

God and CSI, Take 2

At our house, conversations about ID usually aren't about "identification." It means "Intelligent Design."

My husband Ray's entire education is in science, including a Ph.D. in molecular biology. Early in his Christian walk, learning there was evidence against evolution lit a fire under him that has only grown in the 35 years since. Today, he is thrilled by advances in science that on an almost-monthly basis reveal more and more evidence that an intelligence is the only reasonable explanation for many aspects of the natural world.

But that doesn't sit well with people who don't want to be accountable to the God they know perfectly well is there, but spend endless hours and countless books (and YouTube videos) denying it.

The anti-God attitude was well known to the apostle Paul, who said in Romans 1:19-20, ". . .that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

Eventually, it poisoned the very core of most science today. The early scientists like Galileo and Newton made important discoveries about the Creation because their starting point was a belief in an intelligent, orderly Creator who wove orderliness into His creation. They believed that the orderliness and principles of the natural world were knowable because our God is knowable. But then, Darwin's theory of evolution allowed people to embrace science without buying into the "God part" of it. Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*) said that "Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually

fulfilled atheist.” And today, it is now assumed that the very nature of science excludes anything supernatural. This has nothing to do with the evidence and everything to do with people’s hearts.

When we “X” God out of our thinking, we feel free to redefine things any way we want, since we no longer feel beholden to His view of reality. I was thinking the other day that if Las Vegas decided it didn’t like its crime statistics, all it needs to do is define crime away. Can you imagine if the city went to the CSI investigators and said, “You know all those dead bodies you deal with? From now on, you need to find a natural explanation for those deaths.”

And the CSI people would say, “But most of the deaths we investigate aren’t naturally caused. They are caused by human beings.”

LV: Not any more. If all people die from natural causes, then we’ve done away with crime. And we are totally committed to doing away with crime in Las Vegas.

CSI: But we’re committed to following the evidence no matter where it leads. If the evidence implies a killer, we can’t say it’s a natural death.

LV: Our commitment is eliminating crime. If you can’t come up with natural causes for these deaths, we’ll bring in CSIs who can.

CSI: So when we find someone face down on a desk, with a wound indicating something long and sharp was stabbed from the back of the neck into the victim’s mouth. . .?

LV: Keep researching until you find a completely natural explanation. And stop using needlessly prejudicial words like “victim.” There is no more crime in this city because we have declared it so. Your findings have to be consistent with the new city policy.

And that's what it's like to be a scientist these days. Don't believe me? Watch Ben Stein's movie *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* .

And go "Arrrrrgggggggghhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!!!"

This is a revised version of the [blog post](#) originally published on October 7, 2008

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This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/god_and_csi on October 7,
2008.

"Aren't the Bonds in Peptides More Easily Formed?"

Dr. Bohlin: I have been in contact with a good friend and we have been having a wonderful discussion regarding a series of topics centering around intelligent design. As typical of our conversations we tend to head down tangential trails that avert our focus momentarily. This week's parley has to do with chemical bonding as associated with protein synthesis.

Specifically, your position that the probability of amino acids forming proteins on their own is astronomical. My friend sent you an email recently asking why covalence is not a possibility when considering formation of amino acids and eventually proteins. In your response you referred to two primary problems: chemical and informational. In regards to the chemical you briefly stated that using the early earth scenario (where earth scientists envision a watery world) the energy required to release the water molecule during the peptide bonding process is high especially in an aqueous solution. Further, you state that this barrier can be overcome by the cell through the use of ribosome in a protein fold devoid of water but that the early earth had no RNA to overcome this barrier. Here is my long drawn out question to you.

First, I contend that the weak hydrogen bond (not covalent) associated with the loss of the two hydrogen and one oxygen atom during the formation of an amino acid with the peptide bond is easily broken through a heat catalyst such that existed during the high radioactive decay of the early earth as it cooled from its molten stage (and still does today but to a much lesser degree). This loss of a water molecule would heighten the affinity of the amino acid to the peptide bond thus strengthening their mutual attraction. The early earth model also indicates that pH (percent hydrogen) levels were probably very different which would also act as a catalyst to break the hydrogen bond as the hydrogen and oxygen atoms try to degas from solution and neutralize the solution. The earth's closed system perpetuated this process indefinitely by trapping the heated gases laden with other hydrous compounds such as sulfuric acid. The formation of the amount of water on earth certainly could not be accomplished by the release of water molecules through the formation of proteins alone. This begs the question of which came first the chicken or the egg? If it were the amino acids, then we would have a sea of amino acids greater than the volume of the oceans. If the amino

acids were formed outside of an aqueous solution then where did the water molecules come from that were eventually released? Both hydrogen and oxygen had to be abundantly present and together they form many, many more molecules other than just amino acids and water. The information concern you were referring to suggests that 10 to 65 th power is unobtainable. However, when there exists many times more that number of amino acids the odds quickly reduce and become more favorable. 10 to the 65 th sounds astronomical but 10 to the 6500 th is even more astronomical thus diminishing the former. Further, amino acids can be synthesized in the laboratory which suggests that the building blocks are present on earth. In time, with the correct agents in place (such as powerful radioactive isotopes {neutrinos perhaps?}) the left-handed stereoisotopes of amino acids may also be laboratorily synthesized.

Finally, I would like to know your thoughts on why you believe that proteins were designed. Is it purely philosophical or have you developed a hypothesis that has been tested by others that lends further credence to your postulation? Thank you for your time in advance.

Thank you for your consideration of my earlier response and I am glad to answer your questions and objections.

First, the bonds that are broken to form a peptide bond formation with the subsequent release of water are not hydrogen bonds, they are covalent. That is why peptide bond formation is endothermic or uphill in relation to energy. Simply providing heat is not going to overcome this problem. Sydney Fox attempted thermal synthesis of proteins in early earth conditions, the results of which he termed proteinoids. Beginning with amino acids (in solution or dry) he heated the material at 200 degrees C for 6-7 hours. The water produced by bond formation (and any original water from the aqueous solution) is evaporated. The elimination of water makes a small yield of polypeptides possible. The increased

temperature plus the elimination of water makes the reaction irreversible. However, this process has been rejected for four reasons. First, in living proteins only alpha peptide bonds are formed. In Fox's reactions, beta, gamma and epsilon peptide bonds are also found in abundance. Second, these thermal proteinoids are composed of both L and D amino acids. Only L amino acids are found in living proteins. Third, these are randomly sequenced proteins with no resemblance to proteins with catalytic activity. "Fourth, the geological conditions indicated are too unreasonable to be taken seriously. As Folsome has commented, 'The central question [concerning Fox's proteinoids] is where did all those pure, dry, concentrated, and optically active amino acids come from in the first place.'" (*Mystery of Life's Origin*, 1984, Thaxton, Bradley, and Olsen, p. 155-156)

I am sorry you got the impression that I believed that the formation of peptide bonds and the concomitant release of a water molecule produced the original water on the planet. That is not the nature of the chicken or egg dilemma. The chicken or egg dilemma refers to the fact that in living systems today, proteins are required for DNA and RNA to function with specificity. Histones are required to maintain DNA folding structure and more importantly, proteins are required for DNA and RNA replication. However, it is the DNA which contains the code for the construction of proteins. DNA needs proteins, proteins need DNA. Which came first in the early earth? DNA or protein, chicken or egg? The proposed RNA world, RNA molecules which can perform some limited enzyme (protein) functions is negated by the fact that there is no mechanism for the production of RNA in an abiotic early earth. Even if this is accomplished, the enzyme-like functions of some small RNA molecules are not sufficient to support life in any shape or form.

Just because $1/10$ to the 65th power is large compared to $1/10$ to the 6,500 power does not minimize $1/10$ to the 65th as a

very small probability. It is estimated that there are 10 to the 80th power particles in the universe. The smallest amino acid, glycine is comprised on 13 atoms, each atom (either hydrogen, carbon, nitrogen or oxygen) is composed of multiple protons, electrons and neutrons and each of these is composed of multiple quarks. You can readily recognize that a sea of 10 to the 65th amino acids is a physical impossibility. Current estimates suggest that the concentration of amino acids in the early earth could never have exceeded, 10 to the -7 molar, which is the same as the present Atlantic Ocean (*Mystery of Life's Origin* cited earlier, p. 60). Sheer numbers are not going to help. Most researchers rely on some form of concentration mechanism to get enough amino acids together for protein formation. Even when this happens, many of the same problems that Fox's experiments run into are difficult to eliminate.

Finally, I believe that proteins are designed for both philosophical and scientific reasons. Proteins as stated earlier, contain information. The sequence of the 20 different amino acids in a protein consisting of 100 amino acids is crucial to its function. William Dembski (in the *Design Inference*, Cambridge University Press, 1999 and *Intelligent Design*, Intervarsity Press, 2000) rigorously defines this information as complex specified information or CSI. It is complex because the sequence of a protein is not a simple repetition as in a nylon polymer. And it is specified because it can tolerate only a small range of substitution at any one of the 100 positions, indeed at some positions, no substitution can be tolerated. Summing these up is where the 10 to the 65th power came from.

Most biologists readily admit today that chance alone is incapable of overcoming these odds. Therefore, they hold out for some undiscovered natural law that will allow information to arise out of the chaos of a mixture of amino acids. But law is also an unlikely candidate. Some have suggested that

perhaps certain amino acids have an affinity for certain other amino acids. This could give some level of sequence specificity. This fails on two counts. First no such pattern is observable when nearest neighbors are analyzed in modern proteins. Second, this would defeat the entire process since the sequence would no longer be complex but simple. Simple because the sequence could now be predicted once the first amino acid is put in place. This would lead to a very limited number of possible combinations and not the millions of possibilities currently residing in living cells.

The only known source for CSI today is intelligence. Even the fundamentalist Darwinian Richard Dawkins, said in his book *The Blind Watchmaker*, "Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose." Perhaps they appear to be designed because they were designed. There is certainly nothing unscientific about wanting to explore that possibility.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin
Probe Ministries