

# INTELLIGENT DESIGN

John 1:1-5, :10-12 (NIV); Romans 1:18-20 (NASB)

David Bruce Linn, Pastor-Teacher

1 May, 2005

All Rights Reserved

It's Christmas eve. Your wife has purchased the largest jungle gym ever designed, it has hundreds of pieces, and says on the box in bold letters: "Some assembly required." Think about three possible assembly scenarios. In the first scenario, you make a hot chocolate, head for the den, and watch a football game. How likely is it that the jungle gym will be assembled in the morning if you do nothing? In the second scenario, you make a hot chocolate, and while watching a football game at the same time, you set out to assemble the jungle gym without looking at the instructions. What are the chances of success under that scenario? Finally, a third possibility is that you shut off the TV, drink a cup of coffee instead of a cup of hot chocolate, and then you--drum roll--read the manufacturer's instructions first! I think we would all agree that this last scenario has the best chance of pleasing the kids in the morning. The key to success in that scenario is...well, we will take that up later.

The world of living things is filled with marvelous complexity and fascinating variety. How did it all get here and how did it take the remarkable forms we see? At this point in history there are two major competing views of where living things came from: designed and not designed. We shall treat the last one first.

## 1. WHERE DOES SCIENTIFIC NATURALISM SAY LIVING THINGS COME FROM?

While empirical science cannot reproduce the events which led to the beginning of everything, it attempts to work backward from what is known today. Two major classes of views are common. The first is the older view of the preexistence of energy and matter. Most theoretical physicists do not now accept this theory. The most common view is the so-called Big Bang Theory which is the result of working backwards from observable natural processes. Albert Einstein kicked the idea off with his equations which require a continuously expanding universe. The theory proposes that the universe began with a singularity which produced an inconceivably enormous expansion of matter and energy which generated the physical universe with which we are familiar. It is a theory which dances with the idea of a creator because of the problem of having something come from absolutely nothing. Most scientific naturalists prefer to argue that it was just natural that everything would organize into the real universe from a complete vacuum with no creator acting on it. That is simply an act of faith based on the need for a workable starting point.

A totally separate question is how this matter came to life. The explanation given near the middle of the last century is that chance plus a massive amount of time working on this disorganized matter would eventually generate life. This was expressed by Harvard biochemist George Wald in a *Scientific American* article from August, 1954. He wrote: "...Given so much time, the 'impossible' becomes possible, the possible probable, and the probable virtually certain. One has

only to wait: time itself performs the miracles" (pp. 44-5). This is the same as saying that if the pieces of the jungle gym were left for a long enough time, they would assemble themselves, or at least become part of something else which is highly organized, or even living.

The view that time and chance are sufficient to explain the origin of life is now almost totally out of favor. In 1995 Nobel laureate Christian de Duve wrote a book summarizing the current view entitled *Vital Dust: Life as a Cosmic Imperative*. He argues that chance is inadequate, and that life came to be through a long chain of events driven by life-favoring laws of chemistry. Remember that Darwin's natural selection cannot come into play until life exists, so de Duve relies upon the idea that chemical laws predispose unorganized matter to form into organized and then living matter, given enough time.

This view raises several immediate questions. First, where did these life-predisposing laws come from? They must be postulated as an assumption, not a scientific conclusion, because there is no way to test for their existence at the time life began. There is no proof that chemical laws today organize matter into living things. Secondly, laws do not create the sorts of living things we see. They specify repetitive things like: "When baking soda and vinegar are present in a child's toy volcano a stinking mess bubbles out the top." Laws create things like stripes on a highway, polka dot shirts, and snowflakes. While laws can produce very highly specified patterns as compared to disorganized matter, de Duve's theory hardly explains the non-repetitive form of complexity we see in living things.

Finally, there are those who say that time plus law plus chance is the answer. This is just a mixture of two non-working scenarios because the patterns of life are both highly specified and non-repetitive. But let's grant the hypothesis for the sake of argument that life did start in one of these ways, as science says. Then how did all these marvelous forms of life develop? While there are a few dissenters among modern scientists, the reigning answer continues to be that some form of Darwinian natural selection explains how the first single-cell organism changed and developed over time to produce all living things.

Let's think about what this really means, using a famous example that appears in many textbooks even today. A study was done of peppered moths in England which purports to demonstrate a single evolutionary change which, when accrued with millions of small changes over millions of years is said to explain the origin of every living thing. I can still remember learning this example in high school and seeing the pictures of peppered moths sitting quietly on trees to be photographed. The argument begins with the fact that industrialization of the area under study in England caused the local trees to be covered with soot. At that time the peppered moths were almost black in color. When the use of coal-fired manufacturing plants gradually died out the local trees were no longer covered with soot, their bark lightened in color, and the moths seemed to turn light in color to match the color of the tree bark upon which they landed. The explanation given was that the population of moths turned light as a matter of "survival of the fittest." The dark moths were originally nearly invisible when seen against sooty tree bark and thus eluded their predators. When the tree bark lightened because it was no longer sooty, dark moths became easy to spot and were consumed in large numbers by their predators, while the light moths flourished because they were the ones now nearly invisible against the non-sooty bark. Thus the fittest survived, and the theory of natural selection gained a textbook case.

Although still repeated in the textbooks, this example has been shown to be fatally flawed, chiefly because it never happened. In fact, scientists looking for a good example of natural selection observed a variation in moth colors, postulated an evolutionary advance, and publicized it. It is now known that peppered moths do not land on tree trunks in the normal course of their lives, and so the theory of why they changed color cannot possibly be true. How then could there be such good photographs of peppered moths on trees? The scientists collected them when they were cold and torpid, and carefully placed them there for the photos.

If this false example were actually true, what could it show us? First of all, it does not show us an evolutionary advance because dark and light peppered moths live side by side, kind of the way that coelacanths, said to be little-evolved ancient sea mammals, live side by side with dolphins. The supposedly less fit version never died out. Secondly, and a key point for this entire discussion, is the fact that the change in the frequency of the colors in the population of peppered moths represents no change whatsoever in the genetic code of the moth's DNA. Both colors were already in the DNA, and the external change in color reveals only a swinging back and forth between possible colors which are already present in the genetic code. Though Darwin did not know this at the time he first proposed his theory of natural selection, unless the supposedly more-fit mutation has more information in its DNA than the less-fit one, there is no evolutionary advance at all. Living things replicate according to the information in their DNA, not as a reaction to conditions in their environment.

This is the fatal flaw in current evolutionary theory. There is no plausible explanation for the existence of the information in the DNA of every living thing, and there is no evidence whatsoever that any mutation has ever caused an increase in that genetic information. The typical examples of natural selection are all variations within the limitations set by the existing DNA in the organism. If the organisms which run faster to avoid being eaten begin to predominate, it is because the potential ability to do so was already in their DNA.

If this is true, then why do the vast majority of scientists continue to cite natural selection as the only valid explanation for the development of all living things?

## 2. SMUGGLED ASSUMPTIONS

A smuggled assumption is an unstated premise upon which an argument rests. As long as a premise remains unstated, it cannot be examined for truth. Such is the case with so many arguments for evolution. Paul Davies, author of the 1999 book *The Fifth Miracle: The Search for the Origin of Life*, states the non-design argument: "[The] solution to the puzzle [is] called Darwinism. Random mutations plus natural selection are one sure-fire way to generate biological information... Chance in the guise of mutations and law in the guise of selection form just the right combination of randomness and order needed to create the 'impossible object' [that is, life]. The necessary information comes...from the environment" (p.89). If the environment does not have the information to begin with, how can a developing organism draw on it? Law plus chance plus time cannot program a DNA molecule. So why do we continue to hear this argument as the only possible source of life on earth? Because the only possible other source is God, and God has been excluded by definition.

The reason this is so is partly empirical. The scientific method is founded upon the idea of direct observation and verifiable, repeatable experiments. This kind of intellectual rigor has rescued us from many harmful and foolish practices such as bloodletting to "help" the sick and testing for witches by holding them under water. George Washington was likely killed by the bloodletting ministrations of his doctors. Uncountable innocent women were drowned in a test that modern scientists would call "non-falsifiable": hold all suspected witches under water, and if they drown, voila! they're witches! We all need to be thankful that modern science has rescued us from belief in such imaginary causes by insisting upon observable phenomena and repeatable experiments.

But what happens if we turn the methodology into a philosophy of life? It would have the motto: "The only things which are real are things I can observe." This is no longer science but materialism or naturalism. It is the belief that nothing exists in the universe except for material things. There is no soul, no spirit, no God or gods of any kind, and not even a human mind apart from the electrical firing of neural synapses. This is not a scientific observation, because one cannot prove a negative. It is, in fact, a form of religious belief.

Because science has a methodological materialism, it has become a magnet for people who hold the religion of naturalism. Then what happens to the objectivity of the scientific process when scientists are observing something which must have an explanation beyond the material? It is simply ruled out without a moment's thought. In fact, modern science has become a bastion of philosophical imperialism. No one is allowed to come up with results which are non-material no matter what evidence is discovered. At least Paul Davies is candid about his bias as he writes in *The Fifth Miracle*: "it is the job of science to solve mysteries without recourse to divine intervention." That's fine as long as science is not observing something which points to God as clearly as does the programming of DNA.

This leads to a kind of bizarre reasoning which would not normally be acceptable in empirical science. Even though there are monstrous holes in the theory of evolution, evolutionists argue that it must have happened and should be considered as much a fact of science as measurement, or gravity. This false certainty is a logical mind game performed by smuggling in the assumption of a purely materialistic universe. While the evidence of design is staring scientific materialists in the face, it is not even acknowledged. This is not science, but religion.

This blanket denial of God is no surprise to God himself who wrote in Romans 1:18b-20: **"...Men...suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."** The Bible says that the fact of a Designer, even though he is invisible, can be clearly seen by anyone merely by looking at what he has made. It also says that many people will look right at the truth, deny it, and launch a crusade to suppress the fact of the Designer's existence.

### 3. THE DESIGN INFERENCE

Why do we say that the Designer can be seen in the programming of DNA? Because in all human experience, something so complex as an encyclopedia or the operating system of a

computer has only been produced by an intelligent agency, and DNA is hugely more complex and intricate than these. In fact, the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence project (SETI) acknowledges this standard in its search for life beyond earth. The SETI scientists comb through massive amounts of radio wave data from space looking for evidence of intelligent design--a message. They would hold a press conference if they found data with these three attributes:

- a. The data must be sufficiently complex to prove that it is not just accidental. A short snippet of complexity is not enough.
- b. The data must be non-repetitive, unlike that produced by a law or a simple logical process. It cannot be merely like chemical law which specifies the regularity of bond angles, such as produces crystals.
- c. The data must be specified, that is, it must show that it has a purpose which fits something external to itself. An example might be a radio transmission with a long string of prime numbers embedded in it. A prime number can only be divided by itself and the number one. It is an intellectual construct. A string of them in order could not happen by accident: 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 17...etc.

Michael Crichton has correctly pointed out that the SETI project has not been a paragon of empirical science, but these criteria are unquestionable. If the SETI scientists would shout "We've found intelligent design!" at radio data with these three attributes, why cannot biologists do the same thing with the biological data that is already in hand? It clearly demonstrates these three criteria. But as we've seen, humans are spiritual beings with spiritual issues hindering them from admitting the obvious existence of their own Designer.

## CONCLUSION

The jungle gym cannot assemble itself--neither can a far more complicated living cell. The assembler who bolts the gym together without reference to the instructions is likely to come out with something which does not work and a pile of extra parts. The only way for the gym to work is for it to be assembled according to the critical information which comes from the designer--the manufacturer's instructions.

In the same way a cell without DNA does not work. The programming of the genetic code which is in every living thing had to come from a Designer. And if we admit that such a Designer could create a code and then encode information for life, how hard would it be to admit that this same Designer has used words to give us critical information not just for physical life but for eternal life as well? So wrote John the Apostle as one of God's instruments to communicate this information: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."**

**"He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to**

**all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...**" (John 1:1-5, 10-12 -- NIV). The God to whom we owe life itself, who programmed our DNA, is speaking to every one of us. Are we listening? Our lives in this world and the next depend upon it.

[The central ideas in this study originated in *The Wedge of Truth*, by Phillip E. Johnson, InterVarsity Press, 2000, and an article by William Dembski in *First Things*, October 1998, entitled "Science and Design."]