Darwinist Arguments Against Intelligent Design Illogical and Misleading

I recently attended a debate on "Intelligent Design (ID) and the Existence of God." One of the four debaters was Dr. Lawrence Krauss{1} representing an atheistic, anti-ID position. I was looking forward to hearing what Dr. Krauss would say when speaking in the presence of other knowledgeable members of academia. Would he go beyond the tired, illogical talking points passed on without question by the mainstream media? Or would he present some thoughtful arguments *against* the validity of intelligent design concepts and/or *for* the current state of Darwinist explanations for life as we know it?

Since I believe there are some thoughtful, interesting arguments that could be raised against intelligent design, I was sorely disappointed to discover that Dr. Krauss did not deviate from the shallow arguments which consistently appear in media coverage of this topic. As one of the other debaters, Dr. David Berlinski {2}, commented after Dr. Krauss' opening statement, "Everything you have said is either false or trivial."

However false and trivial they may be, these arguments are blindly accepted as reasonable by many people. As thinking Christians, we have a responsibility to be prepared to tear down these façades raised up against the knowledge of God. One way to do this is to be able to discuss with others the prevailing arguments in ways that reveal their weaknesses and inconsistencies. To help in that process, the remainder of this article will list several of the standard arguments offered up by Dr. Krauss and examine their reasonableness and validity.

Argument: **Evolution is a proven fact**. Scientific experiments and observation over the last 100 years have conclusively demonstrated that evolution is a fact.

> ***Analysis: Faulty logic resulting in false conclusion***. *In the context of the debate, "evolution is a proven fact" is implied to mean that random mutation coupled with natural selection is the sole process through which life evolved on this planet.* ***This meaning of evolution is not a proven fact.*** *What has been demonstrated through observation and experimentation is that the frequency of certain characteristics in a species will vary over time through random mutations and natural selection. These results provide some support to the theory that these undirected natural causes could be responsible for the development of life as we know it, but they do not come close to proving it. In logical terms, we would say that what science has demonstrated is necessary for the premise to be true but not sufficient to prove that it is true. That would be like saying, "Since we can demonstrate that wind and water erosion can produce regular geometric patterns, this proves the Statue of Liberty is the result of undirected natural forces."*

Argument: **Origins science is the same as observational science**. Both the study of origins (or other one-time events) and the study of ongoing natural processes are the same because they both look at data that was observed in the past. Therefore we can apply the same criteria to origins science as to observational science. Since observational science depends on repeatable experiments, we should reject out of hand any hypothesis (e.g. ID) that considers intervention by a designer because we cannot recreate it.

> ***Analysis: False premise resulting in faulty conclusion***. *The study of origins is more akin to archaeology and forensic science than to observational science. In these fields, scientists look at the evidence left over by past events to*

help evaluate hypotheses on what caused the event to determine the ones that are most likely. As an example, consider the question, "Why does the earth have a large moon?" Scientists have a number of different theories on when and how our earth acquired a moon, but they would all agree that we can never be certain what actually happened (apart from the development of a time machine which would allow us to go back and observe the event). It is true that in observational science fields, scientists do look at results from experiments done in the past. But, they can choose to repeat those experiments in the future.

Regardless of whether one is considering the role of natural selection or the role of an intelligent designer, when you are developing hypotheses for the origins and development of life on earth the best that can be done is to access which processes had the highest probability of contributing to the end results. If you eliminate all options other than random variations in natural processes, you tie the hands of scientists in considering how the evidence best fits all hypotheses.

Argument: Some things that have the appearance of being designed are not. Therefore, we cannot detect the presence of design.

***Analysis: Faulty logic resulting in false conclusion**. Yes, there are things found in nature from the geodesic shapes of carbon structures to the results of erosion that mimic shapes designed by man. Yet, most of us seem to have no problem distinguishing between the remains of ancient civilizations and the results of undirected natural processes. If you search enough beaches and tidal pools, you can probably find every letter of the alphabet produced by the interaction of tides and currents. But, if you come across the words "John loves Mary" in the sand, you will be very confident that*

these were the result of intelligent intervention.

Argument: The theory of evolution is a foundation of modern science.

> ***Analysis: Switching definitions results in false conclusion.*** *Understanding the processes by which bacteria, viruses, species and societies change in response to changes in their environment are important concepts in modern science. However, whether one believes these processes are solely responsible for the origin and development of life on earth or not has little or no impact on one's ability to make advances in science. To date, I have not been made aware of a single positive advance in modern science or engineering that required the developer to fully believe in Darwin's view of the origins of the species in order to make that advance. One's beliefs on origins are foundational to answering the metaphysical questions of life, but don't preclude someone from making contributions in science. Advances in science have been made by Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, atheists, etc.*

Argument: Scientists understand how the bacterial flagellum evolved, disproving the concept of irreducible complexity.

> ***Analysis: False statement coupled with faulty logic.*** *The bacterial flagellum is a complex device used to propel some types of bacteria. It is comprised of over 30 different proteins. Not only do these proteins perform different complementary functions, but they must be assembled in the bacteria in exactly the right sequence by other proteins. Since the flagellum will not function without all of these elements in place (i.e., it meets the definition of irreducible complexity established by Dr. Behe in his book Darwin's Black Box), the premise is that all of these parts would have to appear simultaneously in order for natural selection to favor carrying forward any of these mutations in*

the gene pool.

Dr. Krauss stated that scientists have shown that the bacterial flagellum is not irreducibly complex. To the best of my knowledge, this is a gross overstatement. The arguments I have seen presented fall far short of developing a plausible explanation for how the flagellum could have evolved{3}. If a plausible argument coupled with experimental evidence exists, I am very interested in having my understanding updated. However, even if such evidence did exist, it would not demonstrate that the concept of irreducible complexity was false or that this unknown plausible path was the way the flagellum came onto the scene.

Argument: Intelligent Design can never be science because it is not falsifiable. You must have ways to prove a scientific theory is false in order for it to be a valid theory. Any observation that does not agree with the theory can be attributed to supernatural intervention.

***Analysis: Arbitrary, inconsistent definition**. Academics in the field of philosophy of science do not agree that the ability to falsify establishes a boundary on what is and is not science. Professor of philosophy and atheist Dr. Bradley Monton {4} pointed this out during the debate. He argued that we should not exclude a potentially valid hypothesis simply on the basis of a narrow definition of science. In addition, origins science cannot meet this standard. Proponents of neo-Darwinism have clearly demonstrated over the last few decades that it is not falsifiable either. Whenever the theory disagrees with the evidence, its proponents claim that natural selection found a way around the problem; we just don't know what it is yet. As Richard Dawkins stated, "Evolution is more clever than we are."*

Hopefully, this summary will help you sort through the

smokescreen of “conclusive” arguments offered up by the proponents of naturalistic Darwinism. Perhaps someday they will engage in a genuine discussion where both sides can state: 1) the reasons they believe their theory has merit and, 2) the observations that create problems for their theory. Such a discussion might actually prove helpful to someone trying to sort through the evidence to make an evidence-based faith decision.

Notes

1. Dr. Lawrence Krauss is the Foundation Professor in the School of Earth and Space Exploration and the Physics Department, Co-Director of the Cosmology Initiative, and Inaugural Director of the Origins Initiative at Arizona State University.

2. Dr. David Berlinski is a lecturer, essayist and a Senior Fellow of the Discovery Institute’s Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture. Dr. Berlinski received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Princeton University and was a postdoctoral fellow in mathematics and molecular biology at Columbia University.

3. Additional information from the Reference Guide to Redeeming Darwin available at *RedeemingDarwin.com*.

Example of Darwinist argument: Since design cannot be considered as an explanation, evolutionists maintain that complex structures like flagellum evolved slowly over time from less complex structures performing other functions in the cell. Kenneth Miller states: “At first glance, the existence of the type III secretory system (TTSS), a…device that allows bacteria to inject these toxins through the cell membranes of its unsuspecting hosts, would seem to have little to do with the flagellum. However, molecular studies of proteins in the TTSS have revealed a surprising fact—the proteins of the TTSS are directly homologous to the proteins in the basal portion

of the bacterial flagellum…. The existence of the TTSS in a wide variety of bacteria demonstrates that a small portion of the "irreducibly complex" flagellum can indeed carry out an important biological function. Since such a function is clearly favored by natural selection, the contention that the flagellum must be fully assembled before any of its component parts can be useful is obviously incorrect. What this means is that the argument for intelligent design of the flagellum has failed." Response to Darwinist argument: The flagellum is an excellent example of an irreducibly complex function in one of the simplest life forms. Different proteins and structures work together to create a swimming mechanism. This complex interaction cannot be adequately explained by evolutionary processes. Mutations creating only one piece of the flagellum in a life form without the other pieces would not create any value to be carried on to the subsequent generations. Miller's statement that "the argument for intelligent design has failed" misses the point of irreducible complexity. The fact that one component of an irreducibly complex system may have another useful function does not remove the barrier that the irreducibly complex system requires the simultaneous appearance of multiple cooperating components to perform a function that has not been performed in that way before. In addition, William Dembski points out another problem with Miller's argument:

> *The best current molecular evidence, however, points to the TTSS as evolving from the flagellum and not vice versa…. Miller has nothing more than the TTSS to point to as a possible evolutionary precursor. Behe and the ID community have therefore successfully shown that Darwinists don't have a clue how the bacterial flagellum might have arisen.*

4. Dr. Bradley Monton is a philosophy professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder. His areas of specialization include the Philosophy of Science (especially Philosophy of Physics), Probabilistic Epistemology, Philosophy of Time and

Philosophy of Religion. Previously he was on the faculty of the University of Kentucky, an Assistant Professor at The American University of Beirut and a Teaching Assistant at Princeton University. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Physics and Philosophy at Rice University and his Ph.D. in Philosophy from Princeton University.

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