

Evolution Defended II:

A response to John Baumgardner

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Editor:

John Baumgardner admits that in his Fuller Lodge talk he "attacked the methodology of material reductionism and its underlying materialist assumption for the nature of reality." Let us not mince words: he attacked science and the metaphysical and epistemological principles that makes science possible. In his recent letter of 3/7/196 he then asks for specific examples of where his attack violated those very principles.

Very well. Given that Stephen Gould called the gaps in the geologic record "paleontology's little trade secret," this does not mean that it invalidates Darwin's theory of evolution. Gould has published at least eight books, each of which shows how Darwin's theory explains all manner of disparate biological facts, unifying them into a coherent whole. (Many articles in those books also explicitly repudiate Creationism.) Thus, to cite Gould's remark as if it undermined Darwin is to take the quotation out of the wider relevant context.

Given that the probability of drawing the letters "t," "h," and "e" out of a bag of letters is about one in 20,000, there was no mention that because there is more than one three-letter word in English, the probability of an intelligible word is more like one in a thousand. But if the bag were filled with Chinese ideographs, then nearly every three-symbol combination would be meaningful ... to a Chinese person. And if a monkey picked out the letters, the probability that it would recognize anything meaningful would be zero.

This brings us to the significant point: that human minds choose certain arbitrary symbols to represent certain definite ideas. The symbols themselves have no inherent meaning - the "information" resides in the minds of the humans who use those symbols. Linguists and semanticists may redefine "information" in the context of their special discipline to be the symbols and patterns of use of those symbols.

By an extension of that definition, a biologist might talk of a "grammar" of DNA. But such a grammar is not composed of arbitrary manmade rules like "every subject and predicate must agree in case and number," but of inviolable rules determined by stereochemistry and quantum-mechanics; i.e. by the identity of the entities involved.

Thus, one may not calculate probabilities based on statistical independence when there are known dependencies: the conscious choice to use only certain symbols to represent ideas in the case of the letters, the specific laws of biochemistry and physics in the case of the DNA.

These are some of the examples in which Baumgardner's attack on the method and principles of science violated those methods and principles.

Finally, contrary to Baumgardner's statement that "every world-view is predicated on faith-based presuppositions," I would point out that my philosophy is based on ostensibly validated axioms combined with the use of Reason as my only means of knowledge. Those metaphysical and epistemological principles then imply the ethical virtue of rationality as the exclusive use of Reason to understand reality as given to me by my senses. My certainty in the correctness of those principles depends in no way on faith. Indeed, this was recognized even by Immanuel Kant, when he summarized his critical works by saying, "I have found it necessary to deny reason in order to make room for faith."

There can be no compromise between Reason (and science and the world it has made possible) and Faith. I choose Reason.

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