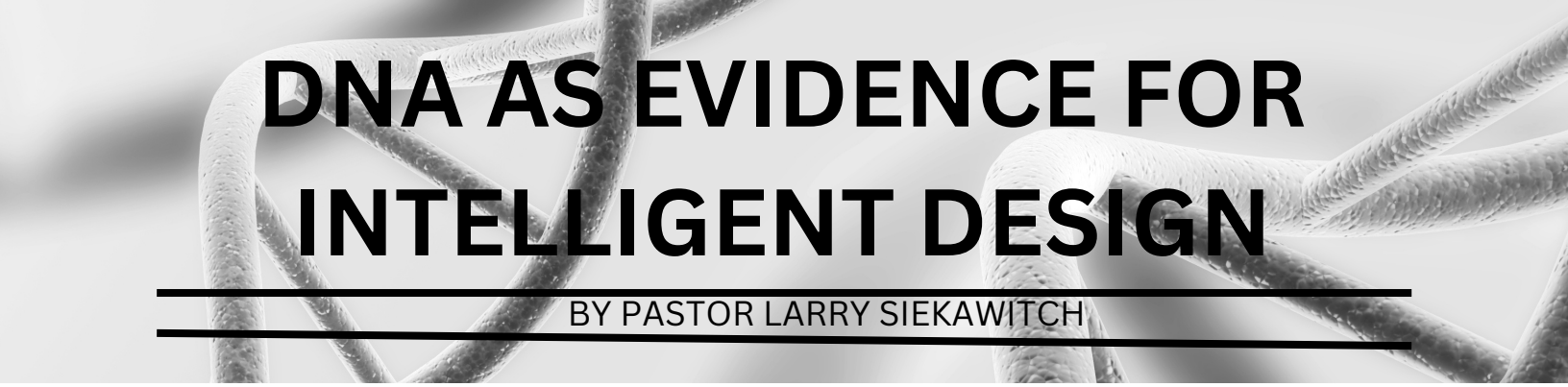


DNA AS EVIDENCE FOR INTELLIGENT DESIGN

BY PASTOR LARRY SIEKAWITCH

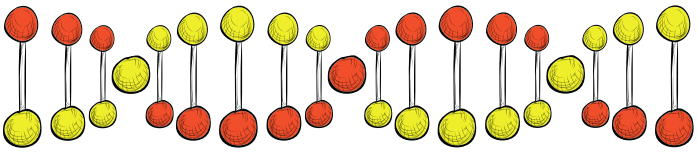
In this paper I will be heavily leaning on the work of Stephen Meyer who wrote Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design. We know that only life produces life. After French chemist and microbiologist Louis Pasteur (1822-1895), who is credited for the discoveries of the principles of vaccination, disproved the belief in spontaneous generation, the consensus of scientists is that only life can produce life. Much experimentation has gone on in the name of science to disprove what Pasteur proved, namely that only life produces life, but to no avail. Christians and other theists argue that since only life produces life, the first biological/physical life forms must have been created by some life form that is not physical. Christians would say this Originator is God. Atheists accuse Christians of “the god of the gap” theory, which states that when we don’t know something we put in God as the answer. This is an unfair accusation, because Christians are actually simply following the science. We know that only life produces life, so the first life must have also been produced by intelligent life. If further research comes along to disprove this hypothesis, then of course we will evaluate the new claims, but until then why would we not go by the science? I would say that atheists commit the “chance of the gaps” fallacy; whenever they don’t know something, they substitute chance as the cause, when chance has never produced life, whereas life has been producing life since the beginning. Why would anyone disregard the evidence for something with no evidence and call it science? Well, the stakes just got a lot bigger with the discovery of DNA. I will now simply put together a series of quotes with explanation to make the case that life, even in its simplest form, is too complex to have come about by chance since the discovery of DNA. There is no chance that chance produced DNA.

In December of 2004, British philosopher and longtime atheist Anthony Flew repudiated his atheism due to the discovery of DNA. Darwinists argued that though life has apparent design, “wholly undirected processes such as natural selection and random mutations can produce the intricate design” (Meyer, 4). This argument only works for life once it got started, but now with the discovery of DNA, the atheist argument of apparent design fails. Let’s see why. Notice that this argument is not based on prior religious belief, but rather inference from scientific evidence.

What is DNA? DNA is present in all forms of life on earth. Every cell in our body contains DNA or the genetic code that makes us us. It is compared to a library of information that determines everything physically about us. It is basic to life, but it is information-rich, not simple or basic. Even the single-celled organisms at the beginning of our planet had DNA. Did DNA come by chance or was it designed. Let’s look at the evidence.

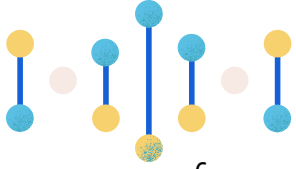
“DNA and other biological molecules do have large and measurable amounts of information-carrying capacity. But they do not contain just Shannon information; they contain functional information. In virtue of their specific arrangements, the bases in coding regions of DNA and RNA and the amino acids in proteins enable these molecules to perform biological functions. Like the information in machine code or written language, biological information is not just complex; it is also functionally specified” (Meyer, 327). What is the most likely explanation for this “functionally specified” information found in DNA? How can we find out?

“Historical scientists understandably preferred explanations that posited causes that were known to be capable of producing the effects in question over explanations that posited either no causes or causes lacking such power. Both an earthquake and a bomb can explain the destruction of a building, but only a bomb can explain the presence of charring and shrapnel in the rubble at the scene. Thus, a forensic scientist would likely conclude, in the absence of other evidence, that the bomb best explains the pattern of destruction at the building site. Entities, conditions, or processes that have the capability (or causal powers) to produce the evidence in question constitute better explanations of that evidence than those that do not” (Meyer, 328). Scientists should be interested in finding the best explanation for the existence of DNA and its functionally specified information in all living cells.



“Since intelligent agency has ‘demonstrated its capacity to produce’ specified information, the ‘effect of the sort here under study,’ I concluded that intelligent design must be considered as - at least - a possible explanation for the origin of biological information. But was it the best?” “I knew that in order to establish a cause as the best explanation, the historical scientist must do more than establish that a proposed cause could have produced the effect in question. He must also provide ‘evidence that his candidate [cause] was present’ and show via ‘a thorough search’ that there is an ‘absence of evidence’ of ‘other possible causes’” (Meyer, 329). What is the best historical explanation for DNA? We need to see if there is only one cause that has demonstrated the capacity to produce the evidence in question. If we can show that there is only one cause, then that cause would be the best candidate.

Here is an example: “The anthropologists who discovered the ancient cave paintings in Lascaux, France, knew of only once cause capable of producing representational art. Consequently, they inferred the past activity and presence of intelligent agents. Moreover, they could make this inference confidently without any other evidence that intelligent agents had been present, because the presence of the paintings alone established the probable presence of the only known type of cause - intelligence - of such a thing. Could there be a similarly strong basis for concluding that an intelligent cause played a role in the origin of biological information?” (Meyer, 330).

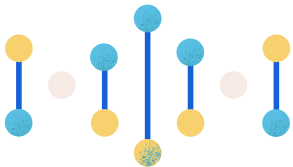


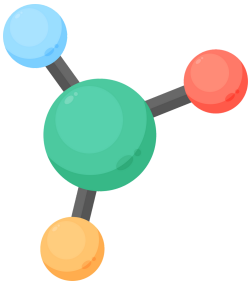
"It eventually became clear to me that intelligent design stood as the only known cause of specified information-rich systems and, therefore, that ID provides the best, most causally adequate explanation for the origin of the information necessary to produce the first life. I came to this conclusion for three mains reasons" (Ibid.).

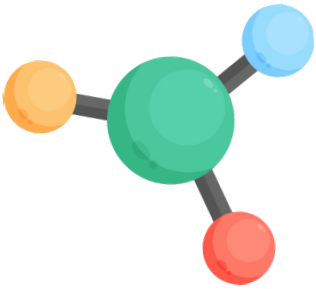
Meyer gives three major reasons for his conclusion: First, there are no other causally adequate explanations. Over several chapters Meyer examines all of the competing theories of the origin of life and/or biological information putting them into three categories: chance, necessity, or the combination of the two. "I discovered that self-organizational laws or processes of necessity cannot generate - as opposed to merely transmit - new information.... Theories based upon chance face a different, though possibly equally permanent, kind of obstacle. These theories fail because of an inherent limitation in the probabilistic resources of the universe itself" (Meyer, 331).

"Rather than treating these explanatory failures as an invitation to still greater flights of theoretical fancy, I began to consider the possibility that nature was telling us something. Perhaps specified information does not arise for free. Perhaps natural processes tend to degrade information rather than generate it. Messages written in the sand are eventually erased by the waves; old newspapers yellow and eventually crumble without care from archivists; static on the line inevitably interrupts the flow of conversation. Information-rich sequences or systems may maintain their original fidelity over time, but most will show an overall loss as the arrow of time progresses. Information inputs typically exceed (or at best equal) information outputs, unless, of course, intelligent agents have intervened. Ordinary experience confirms this intuition" (Meyer, 332).

"In any case, my long investigation had turned up nothing in the way of materialistic processes with the demonstrated capacity - the proven causal efficacy - to produce the large amounts of specified information necessary to generate a self-replicating organism. Nor was I alone in this conclusion. Leading scientists - Francis Crick, Fred Hoyle Paul Davies, Freeman Dyson, Eugene Wigner, Klause Dose, Robert Shapiro, Dean Kenyon, Leslie Orgel, Gerald Joyce, Hubert Yockey, even Stanley Miller - had all expressed skepticism either about the merits of leading theories, the relevance of prebiotic experiments, or both. Even Richard Dawkins, not known for rhetorical restraint in support of evolutionary orthodoxy, candidly admitted in 2008 that 'no one knows' how life arose in the first place" (Meyer, 333). Notice what even Dawkins is admitting; they don't have a clue as to what started life. They are admitting that there is no other alternative that we know of besides intelligent design as a causally adequate explanation.



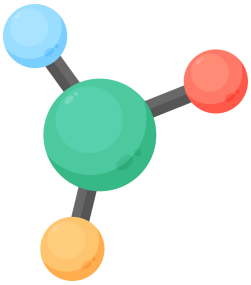


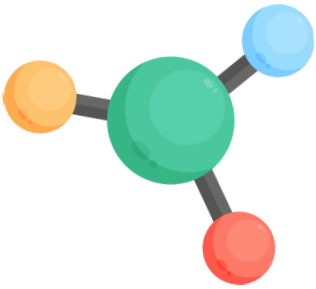


Meyer's second reason for his conclusion that ID (Intelligent Design) is not only the best explanation for DNA, but the only viable explanation, is that "Experimental evidence confirms [the] causal adequacy of ID." Three separate types of experiments have been tried by scientists with absolute failure. "If these experiments were fables, they would have a moral: minds can produce biologically relevant structures and forms of information, but without mind or intelligence little, if any, information arises" (Meyer, 334). He goes over prebiotic simulation experiments, evolutionary algorithms and ribozyme engineering, and he finds that these actually demonstrate the causal adequacy of ID, not chance, necessity, or the combination of the two.

"Of course I am belaboring the argument for the causal powers of intelligent agency. But I do so to underscore a point that is too often overlooked: evidence for the causal adequacy of intelligence is all around us both inside and outside the lab. Clearly, we all know that intelligent agents can create specified information and that information comes from minds. A computer user who traces the information on a screen back to its source invariably comes to a mind, that of a software engineer or programmer. The information in a book or newspaper column or an ancient inscription ultimately derives from a writer or scribe - from a mental, rather than a strictly material cause" (Meyer, 340).

"In sum, the case for the causal adequacy of intelligent agency no longer depends solely on our ordinary experience of agents producing information in software codes or by using natural languages. Experiments attempting to synthesize biologically relevant substances and information-rich molecules have now established the power of - and arguably the need for - intelligent design. The fact that the experimenters were striving mightily to establish the opposite point makes the demonstration all the more noteworthy since any experimental bias would run in the opposite direction" (Meyer, 341).





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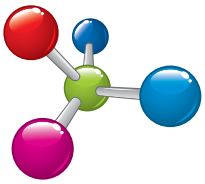
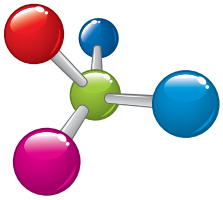
Meyer's last reason for his conclusion that ID is not only the best explanation for DNA, but the only viable explanation is that ID is the only known cause of specified information. "the inability of genetic algorithms, ribozyme engineering, and prebiotic simulations to generate information without intelligence reinforced what I had discovered in my study of other origin-of-life theories. Undirected materialistic causes have not demonstrated the capacity to generate significant amounts of specified information. At the same time, conscious intelligence has repeatedly shown itself capable of producing such information. It follows that mind - conscious, rational intelligent agency - what philosophers call 'agent causation,' now stands as the only cause known to be capable of generating large amounts of specified information starting from a nonliving state" (Ibid.). Meyer gives an illustration to make his point: "The presence of volcanic ash in the sedimentary record establishes the past presence (and existence) of prior volcanic activity because volcanoes, and only volcanoes, are known to produce such ash. When a thorough study of various possible causes turns up only a single adequate cause for a given effect, the candidate cause automatically meets the causal-existence criterion" (Meyer, 342). One could say that just because we only know of volcanoes producing volcanic ash, doesn't mean there isn't another explanation we don't know of - the volcano of the gaps theory, but most can see the silliness of that argument. Meyer gives another illustration: "The Martian landscape displays evidence of erosion - trenches and rills - that resemble those produced on earth by moving water. Though Mars currently has no significant liquid water on its surface, planetary scientists have nevertheless inferred that Mars once had a significant amount of water on its surface in the past. Why? Geologists and planetologists have not observed any cause other than moving water that can produce the kind of erosional features observed on Mars today" (Meyer, 342-343). Water of the gaps or a good illustration? It is possible that we could find another possibility in the future, but until then water is the best explanation. "A pattern of flowers spelling 'Welcome to Disneyland' allows visitors to the theme park to detectintelligent activity, even if they did not see the flowers planted or arranged. Similarly, the specified and complex arrangement of nucleotide sequences - the information - in DNA implies the past action and existence of an intelligent cause, even if the past action of the cause cannot be directly observed" (Meyer, 343). "NASA's search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI) presupposes that any specified information embedded in electromagnetic signals coming from space would indicate an intelligent source. As yet, radio astronomers have not found any such information-bearing signals. But closer to home, molecular biologists have identified information-rich sequences and systems in the cell, suggesting, by the same logic, the past existence of an intelligent cause for those effects" (Meyer, 344).

DNA is way over the heads of most people, but most can understand that it is complicated. But it is not only complicated, it is irreducibly complex. "The proteins in the translation and transcription systems even help to process the genetic information for building other copies of themselves. Proteins are needed for protein synthesis. ATP is needed for ATP synthesis. DNA is needed for ATP synthesis. ATP is needed for DNA synthesis" (Ibid.). DNA has to exist in order to make DNA; it is irreducibly complex.



Let me finish with Meyer's conclusion to his chapter titled "the Best Explanation." "Since the intelligent design hypothesis meets both the causal-adequacy and causal-existence criteria of a best explanation, and since no other competing explanation meets these conditions as well - or at all - it follows that the design hypothesis provides the best, most causally adequate explanation of the origin of the information necessary to produce the first life on earth. Indeed, our uniform experience affirms that specified information - whether inscribed in hieroglyphics, written in a book, encoded in a radio signal, or produced in a simulation experiment - always arises from an intelligent source, from a mind and not a strictly material process. So the discovery of the specified digital information in the DNA molecule provides strong grounds for inferring that intelligence played a role in the origin of DNA. Indeed, whenever we find specified information and we know the causal story of how that information arose, we always find that it arose from an intelligent source. It follows that the best, most causally adequate explanation for the origin of the specified, digitally encoded information in DNA is that too had an intelligent source. Intelligent design best explains the DNA enigma" (Meyer, 347).



If you walk through the jungle and come to a place where a beautiful garden exists, where all the flowers are ordered in a complex sequence that is obviously designed, but you never see a gardener, you are still wise in discerning that there is a gardener. I don't mean another non-intelligent universe that accidently popped this one into existence with life somehow appearing here. I mean an intelligent being who designed DNA. Who is this intelligent being? Other evidence is necessary to answer that question, but atheism is out of the question. Agnosticism is also not acceptable. If there is a designer of DNA, one who is responsible for our lives, we cannot be satisfied with just saying, "I don't know and cannot find out." If there is a creator, it stands to reason that the creator would attempt to communicate with us and that we should attempt to communicate with him. Don't give up. "You will seek Me and Find Me when you search for Me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29:13