

# Evolution's theological underpinnings

A review of:  
*Darwin's Proof: The Triumph of Religion Over Science*  
by Cornelius G. Hunter  
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C.W. Nelson

Cornelius Hunter provides a brilliant analysis of Darwinian theory in his latest book, *Darwin's Proof: The Triumph of Religion Over Science*. This work focuses on how the data that pose problems for evolutionary theory are explained more easily—and more scientifically—by the alternative, Intelligent Design (ID). Hunter addresses most of the evidence for evolution encountered at the introductory college level, such as aspects of the fossil record and comparative anatomy, and proceeds to expose its philosophical and theological foundations. He shows how evidence is often considered strong support for evolution not because it validates the theory, but simply because it seems to discredit the alternative, divine creation. While this logic may appear objective because of its strictly naturalistic basis, it relies on a large number of metaphysical assumptions about theological doctrines, including the nature of God. Finally, Hunter challenges believers and nonbelievers alike to reexamine their assumptions about the nature of God, with the hope that realistic ideas about God, informed by a straightforward reading of the Bible, will add greater clarity to the fundamental issues of this debate.

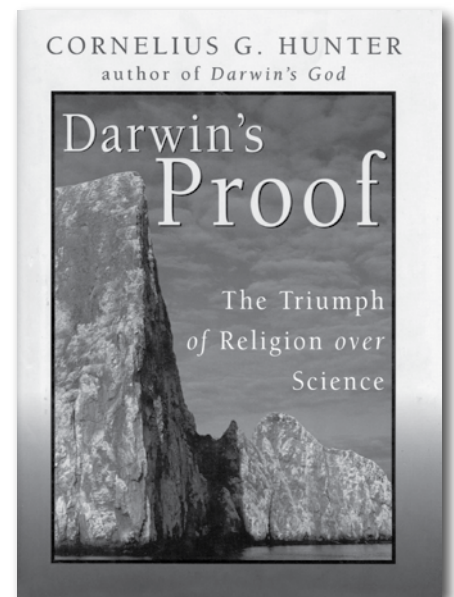
## Complexity: the fundamental argument against evolution

Hunter utilizes the first chapters of the book to elucidate the complexity present in living organisms. He discusses a number of systems, including the transcription and translation of DNA,

protein folding, and enzyme regulation. Life is unquestionably the most complex thing humans have ever observed, and it is significant that evolutionists consistently acknowledge the ways in which it *appears* to be designed, though it is said not to be. As the often-quoted Richard Dawkins writes, 'Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose.'<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, purposeful design seems to abound in living things. The information present in DNA (the most efficient information storage system known) is copied and translated into incredibly specific proteins that patrol the cell. The process of assembling and shaping proteins that work is very particular; functional ones require a certain sequence of amino acids at their core, and these amino acid chains will often not fold correctly without a host of other proteins (called chaperones) helping them along. Hunter notes that even bacteria create new proteins to develop resistance to antibiotics. It may appear that complexity arises spontaneously in these situations, but 'behind the scenes there is a clever adaptation machine at work' (p. 24). For example, when exposed to harsh conditions, a population of bacteria tends to increase its mutation rate (but only in certain areas that can produce helpful changes, *not* in the whole genome<sup>2</sup>). So, much of the adaptation we do observe in life results from an incredibly complex system that was *designed to produce such changes* in just the right conditions, in just the right places. Evolution has serendipitously produced a machine that can evolve, but can provide no compelling account of how the machine arose in the first place.

Here lies Hunter's fundamental argument against evolution: living things simply don't look like they evolved. If there truly is 'something special about carbon-based life-forms that makes them different from inorganic



machines such as the spacecraft, ... we haven't discovered [that] magical property yet' (p. 15).

Cells, the building blocks of organisms, are holistic. The events that occur within cells are interconnected and fully functional, showing no sign of gradual development. And while self-replication does make change over time possible, it really only represents an additional level of complexity that lacks a naturalistic explanation. The complexity of life thus exposes the philosophical basis for evolutionary theory: contrary to all we can observe, evolution proposes that *complexity arises on its own*.

It is important that evolution does not refer merely to the selection of advantageous traits. If this were so, 'evolution' would be synonymous with 'natural selection'. The defining characteristic of the theory of evolution is the hypothesis that a single cell, through the gradual addition of complexity, has produced all the life that now exists on Earth. This idea is simply not scientific, because it has no basis in observation. However, 'instead of requiring scientific theories to be likely, evolutionists require merely that they are naturalistic' (p. 35). Evolution is founded in a plethora of metaphysical assumptions, and is thus far from an objective approach to the origin of species.

### Why evolution is not a good theory

Hunter also exposes problems with the evidence used to support evolutionary theory. The supposed strength of such evidence is, in many cases, based on the assumption that evolution has occurred. Within the paradigm of evolution, any trait that exists is assumed to have evolved, and is therefore analyzed in light of that premise. Consequently, any reasoning found therein has nothing to offer this debate. It is the soundness of the premise itself that is in question. For example, the similarity between human and chimp DNA is only relevant when discriminating between *particular theories* of evolution; the raw data make just as good sense in the context of a designer. An organism's visible features are 'ultimately driven by the molecules' (p. 56) that specify them—that is, the information *encoded* in the DNA—and so it would make sense that if organisms were *created* with similar features, they would harbour similar genetic information. It would make little sense to create interacting organisms with incompatible biochemistries. In the controversy between creation and evolution, such similarities cannot make a good case for or against either paradigm.

The theory of evolution encounters a problem because it can, in many cases, explain virtually any possible outcome, rendering it practically useless. To continue the previous example, it is true that evolution explains DNA similarities easily. One aspect of this observation is that differing degrees of similarity exist in coding and non-coding regions. Coding regions are segments of DNA that are made into protein, and noncoding regions have been thought to lack such a function. The idea that coding regions are more similar between different species than noncoding regions has been used as evidence for evolution. This idea makes good sense, because mutations (if they were 'noticeably' harmful) would be weeded out of those regions that have an important function. The noncoding regions would therefore

be allowed to mutate, or 'evolve', at a faster rate.

Yet this argument has very little strength to support evolution, as '... evolution would have no problem if this were not the case. For example, if the [coding regions] had greater variation than the noncoding regions, then evolutionists could say selective forces drove the gene differences, while the noncoding regions have some function that limited the amount they could evolve' (p. 59).

In fact, it appears that many noncoding regions are more similar between the species than evolutionary theories, based upon the assumption that they lack function, might predict. An incredible number of functions have been found for DNA that is not translated into protein, previously thought to be 'junk'.<sup>3</sup>

Because of this, the evidence used to support evolution loses any real meaning. It is true that evolution can explain observations very well; it simply explains *too much*. In the case of coding region DNA similarity, evolution can easily accommodate *any possible observation*—indeed, it can often accommodate opposing outcomes. Though this does not prove evolution false, it does make the task of *testing* evolution incredibly difficult, and removes the basis for much of the supposed 'evidence' for the theory. Philip Skell of the National Academy of Sciences makes the same criticism.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time that evolution lacks the ability to amass any meaningful evidence, there are also observations that it cannot begin to explain. Evolution has the ability to explain the *characteristics* of the complexity that exists, but it fails horribly when pressed to explain how complexity can *arise*. It is one thing to show that genes change over time; it is quite another to show that this change increases the complexity of genetic information. Just as organisms don't look like they evolved, the changes that scientists observe in DNA don't look like they

increase complexity. John Sanford, inventor of the transgenic gene gun process, who has spent his career studying mutations in plants, shows that mutations cannot produce the kind of change that evolution requires. He concludes in his book that 'no form of selection can actually halt' the *degeneration* of DNA.<sup>5</sup> And this gradual degeneration of DNA over time—something he calls 'genetic entropy', not to be confused with entropy's formal mathematical meaning—has nothing to do with changing environments. No matter what the scenario—if anything like the present mutation rate has been active, evolution is implausible. The most compelling reason to accept evolutionary theory thus becomes the fact that it is naturalistic—a philosophical assumption that has no possible basis in the empirical world. And in the case of evolution, the fact that it is naturalistic does not mean that it is nonreligious; in fact, the opposite is true.

### Evolution as theology

When Darwinists set out to support their theory empirically, a curious trend emerges. Consider again the example of DNA similarity between humans and chimpanzees. The reason this is often considered such good evidence of evolution is not primarily because it is consistent with evolution. Instead, this piece of evidence is considered powerful because evolutionists believe that *God would not have created that way*. Of course, this reasoning is impossible unless one begins with a very specific idea of who God is and how he would create. Evolutionists assume that God, *unlike* the great inventors and architects (that is, intelligent designers) of our time, would not use patterns and similar components in his creation. Evolution thus employs powerful, biased *theological* assumptions in its reasoning. As Holding shows, the presumption that a designer would have used unlimited originality in his creation is a highly subjective artifact of modern 'consumer culture'. Instead, similarly designed structures and unifying biological principles would

bring glory and honor to any designer, and this is certainly true in the biblical framework.<sup>6</sup>

### Neglecting the Fall

Hunter traces the history of this view of God, beginning with the rise of deism in the seventeenth century. Deism began with the conviction that the one true religion ‘should be something that anyone could figure out’ (p. 84). Humans through reason alone should be able to deduce the truth about God. Though this movement did not last, it fueled the natural theology that inspired William Paley’s *Natural Theology: Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*. In this work, Paley overemphasizes the bliss of creation and turns a blind eye to the pain and suffering evident in nature. He proceeds to reason that God designed the world for the sole purpose of maximizing the happiness of man. Paley’s work led to an unfortunate tradition of denying the implications of an historical Fall and to assumptive reasoning about how God would or would not create.

By the time of Darwin, this idealized view of nature was set firmly in place. Especially important—and destructive—was Linnaeus’s confused notion of *immutable species*. This concept was such an important part of pre-Darwinian thought that Darwin needed only to provide evidence *against* the concept in order to support the shift toward his own theory. This precedent in rationale has persisted to the present.<sup>7</sup> In Hunter’s words, ‘The theory of evolution is confirmed not by a successful prediction but by the argument that God would never do such a thing’ (p. 71) as create the world we see. Of course, this reasoning ignores the Bible’s description of a fallen world, and the God of the Bible, whose character is both mysterious and immortal.

### Bad design?

One example of this type of reasoning emerges in evolution’s response to those aspects of living things that appear less than ideal. In the mind of the evolutionist, God would certainly not have created organisms with anything

less than perfect biological systems. (In the ominous shadow of a vast array of biological systems whose workings and interactions are not even slightly understood, this statement assumes that our current knowledge allows us to determine what the ‘ideal’ state of these ‘imperfect’ structures might look like.) In this manner, ‘poor design’ is proposed as another argument for the theory of evolution.

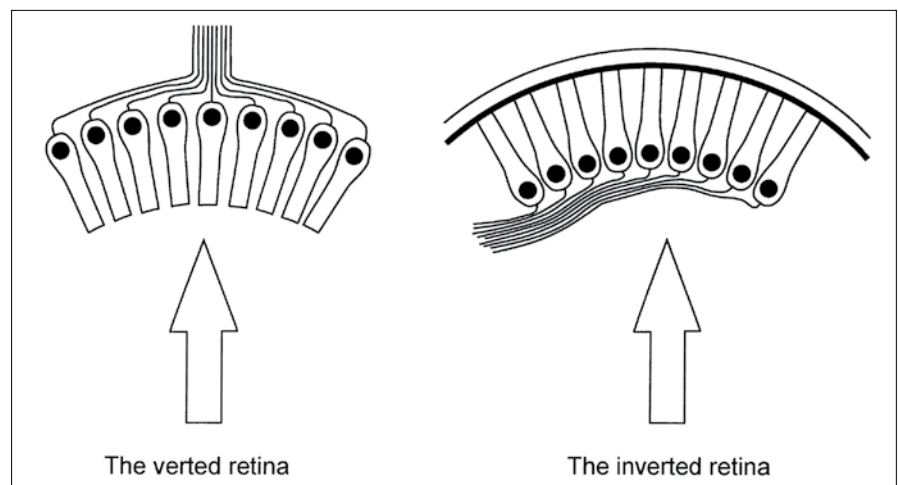
Of course, the argument from poor design is quite inconsistent with the observations of biology. Well-known evolutionists like Nesse and Williams, while they mention the discredited argument of a ‘design flaw’ in the inverted retina,<sup>8</sup> also note that ‘the body is a bundle of careful compromises. The body’s simplest structures reveal exquisite designs unmatched by any human creations ... Like any engineer, evolution must constantly compromise.’<sup>9</sup> So, careful compromises resulting in less than ideal systems in organisms support evolution, because God would supposedly not have created that way. However, those systems that *are* ideal are used to testify to the strength of natural selection’s role in evolution. One cannot have it both ways.

Darwinism, then, actually provides a satisfactory explanation for the existence of life only in the *philosophical*

realm. Once Darwinists conclude that God would not have created what we observe today, evolution need not even be likely. The fact that evolution provides no detailed or compelling explanation of biological complexity simply ‘becomes the subject of future research’ (p. 67). Darwinists are satisfied that god—the god that *they* have carefully defined—would not have created the Earth and its inhabitants. In this way, the ‘science’ of evolution becomes a blazing fire, a jealous one; a flame that hopes to claim all—even religion—as its own product. The veracity of this idea is of course a question that science itself can never answer.

Hunter ends this discussion by urging followers of Christ to reexamine their assumptions about God, in light of how destructive unbiblical thinking has been in history. Unlike the carefully defined god of the evolutionist, or even the ‘god of formulas’ presented by popular ‘barcode’ Christianity,<sup>10</sup> the God of the Bible is unique and beyond the understanding of humans. Hunter does well to include the words of Isaiah (p. 103),

‘Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker,  
To him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground.  
Does the clay say to the potter,



The inverted retina is commonly used as an example of ‘bad design’, to discredit the hypothesis that biological systems were designed. However, the very structure of such an argument (from ‘poor design’) necessitates assumptions about God’s nature and rests on the premise that the ‘ideal’ configuration of biological systems is known. Additionally, Peter Gurney<sup>8</sup> has elucidated a number of reasons why, in those organisms that possess an inverted retina, such a configuration may function better than a verted retina would, particularly in protecting against the otherwise injurious effects of light. (From Gurney<sup>8</sup>).



“What are you making?”  
Does your work say,  
“He has no hands”?” (Isaiah 45:9)

### Some criticisms

While this book is ideal for anyone who is naturally interested in the science of biology, it often overshoots the average layperson. Two of the opening chapters discuss some of the details of molecular biology with delightful clarity; however, many readers might be discouraged by the complexity of the content. The audience to which this book is directed is therefore not clear.

Hunter describes the philosophical basis of the debate between creationism and evolutionism very well; unfortunately, he does not devote the necessary space to the *nature of mutational change*. It is not enough to simply state that life exhibits no indication of the gradual evolution of complexity. Evolutionists invoke mutations as the source of variation that makes this sort of evolutionary change possible. It is only once mutations are understood—namely, the fact that mutations go in the *opposite direction*—that evolution can be thoroughly discredited.

The interested science reader would thus do well to read this book in conjunction with another, more focused book that discusses mutational change, such as John Sanford’s *Genetic Entropy & the Mystery of the Genome*<sup>11</sup> or Lee Spetner’s *Not By Chance!*<sup>12</sup> These provide the scientific background needed to understand why mutations cannot lead to an increase in complexity over time. The overwhelming majority of mutations are slightly deleterious, yet taken alone they each create such small effects on an organism that natural selection cannot remove them. New findings suggest that these mutations are accumulating incredibly fast—possibly one hundred new mutations per person (discussed in Sanford’s book).<sup>13</sup> This would mean that every individual must die one hundred times over, just to keep the human population from eventually degenerating. Additionally, Spetner discusses how many of the beneficial mutations that arise are not passed on because of ‘genetic drift’—the result of a random process by which some

types of genes happen to be eliminated when gametes are formed. This process acts without regard to how good or bad a mutation may be. The scenario observed in nature therefore supports the paradigm that the genes of living organisms are actually degenerating, *not* evolving into increasingly more complex forms.

Finally, Hunter takes a turn to engage in a discussion of salvation near the end of the work, writing that ‘God will accuse the sinner, and there will be none to the rescue. He is a righteous judge who does not relent’ (p. 107). This description portrays God as a being that seeks to condemn those that do not follow His rules, and ignores the fact that there is no one who wants more to rescue each soul than God does. This portrayal of God is equally unbiblical and dangerous as the deistic view, considering that issues regarding God’s nature are already so fragile in this debate. C.S. Lewis compels believers to recognize the sobering nature of their role:

‘It is a serious thing to live in a society of gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. ... our charity must be a real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner.’<sup>14</sup>

Only through grace may a balanced, tenable understanding of God’s character be revealed to those who are willing to humble the mind.

I join Hunter in challenging readers to examine their assumptions about God. Humans need desperately to explore what the Word says about his nature, instead of relying on their own deeply ingrained feelings about the matter. Christians must stand for God’s truth in love, ‘with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition’ (2 Timothy 2:25). The Bible reveals a God whose ways are wondrous and unknown to man, whose love for us is wider than the oceans and higher than the sky.

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