



APOLOGETICA

"PERSUADING THE MIND, LIBERATING THE HEART"

NOVA TOTIVS TERRARVM ORBIS GEOGRAPHICA AC HYDROGRAPHICA TABVLA. Auct. Henr. Hondius

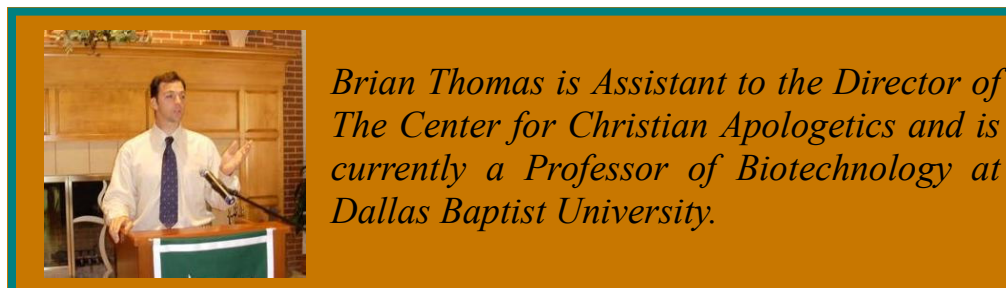
Atheism and Irreducible Complexity

By Brian Thomas

With the erosion of cultural norms and the rejection of traditional beliefs which now pervades our Western society, atheists are attempting to capture the hearts and minds of this generation. Currently, 5.2% of Americans are atheists, and there is some evidence that their camp is growing. Public debates are increasing and atheistic books are selling well.

I recently met a product of this atheistic emphasis. This young atheist friend of mine remarked candidly that he had never met a Christian who, when he mentioned his reasons for becoming an atheist, was even familiar with his vocabulary, let alone able to offer any reasoned defense for theism or Christianity. This is what we are passionate about at the Center for Christian Apologetics. Our desire is to equip believers with information on what people are thinking, and to enable believers to give a thoughtful, informed, and gracious defense of theism, of truth, and ultimately of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

During our recent conversation, my friend and I discussed "irreducible complexity" and its implications, and my young friend asked me to evaluate the six-page portion of Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* in which the author, an atheist and eugenicist, attempts to refute the argument for design based on the concept of irreducible complexity. An irreducibly complex system contains interacting parts



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whereby the removal of one part causes the whole system to fail. This general concept (that of inferring the presence of a designer based on observable design features) was common in prior centuries, and described by William Paley in *Natural Theology* in 1802. However, rigorous criteria for detecting objective design was not elucidated until intelligent design proponent and biochemist Michael Behe published *Darwin's Black Box* in 1996. Though better examples of irreducible complexity have since been proposed, Behe used that of the classic spring-loaded mousetrap. If any part is removed, the trap does not work. Behe then describes several biochemical systems made of proteins, all of which must be present to function.

The argument is that just as one would infer that something like a clock must have been designed (because every known machine with parts objectively ordered into the correct size, shape, and strength to work interdependently for a specific purpose has been designed) so one can validly infer that a biological system with even more complexity, especially irreducible complexity, must have been designed.

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Who Made God?

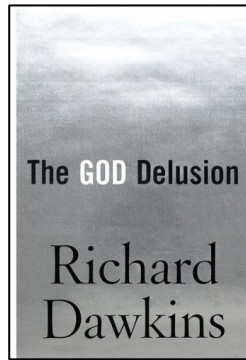
By Brian Thomas

In *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins maintains that invoking a designer is nonsense because any designer would itself require a designer. He says, "Once again, this is because the designer himself (/herself/itself) immediately raises the bigger problem of his own origin."

Here the author exhibits either ignorance of the nature of a theistic God, or bait-and-switching of the immaterial, eternal God for a material, finite God. Theists do not propose a finite God like that of the ancient Greek polytheists or modern day Mormons. Rather, the theistic God is infinite, timeless, and supernatural, which means that he had no beginning and thus no origin. Only finite beings require an origin.

Knowing this, another question could be presented: How do we have any finite things at all? Unless the universe itself can be shown to be

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Atheism (Continued from page 1)

Page 39 of *Darwin's Black Box* reads,

"An irreducibly complex system cannot be produced. . . by slight, successive modifications of a precursor system, because any precursor to an irreducibly complex system that is missing a part is by definition nonfunctional. . . . Since natural selection can only choose systems that are already working, then if a biological system cannot be produced gradually it would have to arise as an integrated unit, in one fell swoop, for natural selection to have anything to act on."

Beginning on page 119 of *The God Delusion*, Dawkins introduces his thesis: though he agrees with creationists that chance alone is totally insufficient to produce highly ordered systems, he argues that natural selection is sufficient, and further, that invoking a designer is nonsense because any designer would itself require a designer. Richard Dawkins cannot allow a designer because it does not fit into his limited naturalist, atheist worldview. We suppose that this is why Dawkins is forced to use question begging, straw men, misinformation, ipse dixitisms ("it is because I say it is"), bait-and-switching, and ad hominem arguments, rather than addressing the issue: How can we get new information without intelligence when every observed instance of new information is known to come from intelligence?

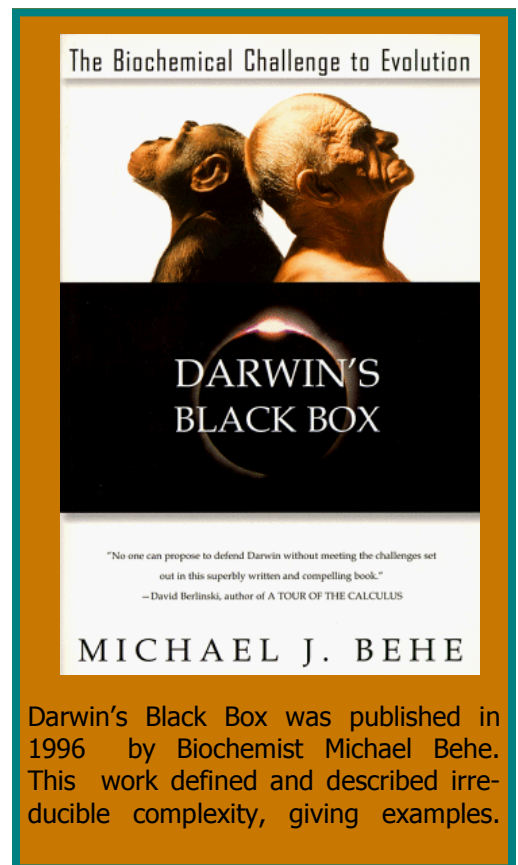
Much of that new information must have, according to the construction of irreducibly complex cellular machines, originated as large, prespecified data clumps. Dawkins states, "Chance is not a solution, given the high levels of improbability we see in living organisms, and no sane biologist ever suggested that it was." With this we agree. However, Dawkins maintains that natural selection is the obvious alternative source of new information. He waves the magic wand of natural selection over the problem with such statements as, "...Darwin's effortless explanation of exactly how the eye evolved by gradual degrees," and, "... it is not only a workable solution, it is a solution of stunning elegance and power". He also accuses creationists of omitting, "...all mention of the real alternative, natural selection, either because they genuinely don't understand it or because they don't want to." How does natural selection really work, and has any investigator ever observed natural selection add any new information?

According to creationist Edward Blyth, who first published the concept of natural selection in 1835, 25 years before Darwin, nature selects the fitter individuals within a population. Notice that it therefore deselected the non-fit. According to Darwinism, this selection leads to new information. However, it has only been observed to conserve information, not generate it. This idea presupposes that there is some pre-existing information to select. I may choose to eat the peas from my plate, and scrape the corn into the trash, but that does not mean that I invented peas or corn. In like manner, natural selection has not been observed to invent information. It merely selects from pre-existing information. To assert that it generates novel information or structures is to go beyond observational science to conjecture. There is a complete dearth of real examples of nature generating new information- especially the quality (not just quantity) of information required to invent an irreducibly complex machine. Dawkins assumes that natural selection did it, and he derides those who do not agree.

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Who Made God? (Continued from page 1)

infinite, despite what we know from the first and second laws of thermodynamics (the universe is winding down, so someone must have wound it up), then the universe must necessarily have come from an infinite God. The other option is that the universe as we know it was caused by an infinite regress of finite causes (gods?). However, this is a contradiction, for infinity cannot be arrived at by additive succession of finite items.



A theistic God could certainly be a designer and not need to be designed. Do we fully understand how an immaterial God interacts with a material world? Not I. However, we understand far, far less how a finite material world replete with specified complexity could have come from no cause at all. Let us be prepared to ask our friends, "If there is no First Cause, why is there something here, rather than nothing?" A good resource for equipping ourselves and fellow believers is *When Skeptics Ask* by Norman Geisler.

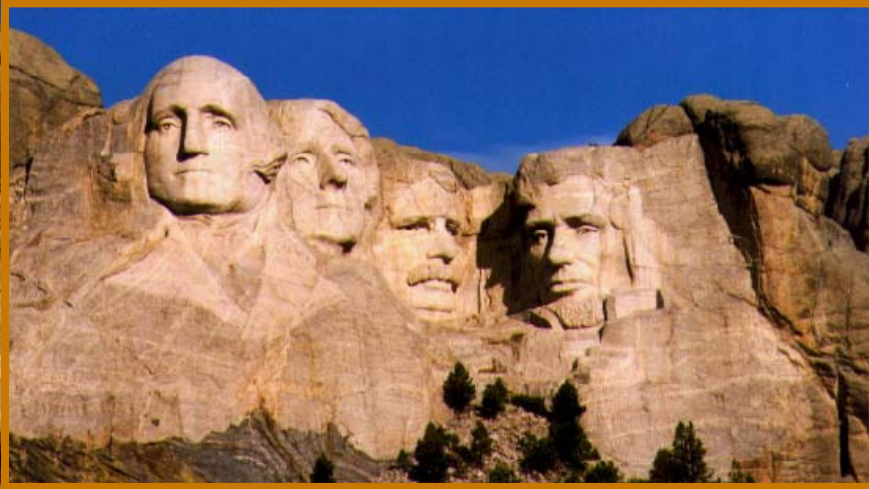
PERSUADING THE MIND, LIBERATING THE HEART

Atheism (continued from page 2)

“The creationist completely misses the point, because he (women should for once not mind being excluded by the pronoun) insists on treating the genesis of statistical improbability as a single, one-off event. He doesn’t understand the power of *accumulation*.” (emphasis in the original)

As intelligent design scientists have repeatedly and cogently described, the challenge is not the generation of statistical improbability, but the generation of improbability *with specification*. "Accumulation" of junk is not useful!

The precise shape of any particular mountain is improbable, or complex. The precise shape of Mount Rushmore is both improbable and specified (i.e., it fits a recognizable pattern.) It is the very combination of these features that enables forensic scientists, lawyers, and all the rest of us to identify artifacts as having been designed or not. It seems Richard Dawkins has bait-and-switched 'complexity with



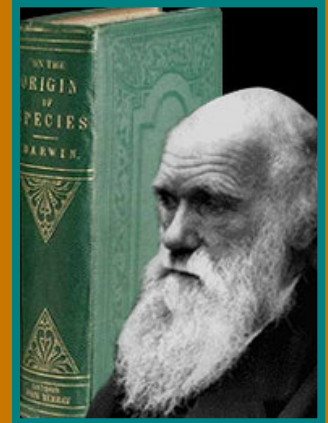
specification' for mere 'complexity', which would seem disingenuous. We would just like to know *how* “accumulation” can generate irreducibly complex machines (which all contain complex, specified information). We would like to see it in action. We would like to see an example. If there is nothing real to observe, then we would at least like a detailed step-by-step conjecture, not another glib, ambiguous wave of a Darwinian magic wand.

On page 124 the author refers to another chapter wherein he describes the eyes of the flatworm, nautilus, and vertebrate, decrying how painfully obvious it is that these belong in a timeline on a gradual slope toward perfection. This whole exercise, though, begs the question of origins! The author first assumes that there can be no intelligence involved, then lines up different design features from widely

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Job 12: 7-9

“But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; And the birds of the air, and they will tell you; Or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; And the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this?”



On The Origin of Species: or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle For Life by Charles Darwin, popularized the idea that nature selecting individuals drives biological innovation. Creationist Edward Blythe decades earlier published a more accurate description: natural selection is preservative, not innovative.

Glossary of Faulty Argument Techniques:

Ipsedixitism– From the Latin “*ipsi dixit*”, roughly translated: “because I say so.” Also known as, “just-so statements.” This is a bullying tactic that expects the listener to uncritically accept the speaker’s content.

Bait-and-switch– Working with one common definition, then assuming (without saying) a different definition in the midst of an argument. Ex: “Finch beak variations are evolution in action. They show that evolution formed finches from simple life forms.” Notice two different definitions for evolution.

Begging-the-question– Assuming the truth of the very idea that is supposedly being evaluated. Ex: “From simple to complex, the scooter, skateboard, bicycle, then car evolved from one to the next naturally.”

News and Events

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divergent creatures to fit his preconception. I could similarly line up a paper airplane, hang glider, and an F16 and assert that one morphed into another without intelligent input, but we know full well that each of these was designed by a specific intelligence and each for a specific purpose. In like manner, it is at least as likely that the flatworm's eyespot, the nautilus' pinhole eye, and the vertebrate refracting lens eye were each designed by an intelligence and each for a specific purpose. We certainly see no empirical reason, despite Dawkins' derision, why we should adopt such a vacuous tenet now.

On page 125, Dawkins admits that, "...if genuinely irreducible complexity could be properly demonstrated, it would wreck Darwin's theory." One wonders what would constitute 'proper demonstration' for the author. It is not difficult to demonstrate. Just remove a central part from such a system and the whole thing collapses. Certain components of a computer make it genuinely irreducibly complex. If I remove either the keyboard, motherboard, hard drive, power supply (and many, but not all, other parts could be included) the computer would be rubbish. Further, it would be less fit for survival in my house unless I, as an intelligent agent, could diagnose its deficiency and return it to its original state of ordered information. Just so a single, "simple" cell is demonstrably irreducible. And just so does a cell with missing proteins, or missing DNA (all or certain parts), or ribosomes, or any of several thousand required parts become less fit and therefore *deselected* by nature. Dawkins must remain "willfully ignorant" of the fact that that to make an irreducibly complex system requires a large bolus of information. This enables him to keep his atheism.

The conversation I had with my new atheist friend was positive. He heard objections to atheism for the first time, even though he was raised in a Baptist church. We should not be intimidated by the bullying that Dawkins tries to serve us with such statements as, "Nobody could sanely deny that these invertebrate eyes...all lie on a continuous and shallow slope up Mount Improbable." Join us in preparing to answer these bully tactics and in the process you will be ready to give an answer to those who are confronted with the criticisms of radical atheists. Our hope is that we who are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves will continue to find the time and make the effort to prepare ourselves to understand and think critically about ideas, especially ideas with eternal consequences.

1. http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2006-09-11-religion-survey_x.htm?csp=1

See the original at: <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/33304.pdf>

2. http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2006-09-11-religion-survey_x.htm?csp=1

See the original at: <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/33304.pdf>

3. <http://www.creationontheweb.com/content/view/493/>

4. Gitt, Werner, *In The Beginning Was Information*, cLv, Bielefeld, Germany, 1997

5. Dawkins, Richard, *The God Delusion*, Houghton Mifflin, 2006, p. 121

6 II Pet. 3:5

CCA Events

The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction

Voddie Bachum

College of Biblical Studies (tentative)

March 22, 2008

Apologetics Forum

Dr. Ron Rhodes

College of Biblical Studies (tentative)

May 17, 2008

Brian Thomas:

Guest lecture on "The Design of ATP Synthase"

Dec. 4, 2007 Dallas Baptist University

Watch for upcoming information critiquing the new atheist movie and book agenda, "The Golden Compass", on our website, www.answers101.org

Contact CCA

To schedule a seminar, guest speaker, or conference contact CCA:

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