

“I Have No Problem Deriving Meaning in Life as an Evolved Biological Organism”

Dear Raymond Bohlin,

I am also a graduate of the University of Illinois and found your article on the Probe Ministries website interesting reading. I was surprised at the low-quality answers you had received from evolutionary biologists about morality and meaning. To me it is absolutely wonderful, amazing, and awe-inspiring that you and I, or any human beings can have actual conversations and exchange ideas. It is amazing to me because I believe that we are a result of evolution unguided by any supernatural god. To me there can be deep conviction that we are biological organisms and that there is no god while also maintaining a deep sense of meaning and purpose. It seems to me that if you believe God created everything around us, then He did an embarrassingly poor job. Why have around 50% of our DNA be wasted garbage from a violent evolutionary past? If people are created in God's image, why give them an appendix? Surely if you were truly an all-powerful being capable of anything, you should have done much better. But, if we are a result of random chance and evolutionary process unguided by a supernatural power, then the world is amazing. It is awe-inspiring to have such amazing diversity of life and to have a species with the power to be aware of itself. That 50% of our DNA actually works becomes amazing and wonderful testimony to the glory of the evolutionary process. If we are merely a creation of an all-powerful god, then we are clearly his rejects, because he should have been able to do much better. But if we are a result of an evolutionary process then we are amazing and valuable.

Similarly, I see the same problem with meaning. You claim that if we are “merely” biological then there is no real meaning. I would argue just the opposite. If we are merely the result of a supernatural god, then the best we can do is discover God's predetermined meaning. We are unimportant and can never create any meaning in our lives. But if we are biological organisms in the absence of a supernatural god, then we are the creators of meaning. We are the meaning pioneers who must establish meaning, value, and morality as we go. To me, my life seems so much more meaningful if I feel that I can create meaning and values, and be one of the first species to truly experience love, beauty, and understanding. If I am just some all powerful-god's creation, then my personal life seems meaningless because all meaning has been pre-established by some supernatural force beyond my meager comprehension. To say we are “merely” or “just” biological to me is insulting. Being biological does not prevent me from having as much meaning and purpose as I want in my life. But now, the responsibility lies on me. If I have a meaningless life, then it is my own fault for not creating any meaning. I personally find deep meaning and purpose in the love, compassion, and discovery of ideas that I share with my fellow humans who are also creating meaning and purpose in their own lives.

Whether you consider the answers I received from evolutionary biologists to be disappointing or not, they are the standard answers. Your willingness to reach for something more and create meaning is what I would categorize as the third response, that of an existential leap for hope and meaning.

But first to your criticisms of the Creator's workmanship. Please be aware that the previous estimates of useless DNA were closer to 90%. I would not be so quick to assume that the remaining 50% unaccounted for will remain so. We have only begun to unravel the mystery of DNA and its

organization. My prediction is that there will be little left without some function after the next 100 years. One of the principal geneticists with Celera Genomics, the private company that arrived at its own independent human DNA sequence, was quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle* saying,

“‘What really astounds me is the architecture of life,’ he said. ‘The system is extremely complex. It’s like it was designed.’ . . . There’s a huge intelligence there. I don’t see that as being unscientific. Others may, but not me.” (February 19, *SFC*, Tom Abate, “Human Genome Map Has Scientists Talking About the Divine”).

So what we already know reveals not some clumsily ordered mess thrown together by natural selection, but a highly ordered and specified arrangement.

Over 100 years ago, there were dozens of reputed vestigial human structures such as the appendix, tonsils, and tailbone, but all of these have since yielded a function. The tonsils and appendix are members of the integrated immune system. Can we live without them? Yes, but we are better off with them. Surgeons rarely take out the appendix anymore as part of routine abdominal surgery unless absolutely necessary. The more we learn about our bodies the more complex and truly amazing they are. The power of adult stem cells is proving to be truly amazing and they have resided inside us all the time. I think it is rather presumptuous of anyone to suggest that they could have done a better job of designing our bodies. Our knowledge of how everything works is still progressing. What may seem sloppy today may soon be revealed as the right combination of characteristics to achieve an amazing design. That at least seems to be the pattern. We used to think cells were simple accumulations of membrane, protoplasm, and protein. The last sixty years have revealed ever increasing levels of complexity and organization never even dreamed of. I just don’t see how you can view our bodies as rejects. What would you change? What could have been done better in your mind?

If we are the product of an evolutionary process than we truly are amazing. I will grant you that. So amazing that I would suggest that we are alone in the universe. The odds are so stacked against any kind of unguided evolution producing sentient beings such as ourselves, that there just isn’t anybody else out there.

I don’t understand your revelry in the ability to create meaning. What are we to create it out of? Nothing? Something doesn’t come from nothing. Meaning grabbed out of thin air is still air no matter what you call it. In an evolutionary world view all that matters is survival and reproduction and as I said in the article, this ultimately fades away at death which is nothing more than extinction. So what good is the meaning you create? It is ultimately an illusion. A survival device and nothing more. How is that exciting? I am sorry if you are insulted by the characterization of being merely biological, but again, in an evolutionary worldview, that is reality. Your brain has evolved only as an aid to survival and reproduction, not as a truth- and meaning-creating machine.

If we share this meaning and purpose creating capacity with our fellow humans, certainly we arrive at different conclusions. If our conclusions are different, how do we judge who is right? Or does it really even matter? I would suggest that it doesn’t matter at all. You are left with the post-modern dictum of “it may be true for you but it’s not true for me.” The statement is self-contradictory because it assumes that at least that statement is universally true, but how can it be?

Theism can provide true meaning and purpose through the One who is self-existent. Why you think God’s assignment of true meaning and purpose somehow cheapens it baffles me. If I were to create a robot, I the creator determine its function and usefulness, not the machine itself. Remember also, that something must be eternal. As I said earlier, something does not come from nothing. So the fact that something is here means something has to have always been here. That something can be either

material or immaterial. The material universe, according to current Big Bang cosmology, had a beginning. Therefore it certainly seems reasonable to assume that God is eternal. I don't suggest that the Big Bang proves God, but it does make the assumption eminently reasonable.

You may choose to create your own meaning if you like, but I cannot see how it can be anything but an illusion in an evolutionary, purely materialistic worldview.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, Ph.D.
Probe Ministries