

Intelligent random design—a great oxymoron

A review of
Random Designer: Created from Chaos to Connect with the Creator
with the Creator
by Richard G. Colling
Browning Press,
Bourbonnais, IL, 2004

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Dr Richard Colling, a former professor and chairman of the biological sciences department at Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, Illinois, argues in his book that God is a ‘random designer’. He concludes that God originally set up the basic laws of nature and then allowed them to evolve the universe on its own. Colling recognizes that the term “Random Designer ... sounds like an oxymoron—a contradiction of terms” which it is—yet he, without embarrassment, openly advocates this view that is in direct contradiction to both biblical and historical Christianity (p. 3). Colling teaches that God foreknew that randomness would eventually ‘accomplish His goals’, whatever they were, from chaos to intelligently designed creation, although Colling does not detail how this was achieved except in a very vague way.

In short, he believes Darwinian evolution, including random mutations and the randomness of nature, has generated all life on Earth, including humans. Somehow God was behind this random process, although where and when was never mentioned. Thus Colling calls God the ‘random designer’. Of course, if God’s intelligence was behind this process, it could not be random. Colling concedes that “Perhaps the Random Designer intentionally” guided what appears to be an unguided process, making him an Intelligent Design (ID) supporter, a worldview he adamantly opposes (p. 147). He concluded that

the ‘overwhelming evidence’ is that God is “truly a Random Designer” (p. 181). In other passages of his book Colling appears to be an agnostic: “in spite of our inability to see, touch, or understand God in the physical dimension, we intuitively sense He is real—or at the very least, that He *might* be real [emphasis added]” (p. 147).

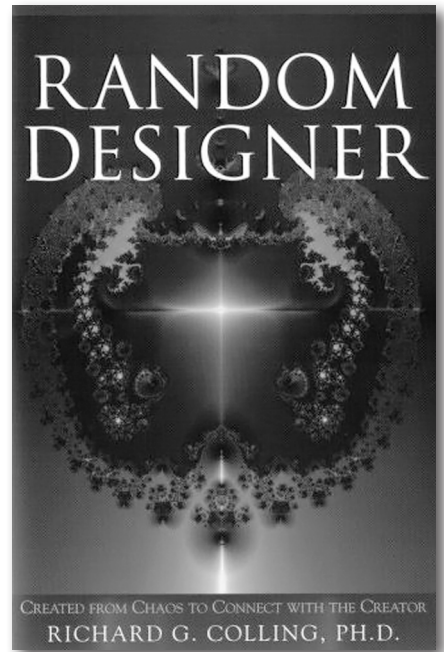
As life evolved by elimination of the weak, or those less able to survive, God was there “all the time, waiting for His creation to discover Him” (Dedication). Colling repeatedly makes the irresponsible mistake of comparing Darwinian evolution to the trial-and-error process used by our well-designed and very complex adaptive immune system.

Assumption and motivation

Colling never attempted to prove Darwinism, but simply assumed it was true and succumbed to omnipresent phrases found in writings by Darwin apologists, such as that evolution is supported by ‘overwhelming evidence’ from the many subdisciplines of biology, assuming that this and similar often-repeated claims are a valid substitute for evidence. A major motive for developing his view of origins clearly stems from what he considers the ‘embarrassment’ caused to Christians by belief in an active creator God. Wanting to be socially acceptable and not an outcast evangelical Christian, he threw his lot in with Darwinism and dogmatically concluded that

“... no serious scientific alternatives [to evolution] have surfaced—none! Evolution is the only current and viable scientific framework that provides a rational understanding of the immense and beautiful diversity of life on our planet” (p. 16).

He dogmatically stated that “no one can accurately say that science supports” the creation or ID worldview, stressing “Let us be very clear: it doesn’t” (p. 16).



Dubious doctrine?

Colling even rejected the central Christian doctrine of the Fall and Atonement, concluding that “interpretations of Biblical accounts that proclaim the creation of the first man to be from the actual physical dust of the earth are ... dubious” (p. 113). Of course, this view is essentially that espoused by agnostics. He implies that the Adam and Eve creation account is symbolic, but of what they are symbolic he does not say (p. 113). Colling does admit that evolution has challenged—and destroyed—almost every childhood belief that he once held about the Bible:

“As a young child, the Bible stories my parents often read to me relating the power and miracles of God captivated my imagination ... They related to me that God created the world and all living things in six days, molding Adam from the dust of the earth and Eve from Adam’s rib. God was all-powerful and the Biblical story of creation explained how all life began. This view of creation was adequate for me until high school biology class, where I learned quite a different view—the concept of evolution” (p. 5).

He then attended a ‘Christian’ college where he evidently lost the rest of his childhood faith. After learning about evolution, he no longer believed the basic teachings of Christianity, and even tried to explain the origin of life by abiogenesis (aka chemical evolution):

“Two different explanations might account for the appearance of these early cells: A purposeful Designer—a God who instantaneously and supernaturally called ... living cells into existence—or a process of random synthesis and selection which, given adequate time and appropriate conditions, ... create the first life” (p. 44).

He concluded that the origin of life was not due to intelligent design, but rather was due to “the random assembly of specialized biomolecules, followed by the preferential selection of the most valuable variants ‘which sparked’ the whole sequence of creative events, ultimately leading to the first living cell on the planet—a very early rendition of random design” (pp. 44–45). How there could be selection before the first self-reproducing he doesn’t say—a serious omission, because natural selection is differential reproduction.

Then this alleged first cell evolved into some multi-cellular life form, then into worms, fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, primates and, last, humans. He writes that, even though ‘pain and suffering’ are a central part of evolution, this evil is balanced by the achievements of evolution. For example,

“... the formation of consciousness and conscience in humans is ... a magnificent and monumental triumph! Beginning with the simplest biochemical reactions and building upon the resulting structures and assemblies, the Random Designer has brought forth a most spectacular creation” (p. 117).

Colling even uncritically accepted some of the uninformed myths about Darwinism critics often repeated by the atheists, such as that non-Darwinists had “not engaged in

any original peer-reviewed scientific research, nor had they offered any viable scientific alternatives” (p. 6).

Colling does accurately explain the basic workings of DNA, the immune system, and other aspects of cellular biology at a high school level. Colling recognizes the enormous complexity of life, even noting “while explaining some fine detail regarding the human cell, I have faced a lecture hall filled with university biology students and literally felt chills run down my spine as I was gripped by the unbelievable beauty and order so evident in ... life.” His book argues God had no detectable role in creating this unbelievable beauty and order—rather the Random Designer (evolution, meaning natural selection of genetic damage) did it all (p. 7).

Colling is an evangelistic evolution proselytizer, even stating that his book was written “for those who are seeking God ... who *might* be real [emphasis mine]” (pp. 10, 147).

If an ID-proponent wrote half the Designer-praising evangelical statements that Colling did, it would be widely exploited as proof that ID is religion! One looks in vain for a clear exposition of his theology, but instead finds flowery prose praising the wonders of the ‘Random Designer’ who constructed everything, one step at a time, from nothing more than damage to DNA that causes what we call mutations, plus natural law, time, and natural selection (p. 61). After irresponsibly claiming that an “infinite number of possible protein structures provide an infinite number of possible protein functions, an infinite number of possible cell types, and an infinite number of different life forms”, he concludes that the natural selection of mutated DNA is an

“... incredibly productive method for creating diversity [and] is another example of random design ... I must confess, these processes never cease to amaze me. But while we may find them amazing, the Random Designer is not the least bit astonished. Unlimited potential is His very nature, and random design is part of His

process and plan. He beckons us to come close and learn more” (p. 55).

The Colling conflict

Colling correctly recognized that “... the explosive conflict surrounding evolution in our culture today is not really about the science at all. It arises from two conflicting worldviews: the atheistic worldview versus a fundamental creationist worldview” (p. 15). As a whole, he has sided with the atheistic evolutionary claims, concluding that God is “more concerned with final outcomes than with intermediate processes, nonproductive pathways In a very real sense then, failure abounds!” in the evolution process (p. 72). So he evidently believes ‘the end justifies the means’.

How he knows all of this about the Creator is left unstated, but it hardly conforms to the creation account as taught by the Christian church for 2,000 years and the Jews for 2,000 years before that. This book, which not unexpectedly caused a stir at Olivet Nazarene College where Colling is a professor, is far closer to New-Age teachings than it is to the basic theology of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Conclusion

In short, the book gave no viable reason to believe in God and plenty of reason not to. Nor will a professor who wrote that God ‘might be real’ be of much help to college students struggling with their Christian faith as, in my experience, many students are (p. 147). As Colling correctly stated, “the primary goal of science is simple—to learn how things work” (p. 11). If the science establishment and Colling would stick to that goal, and not invent worldviews to harmonize Darwinism with its opposite, Christianity, both science and Colling would have far fewer problems. Professor Colling is correct about one thing: his random designer is not a designer in any sense of the word (p. 3).