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## Intelligent Design

### Saving Darwin's Soul: Does His 21st Century Fate Rest on Fighting 19th Century Battles?

Uncommon Descent - 1 hour 38 min ago

This week marks the publication of the Darwin book that has so far received the most advance publicity in the UK, *Darwin's Sacred Cause: Race, Slavery and the Quest for Human Origins*, by Adrian Desmond and James Moore (Allen Lane). Desmond and Moore, both together and separately, have written some of the best histories of the Victorian life sciences, including a best-selling biography of Darwin. You can get a sense of the book from this excerpt currently featured in *Prospect Magazine*.

Desmond and Moore always wade very deep in the archives but also with an eye to what might attract today's reader about their subject. Not surprisingly, then, this is a book that documents the link between Darwin's more general doctrine of common descent and his belief that all humans descend from a common ancestor and hence are members of the same species. A lot of stress is placed on Darwin's revulsion at the brutality of slavery that he saw while voyaging on the *Beagle*, and the fact that it was common among the natural historians of his day to believe in several species of 'man'. The reader can easily get the impression that this was some kind of triumph of evidence over prejudice. However, this impression would be very misleading.

One reason abolitionism did not immediately meet with widespread approval was that it was seen, from a naturalistic standpoint, as based on a sentimental attachment to Christian notions of the 'brotherhood of man', despite the evidence that was accumulating for the vastly different lives and dispositions of the races. Darwin was immune to such knee-jerk naturalism because his mind was 'prejudiced' by a very healthy dose of Unitarianism and non-conformist Christianity on both sides of his family. Desmond and Moore talk about this too but I guess the book wouldn't appear so sexy if the headline read: "Darwin Saved from Racism by Christian Upbringing".

To make their case, Desmond and Moore are smart to confine their argument largely to Darwin's early years, since as he grew older he tended to stress the hierarchy of the races and downplay the distinctiveness of the human condition in natural history. In other words, as Darwin's lost touch with his Christian roots, Darwin's science lost touch with humanity. He began close to believing in the natural equality of all humans and ended close to believing in the natural equality of all species. Instead of reassuring us of the former vision, future Darwin historians should critically explore the emergence of the latter vision, a legacy of Darwin that will increasingly concern us in the 21st century.

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### Well-Informed: Dr. Robert Marks and the Evolutionary Informatics Lab

ID The Future - Sat, 2009-01-31 01:30

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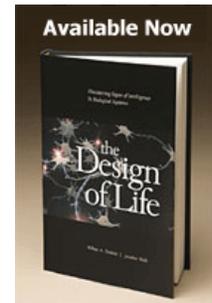
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Click here to listen. Editor's Note: After this podcast first aired, Dr. Marks' website, originally hosted by Baylor University, was taken down in an act of censorship. You can read the story here and watch part of it in...

Categories: Intelligent Design News

### Human DNA repair process video - by chance?

Uncommon Descent - Sat, 2009-01-31 00:42

More details of DNA repair have been revealed.

See: Human DNA repair process recorded in action (Video)

(PhysOrg.com) — A key phase in the repair process of damaged human DNA has been observed and visually recorded by a team of researchers at the University of California, Davis. The recordings provide new information about the role played by a protein known as Rad51, which is linked to breast cancer, in this complex and critical process.

. . . In 2006, the researchers recorded a portion of the bacterial DNA repair process, a system considerably less complex than its human counterpart. . .

This filament composed of a fluorescently-labeled DNA molecule and the repair protein Rad51 grows progressively brighter and longer as more and more Rad51 molecules assemble onto the DNA.

Human DNA is under constant assault from harmful agents such as ultraviolet sunlight, tobacco smoke and a myriad of chemicals, both natural and man-made. Because damage can lead to cancer, cell death and mutations, an army of proteins and enzymes are mobilized into action whenever it occurs.

. . . Rad51 takes a leading role in the action. Always on call in the cell, molecules of the protein assemble into a long filament along a damaged or broken segment of DNA, where they help stretch out the coiled strands and align them with corresponding segments on the cell's second copy of the chromosome, which serves as a template for reconstruction. Because this protein is regulated by a gene linked to increased risk of breast cancer, BRCA2, it is also thought to play a role in suppression of that disease.

With the ability to watch the assembly of individual filaments of Rad51 in real time, Kowalczykowski's team made a number of discoveries. Among those are that, in contrast to their bacterial counterparts, Rad51 filaments don't grow indefinitely. This indicates that there is an as-yet undiscovered mechanism that regulates the protein's growth, Kowalczykowski said.

Another surprising difference between the human and bacterial processes, Kowalczykowski said, is that Rad51 doesn't fall away from the DNA when repair is complete. Instead, proteins that motor along DNA are required to dislodge it.

See full news item:

Article: Jovencio Hilario, Ichiro Amitani, Ronald J. Baskin, and Stephen C. Kowalczykowski, **Direct imaging of human Rad51 nucleoprotein dynamics on individual DNA molecules**, PNAS 2009 106:361-368; doi:10.1073/pnairs.0811965106

In review, the steps identified here:

- 1) Detect DNA damage
  - 2) Call repair mechanism
  - 3) Assemble protein into a long filament
  - 4) Locate it along the damaged/broken segment of DNA
  - 5) Stretch out the coiled strands
  - 6) Align corresponding strands with cell's second copy of the chromosome
  - 7) Reconstruct using the second chromosome as a template
- Protein regulated by a gene
- 9) Undiscovered mechanism that regulates the protein's growth
  - 10) Motor proteins required to dislodge Rad51 from DNA.

Each of these steps requires highly selective matching configurations. There are probably more steps and regulation involved. This long series of steps suggests an irreducibly complex system. And we are expected to accept that all this occurred by non-directed random mutations and selection?

How does the organism survive while randomly creating this mechanism? Not having any repair mechanism would probably rapidly lead to death. See Sanford, J. C. 2006. Genetic Entropy and the Mystery of the Genome. Elim Publications. Elim, NY. 208 pages.

This evidence looks to me like evidence for blind belief in neoDarwinism!

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## Materialism

TellicThoughts - Sat, 2009-01-31 00:23

According to Wikipedia materialism is a form of physicalism.

Physicalism is a philosophical position holding that everything which exists is no more extensive than its physical properties; that is, that there are no kinds of things other than physical things.

Are you a materialist Why? Why not? Does materialism or physicalism correlate to reality? How would you know?

Or are you an advocate for naturalism? If so then why naturalism and not materialism? Or is it both?

Categories: Intelligent Design News

## On: "Materialism of the Gaps"

TellicThoughts - Fri, 2009-01-30 19:18

Michael Egnor wrote Materialism of the Gaps at Evolution News & Views. Quoting Egnor:

I must say that I've never understood the rhetorical force of the 'God of the Gaps' argument. The God of the Gaps sneer is invoked to imply the inexorability of materialism as a complete explanation in natural science. Any critique of materialist dogma in science from a design or immaterial perspective is derided as a 'God of the Gaps' argument. But the real issue is the gaps, which are plentiful and very wide.

Egnor puts his finger on the real issue. Perhaps he does not understand those attracted to the phrase because he does not perceive the mindless, robot-like mentality leading one to fall back on cliches. More from Egnor:

Profound skepticism for the views of opponents, combined with complacent credulity for one's own views, is the stuff of ideological advocacy, not skepticism.

Well said Michael. Egnor quotes this gem from Dr. Novella:

My "dualism of the gaps" point, however, is that lack of complete knowledge does not justify inserting a magical answer.

Ya gotta love these materialist ideologues. Magic as in say, evoking emergence as a causal factor without being able to specify physical parameters relevant to the claim. No quantification, no demarcation of transition states, just a word-emergence. Sounds magical. But there are other magical tricks like, invoking non-existent physical mechanisms to provide a physical basis for the mind. Inserting magical answers indeed. Quoting Egnor:

Yet we know nothing — nothing — about how subjective experience could arise from matter alone. We certainly know a lot about correlations. But about causation — how matter even could cause subjective mental states — we know nothing. We don't even have a scientific paradigm by which we could even imagine what such an answer could be like. Subjective mental states share no properties whatsoever with matter. The 'explanatory gap' — our inability to explain the subjective in terms of the objective — is as wide as ever. It's infinitely wide. We don't even know where to begin to answer the question 'how does subjectivity arise in association with matter' from a materialistic standpoint.

Dr. Novella is wrong to attribute the inference to dualism to an argument from ignorance. The exact opposite is true. The reason that immaterial causation is invoked to explain the mind is because we know so much about the mind and about the brain, and it's evident to most people (that is, people who aren't dogmatic materialists) that the mind isn't material. It isn't an argument from ignorance. It's an argument from deep knowledge — deep knowledge of the

mind and of the brain. The invocation of immaterial causation for aspects of mental states is the result of our deep knowledge of the difference between mind and matter.

I would add one more thing. The reason why material causation is not invoked for behavioral studies, tracing causation to decisions, is that such speculation is superfluous to the results cited. Vacuous add ons.

Categories: Intelligent Design News

## Baby Boom

TellicThoughts - Fri, 2009-01-30 17:49

Mother of Six has Octuplets

I presume everyone here has heard about the birth of a litter of eight to a 33-year old woman in California who already has six children ranging in age from 7 to 2-year old twins. The babies - 6 boys and 2 girls - were delivered 9 weeks prematurely and weigh anywhere from 1 pound 8 ounces to 3 pounds 4 ounces, all but one are breathing on their own. All are receiving fluids, proteins and vitamins intravenously, and all are expected to survive.

The mother, who lives with her mother, had been hospitalized seven weeks ago and ordered to bed rest, the babies will spend at least seven more weeks in the hospital. A team of 46 physicians, nurses and other staff were on hand for the delivery by cesarian at Kaiser Permanente Hospital Bellflower, of what they thought were seven babies, referred to by alphabet. Baby H was a surprise. All the babies have their own neonatologist and two full-time nurses.

A man who lives at the home is soon leaving for contract work in Iraq to help support the family, but it is unclear (by news reports) whether than man is the husband or the grandfather. The woman had fertility treatments to achieve this feat. It is not known how all this is to be paid for.

Meanwhile, out in the real world, the Senate yesterday passed the State Children's Health Insurance Program [CHIP] to provide health insurance to 11 million low-income children, and for the first time since its inception will also cover pregnant women who are legal immigrants and their children, plus an expansion of coverage to 4 million more children. The vote was 66 to 32 largely along party lines. President Obama is expected to sign the legislation as early as next week.

It is estimated that about 5 million children will remain uninsured despite this action.

For discussion purposes, here are some questions related to these events:

1. Does a woman with six children really need artificial help to have 8 more?
2. Is it ethical to implant that many embryos in a woman under the age of 35? (note - most fertility clinics will not).
3. What are the moral/ethical issues involved in the concentration of medical and social resources to a litter of 8 while millions of women (who got pregnant the good old fashioned way) and children in this country have no access to medical care at all?
4. Is it reasonable for society to insist on tighter regulation of the assisted fertility market so as to prevent this sort of thing? Does your answer have anything to do with the high likelihood that in such a situation several of the fetuses will be aborted (naturally or purposely) to ensure the survival of the rest, or that there is a high probability none will survive?

Categories: Intelligent Design News

## Scientism

TellicThoughts - Fri, 2009-01-30 00:50

Chuck Colson wrote a commentary titled The Proper Role of Science. Although I agree with his general thrust I have some minor reservations about it. For example, increased grants for research go beyond embryonic stem cell research although that is included. Since abortion was recently debated in another thread I wish to focus the attention of this blog entry on other points. I know stems cells and abortion can be debated separately but the same underlying values mark the differences of the two sides. Quoting Colson:

As Nancy Pearcey and I write in our book, How Now Shall We Live?, scientism has its roots in Darwinism. Tufts University professor Daniel Dennett writes

that Darwinism, rightly understood, is a “universal acid” that dissolves away all traditional moral, metaphysical, and religious beliefs. For if humans have evolved by a material, purposeless process, then there is no basis for believing in a God who created us and revealed moral truths, or imposing those moral views in any area of life.

Dennett is using a common tactic—using science as a weapon to shoot down religious faith. The standard assumption is that science is objective knowledge, while religion is an expression of subjective need. Religion, therefore, must subordinate its claims about the world to whatever science decrees.

Very true. The real bone of contention is an attribution of metaphysical purposelessness to processes discussed in exchanges about ID. It is true that disagreements exist about the nature of the processes themselves but hovering over all exchanges is Dennett’s universal acid concept. A mindless, purposeless evolutionary process is a wedge in the hands of Dennett et. al. useful for attacking religious beliefs and moral precepts. More:

Scientism assumes that science is the controlling reality about life, so anything that can be validated scientifically ought to be done. Other things are subjective fantasy—like love, beauty, good, evil, conscience, ethics.

So science, which originally simply meant the study of the natural world, has in this view been conflated with scientific naturalism, a philosophy that the natural world is all that exists.

One of the problems with the 'nature is all there is' position was addressed in a previous thread. Sharply distinguishing what is testable from what is not can be problematic. Moreover subjective experiences are no less real by virtue of not being testable.

Dennett would replace morals rooted in a Judeo-Christian culture with what? Moral relativism? Majority vote? Rule by the powerful? What?

Categories: Intelligent Design News

### **Just because Marxism has lost its sense of purpose, it doesn't mean that ID must as well**

Uncommon Descent - Thu, 2009-01-29 18:49

**A Book Review of John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark and Richard York, *Critique of Intelligent Design: Materialism versus Creationism from Antiquity to the Present* (Monthly Review Press, 2008).**

There are many interesting features of this book, authored by academic Marxists (or at least people who used to be Marxists) and published by a historically Marxist press. The argument is presented as a critical intellectual history, which, while clearly written from a committed ‘materialist’ standpoint, is quite nuanced. But from the standpoint of ID defenders, the book’s most interesting feature is that the authors gladly embrace ID’s demonised image of its opponents. So those who remain sceptical of ID rhetoric that connects Epicurus, Darwin, Marx and Freud as part of a vast ‘materialist’ conspiracy should be silenced by what transpires in these pages: Yes, such scary two-dimensional materialists do really seem to exist – and they write books like this.

Things could be worse. The authors, to their credit, do not indulge in the ‘new atheist’ pastime of diagnosing religious belief as a mental disorder with a possible genetic basis. Rather, they stay on more familiar Marxist ground of arguing that religion serves a deep human need that nevertheless should be overcome if we are truly to mature as a species. However, other than a blind faith in whatever direction science happens to take us, the authors never make clear what such maturity would amount to. Considering that they’re supposed to be Marxists, they are surprisingly dumb to the tension involved in claiming that we are capable of ‘developing’ in an ultimately purposeless universe. Yet, their commitment to radical contingency goes so far as to embrace Stephen Jay Gould’s notion that replaying the tape of life would likely result in a completely different natural history – that is, pointlessness with a vengeance.

The ancient Greek therapeutic philosopher Epicurus functions as an intellectual

polestar for the text. Marx did his Ph.D. on Epicurus and was especially taken by the Epicurean project of disabusing people of the existence of gods. It is probably the source of the more general Marxist strategy of 'demystifying' ideologies. However, the authors presume that a straight arrow of influence runs from Epicurus to modern science to Marx. Here they fail to take seriously the therapeutic dimension of Epicureanism. Epicurus basically believed that fear of the gods was a major source of unnecessary anxiety. Once people stopped believing, they would realize that their lives are not so momentous, which would then enable them to adapt more effectively to circumstances over which they have relatively little control.

While the authors make much of Epicurus' materialist metaphysics (which he undoubtedly held), what mattered more was his overriding sense of the randomness of nature. Thus, to 'free' oneself of belief in the gods was not meant to empower the patient to take responsibility for nature and penetrate its mysteries. On the contrary, Epicurus wanted his patients to be 'free' in the sense of being relieved of fictional burdens that prevent them from leading peaceful vegetative lives. How Freud described Leninism – an 'infantile neurosis' – is probably how Epicurus would have described the ceaseless striving associated that is common to Christianity, modern science and Marxism itself. It is more than a little ironic – not to mention disappointing – that I need to point this out to Marxists, who after all are the ones who normally demand that we consider how ideas work in practice.

But this criticism should also alert ID supporters to beware of any blanket condemnations of a general philosophy like 'materialism' (which in ID circles, at least, seems to be used to capture something both moral and metaphysical). Here the book's black-and-white presentation of the 'Materialism versus Creationism' narrative means that the authors fail to consider the changing conception of materialism, even within the lifetimes of Marx and Engels. The authors lean heavily on early Marxist writings, which polemically counterposes materialism to Christian supernaturalism very much as the authors themselves do. However, materialism underwent a significant metamorphosis in the 19th century, especially in the physical sciences. It is captured in the history of the concept of 'energy', understood as matter's organizational principle, which in the 20th century expanded into the modern concept of information. The authors neglect this side of the story – but the original Marxists did not. Indeed, Engels actually rated the Unitarian preacher and chemist Joseph Priestley – someone whose views were much closer to ID than to Epicurus – above any of the 18th century French materialists in understanding the 'dynamic' character of matter.

Of course, I'm not saying that Engels converted to Christianity in old age, but rather that Marxists have always required a conception of matter much more purposeful – dare I say 'intelligent' – than dumb Epicurean atoms to get their own account of human emancipation off the ground. This is why Marxists usually took their Darwin with large doses of Lamarck – sometimes with disastrous consequences (e.g. the Soviet agricultural policy known as Lysenkoism, not discussed here, perhaps unsurprisingly). When the authors mention, almost in passing, that the only thing Marx didn't like about Darwin was his reliance on Thomas Malthus (Darwin's inspiration for the theory of natural selection), alert readers should think twice about just how committed Marx was to Darwin. In any case, I rather doubt that Marx and Engels would have had any reason to believe in a planned anything (revolution, economy, etc.), if their materialism entailed the level of chance entailed by, say, Gould's replayed tape of natural history. In that respect, the book under review represents a very decadent form of Marxism – one that has been abstracted from any sense of purpose that it might have once had.

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Categories: Intelligent Design News

### Financial Times of London: If you must be wrong, why must you also be just plain stupid and out of date?

Uncommon Descent - Thu, 2009-01-29 00:29

Here's an amazingly silly editorial from the Financial Times of London, January 16, 2009 (yes, that pink newspaper), warning against people who question Darwin worship:

Many scientists and liberal politicians regard the rising creationist tide as a side-show that they can safely ignore. They are wrong, for several reasons. Wide areas of research, from biology to cosmology, would suffer directly if it became politically difficult for governments to fund fields that depend on such a basic a part of science as evolution. The cost would be economic as well as intellectual.

But Darwin is also worth defending because attacks on evolution symbolise a wider and more varied assault on policies based on evidence rather than prejudice. Some of this assault comes from the same religious forces as creationism – think, for example, of those ranged against embryonic stem cell research. Sheer ignorance plays a role too and so do the mass media.

As a matter of fact, human embryonic stem cell research did not turn out to be as necessary as its proponents claimed, and there are lots of good reasons for questioning the ridiculous hagiography of Darwin.

Also just up at the Post-Darwinist:

Darwinism and popular culture: Newsweek columnist fronts anti-Darwinism inheritance theory

Podcasts in the intelligent design controversy

Canadian columnist David Warren takes on a Darwinoid, on the subject of whales

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### Evolution Has Weaknesses: Dr. Meyer Testifies in Texas

ID The Future - Wed, 2009-01-28 23:30

Click here to listen. This episode of ID the Future features CSC director Dr. Stephen Meyer's opening remarks to the Texas State Board of Education, where he testified last week in favor of keeping critical analysis of evolution in...

Categories: Intelligent Design News

### Hansen's former boss at NASA declares himself an AGW skeptic

Uncommon Descent - Wed, 2009-01-28 19:58

The video below is U.S. Senator James Inhofe describing the letter he received from former NASA supervisor and senior atmospheric scientist Dr. John S. Theon:

[There is a video that cannot be displayed in this feed. Visit the blog entry to see the video.]

For the EPW press release on this

James Hansen's Former NASA Supervisor Declares Himself a Skeptic

Follow the link above for a full discussion with links to many additional sources of information. Here I'll just reprint the actual emails sent by Dr. Theon:

—Original Message—

From: Jtheon [mailto:jtheon@XXXXXXX]  
Sent: Thursday, January 15, 2009 10:05 PM  
To: Morano, Marc (EPW)

Subject: Climate models are useless

Marc, First, I sent several e-mails to you with an error in the address and they have been returned to me. So I'm resending them in one combined e-mail.

Yes, one could say that I was, in effect, Hansen's supervisor because I had to justify his funding, allocate his resources, and evaluate his results. I did not have the authority to give him his annual performance evaluation. He was never muzzled even though he violated NASA's official agency position on climate forecasting (i.e., we did not know enough to forecast climate change or mankind's effect on it). He thus embarrassed NASA by coming out with his claims of global warming in 1988 in his testimony before Congress.

My own belief concerning anthropogenic climate change is that the models do not realistically simulate the climate system because there are many very important sub-grid scale processes that the models either replicate poorly or completely omit. Furthermore, some scientists have manipulated the observed data to justify their model results. In doing so, they neither explain what they have modified in the observations, nor explain how they did it. They have resisted making their work transparent so that it can be replicated independently by other scientists. This is clearly contrary to how science should be done. Thus there is no rational justification for using climate model forecasts to determine public policy.

With best wishes, John

From: Jtheon [mailto:jtheon@XXXXXX]  
Sent: Tuesday, January 13, 2009 12:50 PM  
To: Morano, Marc (EPW)

Subject: Re: Nice seeing you

Marc, Indeed, it was a pleasure to see you again. I appreciate the opportunity to add my name to those who disagree that Global Warming is man made. A brief bio follows. Use as much or as little of it as you wish.

John S. Theon Education: B.S. Aero. Engr. (1953-57); Aerodynamicist, Douglas Aircraft Co. (1957-58); As USAF Reserve Officer (1958-60), B.S. Meteorology (1959); Served as Weather Officer 1959-60; M.S. Meteorology (1960-62); NASA Research Scientist, Goddard Space Flight Ctr. (1962-74); Head Meteorology Branch, GSFC (1974-76); Asst. Chief, Lab. for Atmos. Sciences, GSFC (1977-78); Program Scientist, NASA Global Weather Research Program, NASA Hq. (1978-82); Chief, Atmospheric Dynamics & Radiation Branch NASA Hq., (1982-91); Ph.D., Engr. Science & Mech.: course of study and dissertation in atmos. science (1983-85); Chief, Atmospheric Dynamics, Radiation, & Hydrology Branch, NASA Hq. (1991-93); Chief, Climate Processes Research Program, NASA Hq. (1993-94); Senior Scientist, Mission to Planet Earth Office, NASA Hq. (1994-95); Science Consultant, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (1995-99); Science Consultant Orbital Sciences Corp. (1996-97) and NASA Jet Propulsion Lab., (1997-99).

As Chief of several NASA Hq. Programs (1982-94), an SES position, I was responsible for all weather and climate research in the entire agency, including the research work by James Hansen, Roy Spencer, Joanne Simpson, and several hundred other scientists at NASA field centers, in academia, and in the private sector who worked on climate research. This required a thorough understanding of the state of the science. I have kept up with climate science since retiring by reading books and journal articles. I hope that this is helpful.

Best wishes, John

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## Mathematically Defining Functional Information In Biology

Uncommon Descent - Wed, 2009-01-28 16:05

Lecture by Kirk Durston, Biophysics PhD candidate, University of Guelph

[There is a video that cannot be displayed in this feed. Visit the blog entry to see the video.]

Click here to read the Szostak paper referred to in the video.

HT to UD subscriber *bornagain77* for the video and the link to the paper.

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### Missile Guidance Systems and Darwinian Logic

Uncommon Descent - Wed, 2009-01-28 03:06

Since I earn my living as a software engineer in aerospace research and development, and since one of my specialities is guidance, navigation and control (GN&C) software development for precision-guided airdrop systems, I thought the following might be of interest to UD readers. As I listened to the following explanation of how missile guidance systems work, I thought to myself, "(Self) This is perfect Darwinian logic!"

Enjoy!

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### Texas Board Chair Gives a Science Lesson

ID The Future - Tue, 2009-01-27 18:45

Click here to listen. Last week, the Texas State Board of Education met to consider a draft of their new science standards. At the meeting, the Board's Chair, Dr. Don McLeroy did a remarkable thing – he gave the...

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### Is Evolution Biased?

Uncommon Descent - Tue, 2009-01-27 15:41

PLoS Biology has an article out today entitled: "Hotspots of Biased Nucleotide Substitutions in Human Genes". I've mentioned this 'biased' substitution pattern before. What the authors see, they tell us, is a definite W->S substitution pattern in human genes (Weak to Strong = A:T->C:G) against an overall pattern of S->W; for the entire human genome. This is part of their summary:

Our findings are consistent with a model of recombination-driven biased gene conversion. This leads to the provocative hypothesis that many of the genetic changes leading to human-specific characters may have been prompted by fixation of deleterious mutations.

What the authors report is a non-random shifting within genes, and the introduction of "deleterious" mutations. Neither of these is consistent with Darwin. Darwin said that if it could be shown that any change in an organism was harmful, then his theory would be overturned.

I'll let you reach your own conclusions. Here's the link.

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### David Attenborough in the News

Uncommon Descent - Tue, 2009-01-27 13:33

David Attenborough has a new series coming out for the Darwin celebrations on BBC 1 in the UK, and has been giving some interviews to the press. Today he claims that creationists have been sending hate mail to him for deny God. "They tell me to burn in hell and good riddance" he complains. Attenborough reveals creationist hate mail for not crediting God

There is no excuse for Christians to send hate mail to anyone, not least because Attenborough can milk it for all its worth and avoid drawing attention to the real hate campaign against those who reject the orthodox Darwin dogma - such as has been exposed in the Expelled film. Even those who

suggest that children's beliefs should be respected in the classroom find themselves on the sharp end of the Darwinists' Doctor Martins, such as Michael Reiss who was booted out of his position from the Royal Society for this reason.

But Attenborough wants us to believe that evolution is a fact not a theory. "Evolution is not a theory; it is a fact, every bit as much as the historical fact that William the Conqueror landed in 1066." I will save the detailed lecture on why this is false, but suffice it to say that scientific findings should always be held tentatively as often fresh data contradicts what has been found before. When considering our unobserved origins we might wish to proceed with extreme caution if one is really a scientist. But Attenborough is promoting Darwinism with devotion that reveals his religious fervour as an evangelist for atheism. For Attenborough, Darwinism just has to be true, or otherwise he might need to think about his responsibility towards a higher power. He freely admits that he had no religious instruction in his upbringing "It never really occurred to me to believe in God - and I had nothing to rebel against, my parents told me nothing whatsoever." It shows!

David Attenborough is also in The Times. David Attenborough on Charles Darwin He finds himself outraged by creationism and intelligent design. He apparently has 'beef' with those who want to teach creationism or intelligent design. Noting a recent survey that found that around a quarter of science teachers in state schools want creationism taught alongside evolution in science lessons he comments. "That is terrible. That is really terrible ... I don't know about national [disgrace]; it's a human disgrace that you don't recognise the difference between these things," he adds. A disgrace to whom I wonder?

He is a charming enough fellow and an excellent presenter, in fact many people have commented that they find him to be one of the greatest story tellers on the television. With lots of brilliant photography his programmes are very watchable. But that is all we have from him, charming stories and iconography with little attempt to show in detail every step of the claimed evolutionary pathway.

It is the work of intelligent design supporters that exposes the falsity of evolutionary pathways that Attenborough and his friends want to keep off our screens and out of the classroom. There is some irony that Attenborough's new programme is called "Charles Darwin and the Tree of Life" (BBC One, 9pm, Sunday, February 1) when the New Scientist has boldly proclaimed 'Darwin is Wrong' on the question of the tree of life. I guess the New Scientist could have timed its front cover a little better, but perhaps Attenborough can tell us which one to believe and include in textbooks? His version or the New Scientist version?

If the Darwinists have their way then science can Rest in Peace for another 150 years with the sacred Darwin religion held sacred in its place.

science and Values

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## Design Is NOT A Mechanism

TelicThoughts - Mon, 2009-01-26 20:17

This thread began as an off-topic offshoot of Bradford's post, Guided Pathways. Please discuss here instead.

Earlier comments to set the scene:

**JJS:** I'll keep repeating this until you kiddies get it right: there is **NO** mechanism for design. Engineers make use of mechanisms in their designs. The design action of an engineer cannot be reduced to a mechanism. IMO, FLE concerns itself with investigating the (potential) manipulation of natural mechanisms to achieve a desired result (design objective).

**Raevmo:** This kiddie respectfully disagrees. There are computers that design stuff — even "unexpected" designs since the computers use random number generators. Are you saying that there is no mechanism for design in that case?

**JJS:** Let me address the two cases you presented separately:

1. Computers "designing" stuff: This "design" is based on a program that was

developed by software engineers who programmed the parameters of the search of options so that a human engineer can eliminate various options in a workable timeframe. The computer ends up being a tool to examine different design directions. It's really no different than me creating a spreadsheet to go through the myriad of different steel section options in the time span of a few minutes instead of hours.

At the end of the day, it is a human engineer that must check the details of the design to ensure it functions in the real world properly. Thus you have human engineer(s) at both the start and the finish of the design process. The computer merely facilitates the search for options. It does not design.

2. Accidental design: this sounds a lot like "designoids" as expressed by Dawkins and Gene. This is not design, but tinkering or evolutionary noise. In order for tinkering to occur, it needs something to tinker with. In most cases, that something is purposely designed.

**Raevmo (in response to #1):** I would say it does. The human (or computer) who checks the design merely evaluates it, it doesn't do the designing. In case of front-loading: the environment checks the design.

**Raevmo (in response to #2):** Again, I disagree. Evolutionary algorithms can design stuff, and they rely on (pseudo) random numbers to generate new designs. Perhaps in your brain there is also a (pseudo) random design generator, and another part of your brain selects the one that meets certain requirements.

**Bradford (in response to Raevmo [2]):** Or perhaps in his mind there exists a capacity for analysis which makes assessments independently of brain biochemical determinism and that is further evidence of design.

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## Surface Appearances

TelicThoughts - Mon, 2009-01-26 00:16

Tom Gilson has a blog entry titled Knowledge and Bias: A First Response to Tom Clark One striking aspect of the exchange between Tom Gilson and Tom Clark is its substantive dialog and the civil nature of it. My focus is a small part of it, specifically a portion of a comment made by Tom Clark. The first quoted comment segment:

That prediction doesn't stem from a naturalistic bias, but from the nature of science and more generally the project of gaining intersubjective knowledge: understanding things and their connections tends to unify our view of the world, and the world that science reveals is what we ordinarily call nature. I also say that "Should something categorically immaterial someday play a role in scientific explanations, so be it, but for the time being there's no indication that dualism will carry the day."

The study of nature allows for the immaterial. Minds exist and the presumption that they are either physical or emergent properties of brains is, in many instances, superfluous to the analysis of cognitive and behavioral phenomenon. Of course studies can encompass brain cells and neural biochemistry but such studies are not essential to many scientific endeavors which have yielded useful data. To borrow a phrase, materialist presumptions are vacuous to such endeavors. More from Clark's comment:

Same goes for the supernatural. In my exchange with Goetz and Taliaferro I say: "The naturalist agrees that science can't categorically exclude immaterial God, souls, free will and mental causes, that is, it can't categorically rule out their existence, but disagrees that there are scientific, empirical, intersubjective grounds for reasonably believing that they exist." So all I'm saying is that, \*if\* you stick with science and more broadly intersubjective empiricism as grounds for belief, the chances are you'll end up with a picture of a unified reality, not one divided into two categorically different realms, natural vs. supernatural.

One of the difficulties with a natural/supernatural paradigm is an inability to clearly delineate boundary lines in advance of an assessment. For example, much of what we currently understand, based on the application of empirical approaches, would have seemed supernatural in an earlier era of history. Relativity and quantum theories render explanations which run counter to the "common sense" of the uninitiated. Bizarre cosmological structures like neutron stars and black holes would have seemed like fanciful concepts to earlier generations. It's not that they are fanciful, only that our consideration of what constitutes fanciful can be a construct of our current scientific

understanding subject to revision by means of scientific breakthroughs. Wedding scientific knowledge to technology illustrates the point. 21st century technology, introduced into an ancient culture, could convey a supernatural impression. A false one. The boundary between natural and supernatural is not necessarily discernible.

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### **Controversy Brewing over the Darwin 2009 Project at the University of Oklahoma**

Uncommon Descent - Sun, 2009-01-25 05:04

This year, the University of Oklahoma is celebrating Darwin with the Darwin 2009 Project. It appears from the speaker list (at least for the names I am familiar with) that where this project touches on the mechanisms for evolution or the wider debate about its potential implications for other areas of life, this is going to be entirely one-sided.

I know from some friends of mine that there is an undercurrent of opposition brewing from OU supporters, alumni, and other Oklahoma residents. Below is the letter I am writing to OU's President Boren, and I hope that some of you will do the same. Please don't copy my letter directly - write your own - but feel free to be inspired

David Boren, President  
University of Oklahoma  
Office of the President  
Evans Hall Room 110  
660 Parrington Oval  
Norman, OK 73019-3073

Re: Darwin 2009 Project

Dear President Boren -

It has come to my attention that the University of Oklahoma is celebrating the 150th anniversary of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* with a Darwin Symposium. I fully support the recognition of creative scientists such as Darwin who caused paradigm shifts within their fields. However, going through the list of public lectures and lecturers, it appears that the lecture list is entirely one-sided. Evolutionary biology is a diverse field, and I do not think that it does justice to Darwin or evolution to present to the public such a one-sided picture of science and present it as fact. Michael Ruse, Nick Matzke, and Richard Dawkins are outspoken public figures, all of whom present a very one-sided view of evolutionary theory and natural history, and of the relationship of science with other avenues of inquiry.

As an institution of learning in the state of Oklahoma, it is my hope that OU would present to the public the full range of opinion that is present within science over Darwin's theories. In addition to the action of natural selection, many other theories as to the origin of the species have been considered and discussed, including, but not limited to, evolution by symbiogenesis (Lynn Margulis), biological self-organization (Stuart Kauffman), evolution through natural genetic engineering (James Shapiro), evolution by intelligent design (Michael Behe), and creationism (Leonard Brand). Aspects of all of these theories are within the bounds of current scientific discussions, and I listed the names of prominent proponents along with the theories.

Obviously, not all of these could be discussed within such a symposium due to time, space, and money constraints. However, with such a rich diversity of viewpoints within the scientific community, it is unfortunate that OU is focusing solely on one vocal viewpoint to the exclusion of others. In fact, the only mention of other viewpoints seems to be Matzke's talk, for the purpose of deriding them rather than discussing them. If the purpose was to discuss them fairly, it seems that the best way to do this would be to bring in a proponent of such a view to air a full hearing, rather than have a partisan opponent airing a straw-man version.

In addition, the inclusion of Richard Dawkins on the list of speakers gives the impression that this series will focus on Darwinian evolution not just as a scientific idea, but as a total worldview. Richard Dawkins hasn't made any real contributions to science in many years. Most of his current work has been in evangelization for atheism and against Christianity. If the purpose of this symposium is to offer Darwinian evolution as a total worldview (and having Dawkins talking about "purpose" makes it appear this way), then I would hope that the University would provide some balance to the extremes of Richard

Dawkins. I do not know of all of the lecturers on the list, but the ones that I do know all seem to have the same basic perspective, though Michael Ruse is at least much more cordial and thoughtful in his presentation.

As a native Oklahoman, it is my hope that the University of Oklahoma will be known for its freedom of inquiry, and not for one-sided dogmatics. It is my hope that you would take this into consideration, and be sure that lectures are scheduled which present a wider range of viewpoints.

Thank you for your consideration.

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