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Why Are Some Evolutionists Opposed to Evolution?

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In the book *40 Questions About Creation and Evolution* (40 Questions Series) by Kenneth D. Keathley and Mark F. Rooker, Kregal Publications, 2014, include a chapter called “Why are Some Evolutionists Opposed to Evolution.” In this chapter, the authors mention the work of James Shapiro (author of *Evolution: A View from the 21st century*), Jerry Fodor and Massimo Piattelli-Palamarini, (authors of *What Darwin Got Wrong*), and Thomas Nagel (author of *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinist Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*). These authors have written about the shortcomings of the Neo-Darwinian paradigm that has dominated academia for so long. They say the following:

“Cognitive scientists Jerry Fodor and Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini published a critique of Darwinism provocatively named *What Darwin Got Wrong*. They begin by declaring that they are atheists, not just run-of-the-mill atheists, but “outright, card-carrying, signed-up, dyed-in-the-wool, no-holds-barred atheists. The authors make this point so it will be clear that their opposition is not religiously motivated. They contend that Darwin’s theory of natural selection is “fatally wrong.” Unfortunately, because allegiance to Darwinism has become a litmus test for deciding who does, and who does not, hold a “‘properly scientific’ world view,” most strident neo-Darwinists are “distressingly uncritical” in embracing natural selection. Fodor and Piattelli-Palmarini have no problem accepting evolution in the macro sense of the word, but they are convinced that Darwin’s theory of natural selection is “irredeemably flawed.” They make no attempt to provide an alternative theory.

Rather, they admit, “In fact, we don’t know very well how evolution works. Nor did Darwin, and nor (as far as we can tell) does anybody else.” No straightforward, single-level theory, similar to Newton’s law of gravity, is going to be able to explain what is observed in natural history. Rather, they contend, a multi-level explanation is necessary (multi-level explanations are like historical theories which attempt to explain why Napoleon did what he did at Waterloo). Therefore, a simplistic theory such as natural selection cannot be an adequate solution. Fodor and Piattelli-Palmarini explain that four attitudes about natural selection exist among evolutionists. First, neo-Darwinists (those Gould labeled Darwinian fundamentalists) believe that natural selection explains all. The second attitude is manifested by Darwin himself. He believed that natural selection was the primary force in evolution (but not the only mechanism). A growing number of current biologists exhibit the third attitude when they view natural selection as one force among many (and probably not primary). Fodor and Piattelli-Palmarini go the final step and contend that natural selection plays no role in evolution at all. They argue that Darwinism is an ideological cadaver. “One thing that happens to theories that hang around past their time is that they’re nibbled to death by ‘routine findings’.” They conclude with a confession of evolutionary agnosticism: “‘Ok, so if Darwin got it wrong, what do you guys think is the mechanism for evolution? Short answer: we don’t know what the mechanism of evolution is. As far as we can make out, nobody knows exactly how phenotypes evolve.” – pgs. 348-349.

The authors then mention astrophysicist Paul Davies who describes himself as a Darwinist. Yet, in his *The 5th Miracle: The Search for the Origin and Meaning of Life*, Davies admits that all attempts at formulating a materialistic theory for the origin of life have failed—and not from a lack of trying. Davies recognizes that Darwinism provides no explanation for the arrival of life on earth. Since natural selection, as a mechanism, works only on living, reproducing creatures, then evolutionists cannot appeal to natural selection when formulating prebiotic hypotheses. He concedes that the materialist claim that reality is “Darwinism all the way down” does not fit the evidence. Tentatively, Davies argues that the path forward requires a “radical” approach that “many scientists are extremely reluctant to contemplate.” – pg. 350.

The authors also mention the work of James Shapiro, who is a molecular biologist at the University of Chicago and is a recognized expert in genetics. They say:

“Shapiro rejects the foundational neo-Darwinian tenet that evolutionary change comes about by stochastic mutations” as a “determination in the 19th and 20th Centuries by biologists to reject the role of a supernatural agent in the religious accounts of how diverse living organisms originated.” “Living cells do not operate blindly,” Shapiro explains. They continually acquire information, make adjustments, self-regulate, and self-correct. They constantly monitor their environment, their situation, and their health. Molecular biologists increasingly realize that the number of regulatory and control processes in cells outnumbers the functions which actually accomplish a task. There are layers upon layers of interconnected networks that constantly process information. This recognition has given rise to the discipline of systems biology—the study of how groups of molecules coordinate to work cooperatively. Shapiro specifically rejects the notion that random variations are introduced through accidental mutations in DNA. The standard neo-Darwinian model fails to take into consideration that the cell auto-corrects the errors in its DNA. Replication of the DNA strand, explains Shapiro, occurs with extreme precision and speed, and then a multistage process of proofreading takes place. This proofreading happens both during replication and afterward. “The efficiency of the mismatch repair system is about 99%, increasing replication... function within cells as checkpoints: they make sure that certain processes (some of which are incredibly complex) do not proceed until all the prior processes have been completed. It is not mechanical precision that ensures success in cellular tasks and reproduction. Rather, it is the layer upon layer of proofreading, auto-correcting, and quality control. Shapiro presents cells almost as if they are thinking. The proteins within cells work as “microprocessors” with “regulatory circuits.” These proteins assess their environments and react differently to different situations. Shapiro argues that the phenomena of cell cognition—sensing, information transfer, and decision making—challenges the notion that cells simply carry out the commands given by DNA. He contends that current discoveries have caused “the intellectual foundations of molecular biology” to “have indeed been shaken—and shaken hard.”

But the notion of auto-correcting is not Shapiro's main point. His main contention is that DNA does not operate simply as a "read-only memory" which is changed only occasionally and accidentally. Rather DNA deliberately changes—in a nonrandom and nonaccidental way—in response to changing environments and contexts." - pgs. 350-351.

He goes on to say " Rather than evolution occurring gradually through "numerous, successive, slight variations" (as Darwin predicted and the neo-Darwinian model requires), the data overwhelmingly indicates that change occurs in "large steps" and "leaps." Shapiro declares, "As to the actual nature of evolutionary change processes . . . the simplifying assumptions made in the 19th and early 20th Centuries are plainly wrong. They fail to account for the variety of cellular and genomic events we now know to have occurred." The evidence points to rapid, nonrandom, non-Darwinian change." - pg. 352.

Finally, the authors mention the work of Nagel:

Nagel says:

"I am talking about something much deeper—namely, the fear of religion itself. I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that. Nagel explains that at the root of his (and other atheists') visceral revulsion to theism is what he calls "the cosmic authority problem"—the rejection of any accountability to God. He continues, "Darwin enabled modern secular culture to heave a great collective sigh of relief, by apparently providing a way to eliminate purpose, meaning, and design as fundamental features of the world." Because many materialists recognize that acknowledging the evidence that points to purpose and design is tantamount to admitting to the reasonableness of theism, they would rather welcome what Nagel calls "Darwinist imperialism." One is reminded again of Dawkins's observation that "Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist." - pg. 354.

Nagel goes on to say:

"Darwinism cannot explain the existence of consciousness in higher order animals, then it is even more incapable of providing a naturalistic explanation for the cognitive abilities of human beings. Why does mathematics work, and how is it that human brains (which supposedly evolved simply so that their owners could gather food and reproduce) are able to comprehend math? Evolution via natural selection does not and cannot supply an answer. Nagel agrees with Christian philosophers, such as Alvin Plantinga, when they argue that Darwinism cannot supply sufficient reason to have confidence in rationality. If beliefs are simply states of the brain, and natural selection chooses such states according to their contribution to survival rather than any relationship to truth, then there is no reason to trust our beliefs as actually adhering to something that is true. Then what does this say about the evolutionist's belief in Darwinism? Confidence in the truthfulness of Darwinism is completely undermined. Dennett's imagery of Darwinism as a universal acid has returned with a vengeance. The acid has consumed itself." Even though Nagel (tragically) refuses to consider theism as a viable option, he recognizes that theism has a much stronger rational " - pg. 355.

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