

Our Information-Rich Universe Points to Intelligent Design

Jonathan Wells
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I commend Jim Stephens for undertaking his “101 Proofs for God” project, and he’s right to target evolutionary theory and mention intelligent design (ID).

As Cornell biologist William Provine said in 1998, “Evolution is the *greatest engine of atheism*” (quoted in Witham, *Where Darwin Meets the Bible*, p. 23). Schools teach our children that materialistic Science is the best judge of truth, and Science says that evolution is a fact. By implication, God is certainly unnecessary and probably nonexistent. This attitude dominates academia from

kindergarten to the doctoral level.

Of course, evolution can mean many things, some of which are uncontroversial — such as minor changes within existing species. In the 1930s, evolutionary biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky called such minor changes “microevolution;” he used “macroevolution” to refer to the origin of new species, organs and body plans. According to Charles Darwin’s theory, all living things are descendants of one or a few common ancestors that have been modified by unguided processes such as variations and natural selection. Thus — theoretically — over millions of years microevolution has produced macroevolution (including the origin of human beings) without the need for design or purpose.



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But Darwin did not know the mechanism of heredity or the origin of novel variations, so his theory was incomplete. After 1900, Mendelian genetics seemed to remedy the first deficiency, and after 1953, DNA mutations seemed to remedy the second. The resulting Modern Synthesis combined Darwin’s theory with the idea that organismal development is controlled by a genetic program written in DNA sequences, and that DNA mutations can change genetic programs to generate raw materials for evolution. According to molecular biologist Jacques Monod, “with that, and the understanding of the random physical basis of mutation that molecular biology has also provided, the mechanism of Darwinism is at last securely founded. And man has to understand that he is a mere accident” (quoted in Judson, *Eighth Day of*

Creation, p. 217).

This is what our children are being taught: Not that we are created in the image of God, but that we are just accidental by-products of undirected material processes.

As Jim Stephens points out, however, the two main mechanisms in the modern version of Darwin’s theory — mutation and natural selection — lack evidence. Biologists have mutated fruit fly embryos in every possible way, in a process called “saturation mutagenesis,” and found only three possible results: a normal fruit fly, a defective fruit fly, or a dead fruit fly. Saturation mutagenesis has also been used on worms, fish and mice, with the same results.

The second mechanism, natural selection, has never been shown to produce anything more than artificial selection — which is to say, microevolution. No one has ever observed the origin of a new species by variation (mutation) and selection. This is the “ultimate missing link” in modern evolutionary theory. Without sufficient evidence for its proposed mechanism, Darwinian evolution — even in its modern forms — is only a “just-so story,” like Rudyard Kipling’s fantasies for children about how the camel got his hump and the leopard got his spots.

Darwinian evolution supposedly rules out design, but according to intelligent design theory, there is evidence in nature that some features of the world, including some features of living things, are better explained by an intelligent cause than by unguided natural processes. To put it another way, there are patterns (hence the “design”) in nature that give evidence of having resulted from teleology (hence the “intelligent”).

On this Blog, Joseph Vignolo commented the following about Jim Stephens’s project:

“I do believe in intelligent design, but without the intelligent designer. This may seem counter-

intuitive, but it really isn't. First, let us understand what intelligence really is. Everything around us is just information.... [Nature] contains certain excluded combinations, rules you could call them, that came into existence when the universe spontaneously originated... Then, over time, things interacted. A lot. It all happened over billions of years. As all this stuff got stirred up, certain combinations occasionally occurred. They possessed certain advantages and were in harmony with their environment and so they persisted and hung around. But other combinations without advantages or not in harmony with the environment perished. It was all just a big, long, bunch of trial and error, followed by a lot of failures but some occasional successes, which permitted stuff to gradually climb from a lower state of order to a higher one. Sure, it sort of seems like there was a human-like intelligent designer at work. But that's putting the cart before the horse. It's obvious that everything around us was intelligently designed. It happens because nature has the ability to do trial and error, to do experiments and to self-organize. This meets the definition of design. And intelligent design at that. This explains how everything got to be how it is today."

Although I wouldn't say that everything is "just" information, I would agree that information is more fundamental than matter. To quote from a new book by my friend and fellow intelligent design theorist William A. Dembski:

"[I]nformation is produced as some possibilities are realized to the exclusion of others." Real material objects are always characterized by particular forms or signatures — that is, they realize some possibilities instead of others. Pure matter is an abstraction. Therefore, Dembski writes, "information should properly be regarded as the prime entity and object of science, displacing matter from its current position of eminence... Materialists see the natural world as matter all the way down. Information realists, like me, see the natural world as information all the way down." (*Being As Communion: A Metaphysics of Information*, p. 91)



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYAsaU9IvnI&list=PLR8eQzfCOiS3WgNO1msnYMpK-3cezglzz>
Dr. William Dembski describes the central thesis of his new book *Being as Communion*. Dembski proposes that the fundamental "stuff" of this universe is information, not matter.

Natural laws are informational. For example, the characteristics of the elements — and their arrangement in the periodic table — realize one possible set of relationships to the exclusion of other possible sets. But where did natural laws come from? One could say that they just happened ("spontaneously originated"), but saying that things just happen is not really an explanation. How does one possibility get selected, to the exclusion of others? The answer is not information, which is the result of the selection rather than its cause.

Landing on one successful possibility out of a vast number of unsuccessful possibilities requires specifying a target. In other words, it requires goal-directedness, or knowing what you want before you go looking for it. Goal-directedness (teleology) is characteristic of an intelligent agent, one that can think of outcomes before they are realized. So information is not the same as intelligence; instead, information is produced by intelligence.

Intelligence is not limited to acting externally, from the outside in, as we see in human artifacts. Intelligence can also act internally, from the inside out, as we see in living organisms. But whether intelligence is external or internal, it is necessarily goal-directed. It is never just "a big, long, bunch of trial and error."

So the "intelligent design" to which Mr. Vignolo refers is not what Dembski and I (and other ID theorists) mean by intelligent design.

Where does intelligence come from? A theist would respond that its source is God, whom we can know to

a limited extent because we were created in God's image. Mr. Vignolo calls this "the man in the cloud theory," but surely he knows that this is a caricature — indeed, a mockery — of theism. I know hundreds of theists — Unificationists, Christians, Jews and others — and not one of them holds to anything like "the man in the cloud theory." From a theistic perspective, our information-rich universe points to an intelligent mind that far transcends human intelligence and necessarily pre-exists it. We recognize it as intelligence because we know from our own experience what intelligence can do (and what cannot occur without it); we know it transcends us because we are incapable of creating the universe; and we know it is pre-existent because intelligence precedes information.

Mr. Vignolo rejects this explanation, because human intelligence is an evolutionary latecomer on the cosmic scene. In his view, intelligence came last, not first.

Now, *that's* putting the cart before the horse.

Jonathan Wells (UTS Class of 1978) earned a Ph.D. in theology at Yale University (1986) and a Ph.D. in biology at the University of California at Berkeley (1994). He is the author of Icons of Evolution and is currently a Senior Fellow at the Discovery Institute in Seattle, Washington.