical teachings through science. When they do this, many people stop listening to them, and they become even less willing to listen to the evidence for a Designer.

If we leave the Bible out of the discussion, is there evidence that an intelligent Designer made living things? Consider the following: DNA, which is found in all cells, is the blueprint for all cellular operations. It contains instructions that are used to construct complex molecules called proteins. The question we must answer is how did these instructions come into existence. Whenever we try to reconstruct the past, we reason by analogy. Is there a comparable case where we can show that encoded information has come into existence simply through natural means? No. Even a short letter is so complex that it does not come into existence without a writer. What we know about messages strongly suggests that the information encoded in the DNA molecule was put there by an intelligent agent.

The biochemist Michael Behe points out that many processes in living things are "irreducibly complex." The board game Mouse Trap is a good illustration of what this is. If you have played the game, you probably know that if one piece is not in its proper place, the mousetrap will not work. The trap is irreducibly complex because all the pieces must be present and working properly for the whole system to function. You can tinker with the mousetrap and modify the way it works. However, this tinkering is intelligent intervention, and the theory of evolution states that only impersonal forces are needed to change biological systems. To modify the mousetrap in a way that is analogous to evolutionary theory, you would need to put the assembled mousetrap into a box and shake it. There is

little chance that such random changes to a complex system will improve it. Instead they will probably cause it to fail.

Inside the cells in our bodies are many irreducibly complex systems that are biochemical in nature. Vision is one example. When light enters your eye, it strikes a molecule called retinal and loosens the link between two atoms that are part of a rigid chain of atoms. This causes the chain to flip over and triggers off a complex series of chemical reactions that results in our seeing an object. The problem for the evolutionists is to explain how these complex systems came into existence while keeping in mind what we know about DNA. Mutations can change the DNA's instructions and the resulting proteins. However, such changes are quite hazardous for the cell. Modifying a protein even slightly can cause it to change its shape and its chemical properties. It is likely that such a modified protein will no longer perform its proper function. And remember, if only one component fails, the system stops working.

The problem with saying that mutations can create complex systems is that for such systems there is only a small island of success and a universe of failure. Macroevolution would involve jumping between these islands and avoiding the universe that separates them. This is implausible for even one system, and there are a myriad of these systems in nature. Darwinism is an implausible reconstruction of the past because the forces of nature are blind and cannot plan ahead. Our knowledge of these forces and what intelligent agents are capable of doing strongly suggests that only an intelligent Designer could create life's complex systems and avoid the universe of catastrophic failure.

Evolutionists sometimes argue against intelligent design by pointing out that great waste, death, and imperfection are visible in the history of life. They then ask how could this be so if God is the Creator. There is no disputing that evil and imperfection are part of life, but why this is so is not a scientific question. The scientists who answer this question have stepped outside their field of expertise and have become amateur theologians.

How can we know who nature's Designer is and what His attitude toward us is? The Christian Church contends that we will never be able to answer this question with any certainty by looking at the creation. The message found in creation is ambiguous, and sin muddles the message even more. Fortunately, God has sent us a clear message through His Son. Jesus' words and actions show us that God is favorably inclined toward us and that He delights in giving us good things.

The case for intelligent design involves many more details. If you are interested in this case, the following resources will be helpful: *The Creation Hypothesis* edited by J. P. Moreland, InterVarsity Press, 1994 *Darwin on Trial* by Phillip E. Johnson, 2nd ed., InterVarsity Press, 1993 *Darwin's Black Box* by Michael Behe, Free Press, 1996 *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds* by Phillip E. Johnson, InterVarsity Press, 1997

The Mystery of Life's Origin by Charles Thaxton, Walter Bradley and Roger Olsen, Philosophical Library, 1984

The Access Research Network website at www.arn.org

The Origins website at www.origins.org