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How Did Life Begin?

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How Did Life Begin?

Prior to the 19th century, no one had any idea how life originated on Earth other than an act of God. Materialists, who did not believe in God, just assumed a natural explanation would eventually emerge.

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution published in 1859, only dealt with the development of life through natural selection, not with the origin of the first living cell. He assumed that life occurred spontaneously when organic molecules somehow combined in a slimy pond.

Nevertheless, biologists believed Darwin's theory ruled out the need for a designer in the origin of life as well as its development into various species. In *The God Hypothesis*, Cambridge educated philosopher of science, Dr. Stephen Meyer, reveals that physicists have been more willing to acknowledge a "superintellect" than have biologists. He writes,

> *Whereas many physicists have recently considered design by a 'superintellect' as an explanation for the origin of the finely tuned features that make life possible in the universe, biologists have long resisted the design hypothesis. Ever since Darwin, they have assumed that they could…explain 'design without a designer.'*[1]

Encouraged by Darwin's "guess" as to how life began, chemists began laboratory experiments hoping to create life. In the 1950's, Harold Urey, a professor at the University of Chicago challenged his students to create life in a test tube. One of his students who tried, Stanley Miller, was jubilant when after enormous efforts he produced a few amino acids—the building blocks of proteins.

It all appeared so promising, but what Miller did not understand then was that without an extremely sophisticated molecule called DNA, those amino acids would never be able to form proteins—the stuff of life. The initial euphoria of his experiment faded once further discoveries from biochemistry revealed life's incredible complexity.

Professor J.P. Moreland compares such laboratory results with the complexity required to generate life:

> *If life can be likened to an encyclopedia in complexity and information, the best we have done is to synthesize a compound which carries the complexity and information of the word ME. The jump from ME to an encyclopedia is so far and speculative that the relevance of progress so far is questionable.*[2]

In the many decades following Miller's discovery, biologists are not any closer to creating life in a test tube.

Cambridge Professor of Evolutionary Paleobiology, Simon Conway Morris, remarks on chemists' many failed efforts to replicate life in a test tube. He explains,

> *Something is clearly missing: life cannot be created in the laboratory, nor is there any clear prospect of it happening.*[3]

Having failed in their attempts to create life in a laboratory, biologists kept searching for answers to the question of how life began. Finally, in the 1950s there was a stunning breakthrough in their research.

DNA: SECRET OF LIFE FOUND

On February 28th, 1953, two biologists, James Watson and Francis Crick, announced that they had discovered "the secret of life." What they had discovered was the structure of DNA, which could store information in the form of a four-character digital code.[4]

As evolutionists, Watson and Crick originally reminded biologists that the intelligent coding of DNA was "not designed but rather evolved."[5] However, as the complex coding of DNA became understood, biologists came to realize that natural selection could never have created the intelligence behind its sophisticated coding.

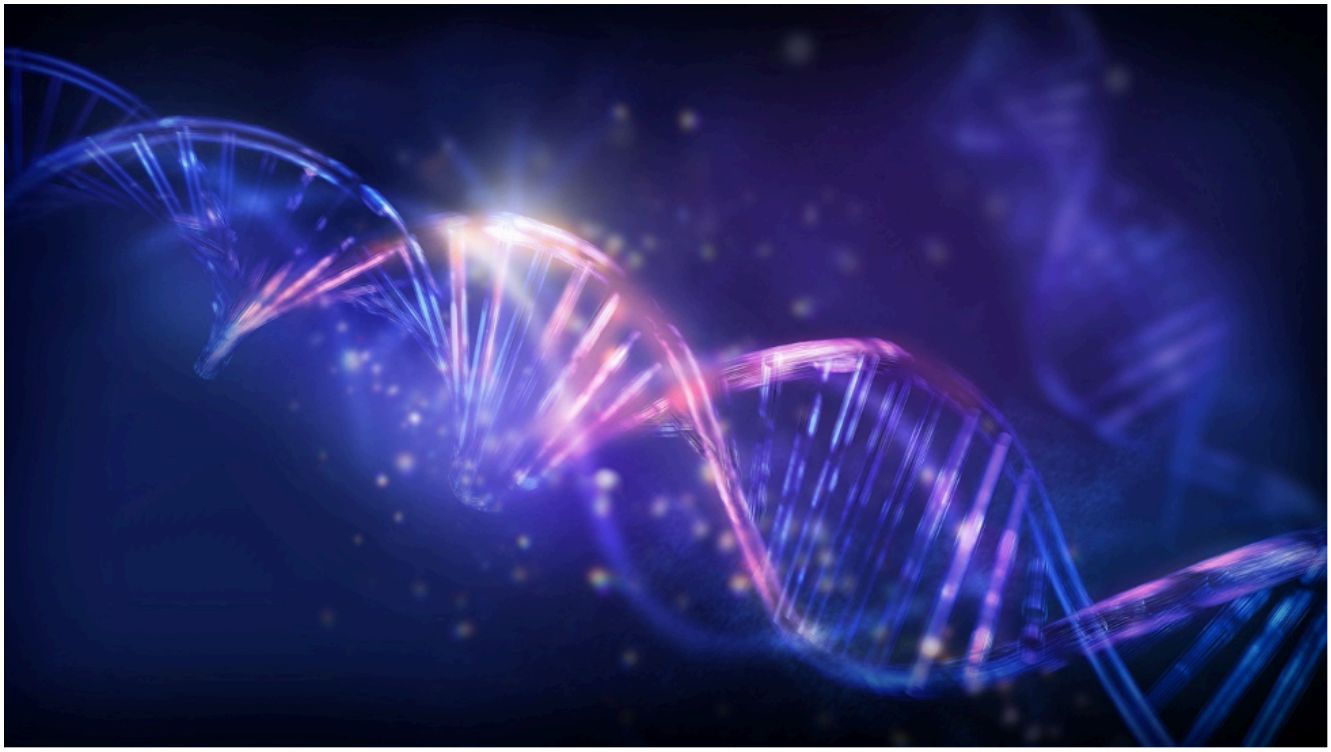
Let us look closer at DNA, and why, in Meyer's words, "the materialist understanding of life has begun to unravel."[6]

DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) is an extremely complex molecule that instructs amino acids to form specific proteins that are the building blocks of life and its diversity. Every living thing on Earth has its own unique DNA.

Each DNA molecule contains the complete genetic blueprint for every cell in every living thing. In a sense it is like a recipe where common ingredients make different dishes. DNA is essentially a chemical software program that instructs cells to make life in all its diversity whether it be flowers, trees, whales, lions, chickens, dogs, chimps, or people.

The genius of DNA lies not only in its complex coded instructions for life but also in its incredibly well-designed architecture, which allows it to contain billions of detailed instructions within a microscopic molecule. Incredibly, just one gram of DNA could theoretically store 215 million gigabytes of data, nearly a million times the storage capacity of an average home computer.

Our genetic blueprint is present in each of our thousand million million cells. Imagine an enormous building with thousands upon thousands of rooms, where each room houses a complete set of blueprints for the entire structure. However, instead of thousands of cells, our bodies contain trillions of cells, each with a complete package of DNA instructions.[7]



LIKE A COMPUTER PROGRAM

When DNA directs the cell to make proteins, it first gives instructions to make amino acids. Then twenty different amino acids must precisely link up into a chain, folding into an exacting, irregular three-dimensional protein. Amino acids are like letters in an alphabet; their arrangement spells out each specific protein.

The process of amino acids constructing proteins is incredibly precise and complex. MIT-trained scientist Dr. Gerald Schroeder explains,

> *An adult human body is made of approximately seventy-five trillion cells. Every second of every minute of every day, your body is organizing on the order of 150 thousand thousand thousand thousand thousand thousand amino acids into carefully constructed chains of proteins.*[8]

Each strand of DNA in our bodies consists of three billion base pairs of genetic information. These base pairs form a chain, which constitutes the entire human genetic code. Today the entire human genome has been mapped, showing the uniqueness of our species. Even though humans are closest to chimpanzees in DNA sequencing, there are still a staggering 40 million differences.[9]

DNA works much like a coded language. Microsoft founder Bill Gates discloses,

> *DNA is like a computer program, but far, far more advanced than any software we've ever created.*[10]

WHAT CREATED DNA?

So how did a molecule with such complex coded instructions originate? What natural process triggered a smattering of organic chemicals to come together and form the incredibly sophisticated double helix? Gerald Schroeder remarks,

> *And here's that enigma. … It shows its head in a dozen different ways, the problem of how the entire process originally got started.*[11]

Such complexity is so improbable that scholars like Morris, Schroeder, Meyer, and a host of biochemists believe DNA coding exhibits creative intelligence beyond random chemical bonds. However, evolutionists are still searching for a natural

origin of DNA's origin.

Having acknowledged the impossibility of DNA to originate naturally, some scientists wondered if DNA emerged from RNA. However, biologists who have analyzed RNA now believe it too "could not have emerged straight from the prehistoric muck."[12]

The origin of DNA remains an unsolved mystery, causing some evolutionists to reconsider their materialistic worldview. In *Probability 1*, mathematician and evolutionist Amir Aczel summarizes the DNA dilemma for materialists:

> *Having surveyed the discovery of the structure of DNA … and having seen how DNA stores and manipulates tremendous amounts of information (3 billion separate bits for a human being) and uses the information to control life, we are left with one big question: What created DNA?*[13]

An increasing number of scientists in other fields are also admitting that DNA's complexity is not explainable by mere chance any more than that of the fine-tuning of our universe is for life. Theoretical physicist Paul Davies affirms in *The 5th Miracle*,

> *The peculiarity of biological complexity makes genes seem almost like impossible objects. …I have come to the conclusion that no familiar law of nature could produce such a structure from incoherent chemicals with the inevitability that some scientists assert.*[14]

Biochemistry professor Michael Behe explains how DNA and its function in the cell has puzzled scientists seeking a natural explanation.

> *In the face of the enormous complexity that modern biochemistry has uncovered in the cell, the scientific community is paralyzed.*[15]

Although he was an agnostic, Astronomer, Fred Hoyle, shocked materialists by admitting,

> *Were a refined theory available for estimating the information content of DNA it would, in our opinion, be immediately apparent from its overwhelming content that life could never have arisen on a miniscule planet like on Earth. It would be seen that, to match the information content of even the simplest cell, nothing less than the resources of the entire Universe are needed."*[16]

In light of the evidence of design, what are evolutionists concluding about DNA's origin?

DNA: A MIRACLE?

Atheist Richard Dawkins, who is an outspoken adversary of intelligent design has written, "biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose."[17]

Yet other leading scientists are willing to objectively look at the evidence. Evolutionist Amir Aczel questions his own materialistic belief by considering DNA as too complex to have arisen from natural processes. In an objective mode he asks,

> *Are we witnessing here something so wondrous, so fantastically complex, that it could not be chemistry or random interactions of elements, but something far beyond our understanding?*[18]

The most knowledgeable biologist on the intricate coding of DNA is its co-discoverer, Francis Crick, a staunch evolutionist. The Nobel Prize–winning biologist admits,

> *An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense, the origin of life appears at the moment to almost be a miracle, so many are the conditions which would have had to have been satisfied to get it going.*[19]

As a materialist, Crick began looking to outer space for the origin of life (panspermia).

Aczel reasons that the complexity of DNA could not have arisen naturally on Earth, asking,

> *Was it perhaps the power, thinking, and will of a supreme being that created this self-replicating basis of all life?*[20]

Like Crick, Aczel concludes that DNA must have arrived from outer space (panspermia). However, not a shred of evidence backs that up. Because of their bias against intelligent design, materialists simply can't accept intelligent design as how life originated—regardless of the evidence.

Leading Atheist Admits Intelligent Design

However, DNA's intelligent coding led to many atheists admitting the compelling case for intelligent design. British philosopher Antony Flew, a leading atheist for fifty

years, became so overwhelmed by the intelligent coding of DNA that he admitted,

> *What I think the DNA material has done is show that intelligence must have been involved in getting these extraordinarily diverse elements together. The enormous complexity by which the results were achieved look to me like the work of intelligence.*[21]

Flew accepts Darwinian evolution as how life eventually developed but doubts it can account for life's origins. He concluded that intelligent design is the best option to explain biological complexity. Flew made front page news when he renounced his fifty years of atheism, remarking,

> *The argument to Intelligent Design is enormously stronger than it was when I first met it…It now seems to me that the finding of more than fifty years of DNA research have provided materials for a new and enormously powerful argument to design.*[22]

Flew was convinced by the overwhelming complexity of DNA's coding in the sequencing of amino acids to form proteins. Meyer compares the sequencing of the amino acids in DNA to a language, noting,

> *Amino acids alone do not make proteins, any more than letters alone make*

> *words, sentences or poetry.*[23]

Meyer then explains that the odds of such sophisticated coding developing without an intelligent designer are beyond all probability. He writes,

> *The probability of producing even a single functional protein of modest length (150 amino acids) by chance alone in a prebiotic environment stands at no better than …1 chance in 10^{164}, an inconceivably small probability.*[24]

To grasp such an astronomical number, consider that the odds against winning a Power ball lottery with a single ticket are about 1 in 10^8. Or trying to pick a solitary atom from all the atoms in the universe would be 1 in 10^{80}. Meyer compares the intelligence required for codes and languages with that of DNA.

> *Our experience with information-intensive systems (especially codes and languages) indicates that such systems always come from an intelligent source.*[25]

Honest atheists like Flew are persuaded that DNA could not have originated by chance. Materialists who struggle to explain the origin and fine-tuning of our universe for life are now even more perplexed by that tiny molecule, DNA.

As DNA's cofounder, Francis Crick admitted,

> *In some sense, the origin of life appears at the moment to almost be a miracle.*

Endnotes