

Use Scientific Journals - Not Religion

R.N. Rogers

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Editor:

I apologize again for another letter on science versus religion. Actually, there is no fundamental conflict between them: Religion often demands a confirmation of faith; science demands a confirmation of data. They operate in different realms. It is when religion attempts to force the political system to conform to its worldview that it is dangerous. It is when religion attempts to misuse the terms of science to prove its points that I get irritated. The directed purposeful confusion between "origins" and "evolution" is extremely irritating. A lot is known about "prebiotic" chemistry, but that is not part of a discussion on evolution. The controversy among John Baumgardner and scientists over calculating times to spontaneous generation of life is so nonsensical that I cannot let it pass. In true science you need numbers. You need to survey the literature. They have done neither.

Baumgardner has said that very few of the possible protein configurations could be functional. Work reported in the literature shows that is not true. For example, in the June 13 *Science* it was shown that generalized proteins can and do catalyze reactions. In doing so, they modify their structures to improve their catalytic efficiency. Very many proteins can do the same job, some better than others, but let's use numbers not guesses.

Baumgardner has said that functional proteins cannot spontaneously assemble in dilute solutions. Such a statement ignores an entire field of study that is much published in the literature. For example, Bolli, et al., *Chem. Biol.*, have shown that tetranucleotide-2',3'-cyclophosphates assemble into oligomers of, up to 36 nucleotides in dilute solutions. The same process can produce optically active molecules, as observed in life. Oligomers can be self-replicating and can provide templates for RNA-type molecules. Chronin and Pizzarello showed in *Science* 275 that even the amino acids observed in the Murchison meteorite show optical activity. Chemical processes that do not involve life can and do produce complex life-like molecules with optical activity.

Baumgardner (and a book by Behe) claim that life must appear all at once: They claim it is "irreducibly complex." That is nonsense. Wachtershauser (Munich) discussed how simple the first self-replicating molecules could be and how they carry information analogous to "heredity." No life is required for these abiotic processes: They are chemistry. Nobody has produced "life" in a test tube: nobody has proved it cannot be done. Many pre-life molecules have been produced spontaneously in the laboratory. Let's read and consider the facts.

My point is not to attack religion: A person with true religious faith need not fear facts. I am simply tired of seeing endless arguments that do not use the scientific method. Unsupported claims mean nothing. There are numbers in the literature. Let's see them used.

R. N. Rogers