

The existence of specified information in the universe points to a creator God

Return of the God Hypothesis: Three scientific discoveries that reveal the mind behind the universe

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Author Stephen C. Meyer has a Ph.D., from the University of Cambridge, in Philosophy of Science. He is Director of the Center for Science and Culture at the Discovery Institute in Seattle. In this work, he delves into many subjects, but mainly philosophy of science, cosmology, and biology. I largely focus on the latter.

In this book, Meyer reports on many debates he has had with leading evolutionists. For this reason, the reader is assured that he has interacted with all the main arguments and counterarguments. The long-term follower of theistic scientific thought is reminded of Duane T. Gish, who likewise debated evolutionists and thereby sharpened his arguments.

The biblical worldview made modern science possible

The author points to the analysis of chemist Melvin Calvin on the origin of modern science:

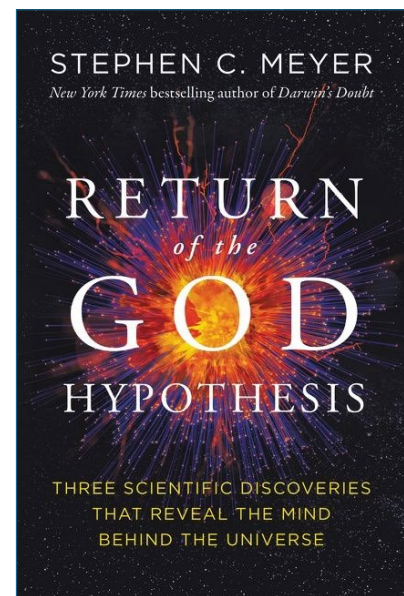
“Calvin notes that the monotheistic worldview of the ancient Hebrews suggested a reason to expect a single coherent order in nature and thus a single, universally applicable set of laws governing the

natural world. By contrast, because animists, polytheists, and pantheists affirmed the existence of many spirits or gods, each possibly interacting with nature in different ways, they had no reason to think that natural phenomena would manifest uniformity and order. The ancient Hebrews, on the other hand, thought that, as Calvin put it, ‘the universe is governed by a single God, and is not the product of the whims of many gods, each governing his own province according to his own laws’. Calvin, like many historians and philosophers of science, identified this belief in an order-loving monotheistic God as ‘the historical foundation of modern science’” (p. 37).

Scientific discoveries because of, not in spite of, the religious beliefs of early modern scientists

Some critics have argued that religious belief is a drag on scientific thinking, effectively a science stopper, and that the achievements of early modern scientists only came when they separated their religious beliefs from their studies. Others have asserted that there is no relationship between science and the Christian worldview. After all, religion was dominant at the time, so it is hardly surprising that most scientists also were religious.

Meyer soundly rejects these kinds of thinking. He realizes that the presence of God was not incidental; it was part and parcel of the everyday scientific reasoning of the early modern scientists. He writes:



“Nevertheless, many of the founders of modern science did not just assume or assert by faith that the universe had been designed by an intelligent agent. They also argued for this hypothesis based on discoveries in their fields of study. Johannes Kepler perceived intelligent design in the mathematical precision of planetary motion Robert Boyle insisted that the intricate clocklike regularity of physical laws and chemical mechanisms as well as the anatomical structure in living organisms suggested the activity of ‘a most intelligent and designing agent’. Carl Linnaeus later argued for design based upon the ease with which plants and animals fell into an orderly groups-within-groups system of classification The tradition attained an almost majestic rhetorical quality in the writings of Newton” (p. 47).

Not a GOTG (God of the Gaps)

Unbelievers (and their compromising evangelical allies) sometimes sneeringly dismiss a Creator God as Someone that is invoked whenever a materialistic explanation is inadequate—until subsequent research

shows that a materialistic explanation is adequate after all (figure 1). Is this objection validly applicable to Intelligent Design?

As a classic example of GOTG, unbelievers bring up Isaac Newton, who supposedly invoked the direct Hand of God, in *ad hoc* fashion, whenever he could not explain some aspect of planetary motion. Meyer actually re-examined Newton's *Principia* and found this to be untrue. It turns out to be a rationalistic legend. Newton did invoke God in a providential sense, but never as a gap-filler. As Meyer explains:

"Third, though Newton affirmed these powers of God, he did *not* postulate occasional, special, or singular acts of God in place of a law-like description of planetary motion or to remedy irregularities in the laws of nature or to fix an unstable planetary system. Newton thought that God was responsible on an ongoing basis for the mathematical regularities evident in nature, not fixing irregularities or rectifying instabilities [emphasis in original]" (p. 429; see also p. 518).

Meyer provides the following analogy to rebut the canned GOTG contention that is nowadays used against the proponents of Intelligent Design. He comments:

"Yet we would not say, for example, that an archaeologist had committed a 'scribe-of-the-gaps' fallacy simply because—after rejecting the hypothesis that an ancient hieroglyphic inscription was caused by a sandstorm—she went on to conclude that the inscription had been produced by an intelligent scribe. Instead, the archaeologist made an inference based upon her experience-based *knowledge* that information-rich inscriptions arise from intelligent causes. She did not base her inference *solely* on her judgment that no natural cause could explain the inscription [emphasis in original]" (pp. 416–417).

Does RNA rescue the evolutionists?

In living things, DNA is necessary to synthesize protein, and proteins are required to assemble DNA. So which came first? Evolutionists would have us believe that this chicken-and-egg question is circumvented by a long period during which non-living chemicals, capable of self-replication, had been subject to natural selection. Meyer elaborates: "The RNA-world hypothesis posits that life first arose from a process of chemical evolution that gained traction after self-copying RNA molecules putatively first made prebiotic natural selection possible" (p. 305). According to this thinking, the emergence of DNA and proteins was only the crowning achievement of this process. Is the foregoing scenario realistic, or is it more the product of evolutionistic wishful thinking?

Meyer (pp. 180–181) lists many fatal problems with the RNA-world hypothesis. The worst one is this: the RNA-world hypothesis presupposes the existence of sequence specificity and information; it does not explain its *origins* in the context of an unintelligent process! This brings the evolutionist back to square one, as pointed out by the author: "Yet explaining how the building blocks of RNA arranged themselves into functionally specified sequences has proven no easier than explaining how the constituent parts of DNA might have done so" (p. 181).

No such thing as a self-replicating molecule

Meyer unmasks a 'self-replicating RNA' experiment as follows:

"The 'self-replicating' RNA molecules in this experiment did not copy a template of genetic information from free-standing nucleotides as protein machines (called polymerases) do in actual cells. Instead, in the experiment, a pre-synthesized *specifically sequenced*

RNA molecule merely catalyzed a single chemical bond, fusing together two other presynthesized partial RNA chains. Their version of 'self-replication,' therefore, amounted to nothing more than joining two sequence-specific halves together [emphasis in original]" (p. 309).

The experiment clearly requires multiple cherry-picked intelligent processes to even make it work and does not even begin to explain the origins of biological design. Even then, the specially chosen RNA molecule is in no sense self-replicating. It, at most, causes two other *pre-selected* RNA molecules to join together. And even *that* has very limited relevance, if any, to any evolutionistic origin-of-life scenario.

What are we to make of this? The 'self-reproducing molecule', a pillar of evolutionistic imagination, is already dead on arrival. The self-reproducing molecule does not exist, and neither does the natural selection of molecules, let alone the prebiotic evolution of the first life. Meyer quips: "First, the process of natural selection presupposes the differential reproduction of already living organisms and thus a preexisting mechanism of self-replication" (p. 179).

Evolution does not explain the origin of novel biological information

Let's now assume that some form of life did come to exist by chemical evolution. Things do not get any better for the evolutionist. In fact, some evolutionists have admitted as much, as observed by Meyer:

"Over the past three decades, many evolutionary biologists have challenged a key tenet of the neo-Darwinian synthesis, namely, the idea that small-scale microevolutionary changes can be extrapolated to explain large-scale macroevolutionary innovations. For the most part, microevolutionary changes (such



Figure 1. An intelligent designer of the universe is not a ‘God of the gaps’.

as variation in colour) merely use or express existing genetic information, while the macroevolutionary change necessary to assemble new organs or whole body plans requires the production of new genetic information. Recognizing this and other problems, in 2008 a group of sixteen evolutionary biologists met in Altenberg, Austria, to express their doubts about the creative power of the mechanism of random mutation and natural selection. They are known as the ‘Altenberg 16’ ...” (p. 195).

Natural selection does not create biological novelty: the problem of specified complexity remains

One must not confuse the oft-quoted survival of the fittest with the arrival of the fittest (p. 482). Meyer thus summarizes the issue at hand:

“As conceived from Darwin to the present, natural selection ‘selects’ or acts to preserve, those random variations that confer a fitness or functional advantage upon the organisms that possess them. But it ‘selects’ only *after* such advantageous variations and mutations have

arisen ... All this means that natural selection does nothing to help *generate* functional DNA base (or amino-acid) sequences, that is, new genetic information ... Why a formidable challenge? Again, because random mutations *alone* must produce *exceedingly rare* functional sequences among a cast combinatorial sea before natural selection can play any significant role [emphases in original]” (pp. 323–324).

Computer programs do not demonstrate the unintelligent origins of biological information

The likes of atheist Richard Dawkins have written computer programs that purportedly show how natural selection is supposed to act on random mutations, over countless generations, to create biological information. They do no such thing. Far from it. The computer program constantly selects sequences against a final, *pre-selected* target. This includes iterations of random letters culminating in the phrase ‘Methinks it is a weasel’.

Evolution has no such foresight and does not strive to any sort of final goal or outcome. Moreover, according to

standard evolutionary theory, each step that is ‘chosen’ by natural selection must endow its bearer with a reproductive advantage. No computer program has even begun to show how each step, with or without culminating in a final predetermined outcome, is supposed to be advantageous to its ‘bearer’. That is the essence of evolutionary theory, and the fatal flaw of ‘evolution-demonstrating’ computer programs.

Specified complexity in proteins

Proteins have distinctive folds, and it takes only a few mutations to destroy a protein fold, while many mutations are needed to transform one protein fold into another. This makes it virtually impossible for new protein folds to arise from evolutionary processes, as Meyer explains:

“So just as a series of random changes to computer code will destroy the function of the software before a new program could arise, a small handful (typically between 3 and 15) of random changes to the amino acid sequence in a protein will destroy the stability of the protein fold well before enough mutations could accumulate to generate a novel fold. In fact, function-ready protein folds will degrade more quickly than English sentences” (pp. 319–320).

‘Rewiring’ of developmental gene regulatory networks (dGRNs) does not create novel animals

The dGRNs govern the timing and expression of genetic information during animal development. As Meyer explains, “These networks of genes and gene products function much like integrated circuits and ensure that the developing organism produces the right proteins at the right times to service the right types of cells during embryological development” (p. 311).

Some evolutionists have downplayed the role of new genes in the

putative formation of new animal body plans and have instead focused on the supposed power of ‘rewired’ dGRNs in this role. This is especially claimed for the sudden appearance of novel animals during the Cambrian explosion.

Is ‘rewiring’ even feasible? Note that the dGRN cannot be subject to step-by-step testing of random mutations by natural selection, as demanded by evolution, and as explained by Meyer:

“Yet all available observational shows that dGRNs do not tolerate changes or perturbations to their basic control systems Even modest mutation-induced changes to the genes in the core of the dGRN produce either no change in the developmental trajectory (due to a preprogrammed redundancy) or catastrophic (most often lethal) effects within developing animals. Disrupt the central control nodes and the developing animal does not shift to a different viable, stably heritable body plan. Rather, the system crashes, and the developing animal dies or, if it survives, is severely malformed” (p. 314).

So, we are right back to the ‘hopeful monster’ fantasy.

Ironically, not only does ‘rewiring’ not do away with intelligent design, but successful ‘rewiring’, were it to take place, requires just that! Meyer comments:

“Any electrician or electrical engineer—indeed, anyone who works with actual circuitry and a power supply with current passing through the circuit—knows that successful rewiring requires well-informed decisions, that is, both information *and* intelligent design. What rewiring manifestly does *not* allow is *random* changes. That’s a great way to burn down your house or blow out the mother-board of your computer [emphasis in original]” (p. 317).

The nylonase novelty that is not

Nylon, a man-made compound that does not occur in nature, was first made in the 1930s. There is now a protein (enzyme) that can break it down. So, we are told, an evolutionary novelty has arisen in just 40 years. Moreover, the new enzyme shows that new protein folding can arise, from blind evolutionary processes, even in an astonishingly short period of time.

Meyer deconstructs the foregoing evolutionary narrative. Just because nylon does not occur in nature does not mean that none of its components occur in nature, and some of these components may be vulnerable to attack by existing enzymes. So the nylonase capability may have long pre-existed the invention of nylon itself. In fact, that is exactly the situation at hand. A ‘cousin’ enzyme to the nylonase enzyme has been found to have weak nylonase activity. It differs from the nylonase enzyme by only two point mutations. So the nylonase enzyme is not even a novelty; it is a tweaking of a pre-existing capability. In other words, it is an optimization, not an innovation (p. 322). Far from being supportive of evolution, it begs the question about its origins. Thus, this trait may go back to creation. Finally, the optimized nylonase activity, the result of two point mutations, has nothing to do with any sort of novel protein folding.

Conclusion

Meyer does not conclude that scientific observations, strictly speaking, prove the existence of God. Rather, it is a matter of probabilities. Consider the universe. Meyer remarks:

“Moreover, as I’ve argued, the observation of extreme fine tuning confirms precisely what we might well expect if a purposive intelligence—indeed, a theistic or deistic creator—had acted to design the universe and life. We certainly have

more reason to expect a universe fine-tuned for life (or a life-permitting universe that depends upon fine tuning) assuming theism or deism than we do assuming naturalism [emphasis in original]” (p. 274).

Evolutionists commonly display a condescending attitude towards the proponents of ID (Intelligent Design). Besides showing a great deal of intellectual arrogance, such an attitude is completely unwarranted. As for the scientific respectability of Intelligent Design, Meyer concludes:

“Yet it is not only cosmology that has rendered the ‘God hypothesis’ newly respectable. As one surveys several classes of evidence from the natural sciences—cosmology, astronomy, physics, biochemistry, molecular biology, and paleontology—the God hypothesis emerges as an explanation with unique scope and power. Theism explains an ensemble of metaphysically significant events in the history of the universe and life more simply, more adequately, and more comprehensively than major competitive metaphysical systems, including not only materialism and naturalism, but also pantheism and deism. Again, this does not *prove* God’s existence, since superior explanatory power does not constitute deductive certainty. It does show, however, that the natural sciences now provide strong *epistemic support* for the existence of God as conceived by Judeo-Christian and other traditional theists [emphasis in original]” (p. 298).