

The irony of the proof for Intelligent Design Theory revisited

First some background: I have been over on facebook.com attempting to generate some publicity for origin-of-religions.org. While so engaged, I encountered posts from people very obviously infected with all manner of thought contagion - the viral thought contagions of religion were particularly well represented. At some point I tossed out the suggestion that one of the people infected with thought contagions of religion might do well to read my essay entitled "The irony of the proof for Intelligent Design Theory." I was later surprised to find that the person had read the essay and then taken the time to try to pick it apart. At first I was deeply offended at something so fundamentally disordered being deposited in my inbox. Later I decided to try turning the tables and this rebuttal is the result. So without further ado here is the first paragraph from our facebook user:

In your article you talk about three types of replicators, viruses, computer viruses and cultural replicators. When discussing ID, I would say the same thing. You can see the same type of info in biology as in computer programs, which seems to imply design. You say that these are "somewhat analogous", but then tell us that the first was created by random noise and the others by intelligence without giving any reason for the statement. You also fail to mention that before a virus can take over a cell, viruses and cells must both exist, so your argument assumes that life already exists. You then drop the first item in your comparison and talk about the motives for the others.

There is an important difference between the replicators of biology and malicious computer programs which our facebook user has conveniently chosen to ignore. The evolution of malicious computer is easily studied because we can look at hacker websites and have samples of virtually all "species" of malicious computer software ever produced. There is no need to attempt filling in the gaps of a fossil record and no need to extrapolate backwards in time to guess at the nature of the earliest examples of malicious computer software. We have an essentially complete history of malicious computer software which may be studied at any time. In contrast the replicators of biology are not so easily studied. There are huge gaps in the fossil record because very few specimens are preserved by natural processes. The recorded history of very early life forms is virtually non-existent. This is because soft single cell

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organisms leave virtually no trace in the geological record. When we look at the malicious computer software there is plenty of evidence that creative designers constantly improve the code for their exploits. For some reason our facebook user barely acknowledged the existence of cultural replicators. This is likely because our facebook user doesn't want to see the similarities between the evolution of malicious computer software and the evolution of the thought contagions of religion. We have a relatively complete record of all the species of "religion" similar to the record we have for malicious computer software.

At this point I can only conclude that our facebook user tells a deliberate lie. My essay does not say that random noise created anything. What my essay does say is that the source of variation upon which natural selection acts may be considered as random noise in the copying process for biological replicators. So to recap we have a relatively complete historical record for the thought contagions of religion and malicious computer software when compared to the record of biological evolution. The historical record includes direct and compelling evidence that people are the primary source for the variation in malicious computer software and the thought contagions of religion upon which natural selection acts in regards to those replicators. In contrast, the natural history of biological replicators reveals no evidence of intelligence or design - it reveals only the handiwork of Dawkins' blind watchmakers. In short there is credible evidence of designers for malicious computer software and the thought contagions of religion. There is no evidence of any designer in the case of biological replicators.

Before continuing, we should consider the starting assumptions for science in comparison to the apparent starting assumption of our facebook user. Science always begins with observation. *The falling apple always appears to move toward the Earth. A fire beneath the teapot causes the water to boil.* Science then allows for a hypothesis. *Gravity acts upon a mass. Heat is a form of energy.* Building out from observation and hypothesis allows us to understand our surroundings in a rational way. The apparent starting point for our facebook user is quite different. His starting point appears to be a belief in a creator. He then attempts to find evidence which can be interpreted (or misinterpreted) to build out from the preconceived notion of a creator. Look at the facebook user's sentence about "You can see the same type of info in biology as in computer programs, which seems to imply design." "Can see" does not equate to "should see." Does he mean we can see design *if* we use a little

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imagination? All I see is wishful thinking and that desperate search for validation of his beliefs.

I am not sure why our facebook user considers the preexistence of cells and infecting viruses to be relevant to this discussion. So I will only note that yes, both the cell and the virus must exist before the virus can infect the cell. This has been repeated for millennia as the virus and the cell have co-evolved in a never-ending evolutionary arms race. I will also admit that I focused on the motives of the intelligent designers of the malicious computer software and the thought contagions of religion. That is because I assumed the evolutionary history of biological replicators was well understood by my target audience. Furthermore the essay is about the thought contagions of "Creation Science" and I consider the comparison with malicious computer software to be very instructive in that regard. So it is logical to drop biological replicators at the point I did and focus on the similarities of malicious computer software and the thought contagions of religion.

You then state, "If one reduces "Intelligent Design Theory" to its essential elements then adherents are asking us to believe that a preexisting creative force has conjured stuff out of nothing." Of course if we accept naturalism, we must accept that nothing created everything out of nothing. Which makes more sense, that something created everything out of nothing or that everything popped out of nothingness on its own?

I must once again conclude that our facebook user has willfully misrepresented the facts. Accepting naturalism does not require that we "must accept that nothing created everything out of nothing." What we must accept is that there is evidence pointing back through time toward a "Big Bang" - and that all that *is* (mass and energy) was there. No observation of what (if anything) was on the other side of the "Big Bang" is possible. Therefore we can do no more than speculate about what (if anything) was before or on the other side of the "Big Bang." So the facebook user's rhetorical question about "everything popping out of nothingness" really has no place in a rational discussion.

You say that there is no sign of intelligent design in the heavens. I have given fine-tuning examples from Stephen Hawking, Roger Penrose and

Richard Dawkins, stating that the chances of this Universe being life-allowing are fantastically small. Design is a reasonable assumption in such a case.

Design is not a reasonable assumption in this case. Design in this case is unsupported speculation and conjecture. I am going to make the bold assumption that our facebook user has taken information out of context to misinterpret as evidence for his “creator”. One conjecture is that there exist multiple universes. There is further conjecture that each of those universes have slight variations in the physical laws and that most of those sets of alternative physical laws would not allow for life. That means in those universes there would be no lifeforms to speculate upon their origins. Life can only exist in a universe which is conducive to life. Therefore life exists to speculate about life only in those universes which are conducive to sustaining life. We are pondering the origins of life in this universe because regardless of the probability of the circumstances allowing life in a universe, this universe does in fact have the characteristics to sustain life. With that understanding I reaffirm my observation that there is no sign of intelligent design in the heavens.

The early scientists decided that an orderly study of the Universe would be fruitful, because if a rational being had created it, than rational beings should be able to gain an understanding of it. It turns out that the Universe is quite rational. Why should this be if everything is randomness? The fact that humans can make sense of the Universe seems to imply a similar but far smarter creator of the Universe.

I can only interpret this paragraph as willful misinterpretation of observation in a desperate attempt to protect preexisting notions of a creator. Employing “Occam’s razor” we have two choices. 1) All the physical laws of the universe such as gravity and conservation of angular momentum. 2) All the physical laws of the universe such as gravity and conservation of angular momentum *plus* some unexplained and undetectable entity which controls stuff including an undetectable spirit/soul in each of us *plus* an undetectable “heaven” *plus* an undetectable “hell”. “Occam’s razor” is variously interpreted as “Entities are not to be multiplied without necessity.” or “Of two equivalent theories or explanations, all other things being equal, the simpler one is to be preferred.”

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Furthermore our facebook user once again willfully misrepresents science: “Why should this be if everything is randomness?” Science does not claim that everything is randomness (at least at the scales of classical physics). There are laws of gravity, magnetism, and any number of other things which are easily understood through the applied mathematics of the physical sciences. Randomness only enters the equation where we lack sufficient mathematical language to exactly model a phenomenon. An obvious application of the concept of randomness is the source of variation upon which natural acts in biological replicators. But evolution is far from random. Each generation is tested and only the combinations which are best at getting copied are able to advance to the next round. There is probability involved but not the pure randomness implied by our facebook user.

Your argument about the contagiousness of religion (which works just as well if you insert the word atheism) is also irrelevant. Even if we assume that you are right, it says nothing about the truth-value of a belief. If you believe that truth exists (There either is or is not a creator. Atheism, Christianity and Islam cannot all be correct in the same way, etc.), it would be passed in the same way.

First of all contagiousness of religion does not work just as well if one substitutes the word atheism. Atheism has no equivalent of the quiverfull movement and has never issued a fatwā against “blasphemers.” Atheism does not demand to be copied - it only resists the infection of the thought contagions of religion. Second of all the contagiousness of religion is absolutely relevant. The contagiousness of religion is part of a regenerative feedback loop which constantly selects for humans which are the best hosts for religion as well as constantly selecting for the thought contagions which are best at controlling their hosts.

You also use what is known as a genetic fallacy. Assuming the truth/falsehood of a statement based on its origin. You said, “Religion (a complex Thought Contagion) is “The Selfish Meme” evolving in the primordial soup of human culture”. Again, even if you are right (which can be easily debated), knowing where an idea comes from does not determine its truth value. The ancient Greeks thought the world was round because they could see the top of a ship appearing before the bottom of the ship. Does knowing this make them either right or wrong?

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Their opinion does not determine the truth, the world is round regardless of what people think about it or why.

So let me paraphrase. If we know a thing was manufactured in China because the label says it was “Made in China” then we can still believe that Martians made it. If challenged we may assert that Martians want to help us but feel it is better to hide their existence with advanced technological means. According to the logic of “genetic fallacy” it is impossible to prove that Martians are not in fact responsible for all consumer goods labeled “Made in China.” According to the logic of “genetic fallacy” it is equally impossible to prove that these Martians are not invisible and do not have our best interest at heart. I stand by the observation that religion (a complex Thought Contagion) is “The Selfish Meme” evolving in the primordial soup of human culture. Our facebook user obviously wishes to dispute this observation by the statement “which can be easily debated”, but fails to offer any reason to dispute the observation.

You say that, “Creationism was designed as a defensive mechanism to protect religion from the teaching of legitimate science in the classroom.” Of course, the belief in creation pre-existed science by several thousand years, so in one sense, you are saying that the effect preceded the cause, but I assume that you are referring only to arguments against certain scientific theories. Again though, you assume that Creationism is teaching, against “legitimate science”, without giving any proofs.

This paragraph contains perhaps the most ridiculous misrepresentation of the facts in the facebook user’s message. It is true that the thought contagion of belief in creation predates modern science. The intelligent designers of religion could hardly be expected to react to threats from scientific advances prior to those scientific advances. All the evidence is that the make-believe science of “Creationism” does teach against the legitimate sciences. Furthermore I said the thought contagion of “Creation Science” was a response to protect religion. “Creation Science” is not the same as the obviously long-held belief in a creator. So “Creation Science” did not predate legitimate scientific inquiry.

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Scientists debate different legitimate theories regularly. In many debates however, the idea of a creator is eliminated before the debate begins. It seems that many scientists start with the following statement: "Given that there is no creator, how did this happen?" Starting with the assumption of atheism however does not disprove the existence of a creator. It would be more fair to leave all options open and see where the evidence leads.

This paragraph once again reveals the very unscientific approach of our facebook user. Science always begins with an observation. Once something is observed then a hypothesis may be advanced to explain whatever has been observed. Our facebook user approaches from the opposite end - there is a preconceived notion for which one then casts about for evidence which might support the notion. It is significant that the facebook user closes with an emotional appeal for fairness - ignoring the fact that there is no application for "fairness" in science. Science is more like *Dragnet's* Joe Friday: "All we want are the facts, ma'am."

Well, these are a few of the holes that I see in the paper.

And thus our facebook user concludes what he almost certainly regards as a successful defense of his chosen belief system. What he fails to understand is the very fact that I am unable to pry the thought contagions of religion from his mind is evidence of the very successful evolution of the thought contagions with which he is infected. As the thought contagions of religion have evolved they have become more and more resistant to eviction from a mind. The thought contagions of religion have also affected the human gene pool by affecting the birth rates of people infected with the thought contagions. The result has been more minds which are a better "fit" for the thought contagions. That is to say that thought contagions forcing large families are in fact breeding populations of people which are the best hosts for the thought contagion. It is this regenerative feedback loop which dooms mankind.