

## The problem with Intelligent Design

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Natan Slifkin, THE JERUSALEM POST

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Why are there Orthodox Jews such as myself who are opposed to Intelligent Design? Isn't it fundamental to Judaism that God - who is taken to be highly intelligent - designed the universe? How can we subscribe to the random, blind, meaningless universe of Darwinian evolution?

In order to understand the answers to these questions, it is necessary to clarify what evolution and Intelligent Design actually mean.

Evolution is simply a description of a biological process by which the complexities of the animal and plant kingdoms came about. It is no more necessarily godless than physics, which explains how the complexities of planets and their motion came about, or political history, which explains how the State of Israel came about.

To be sure, an atheist sees that these provide entirely satisfactory explanations that do not call for a Creator. But the religious person, on the other hand, looks at it differently. He looks at the majesty of the cosmos with its fortuitously arranged table of elements and realizes that the fundamental structure of the universe is uniquely suited for matter and life. He realizes that the unparalleled event of a people returning to its homeland after two millennia of exile and persecution reveals that, in a suitably deep and hidden way, God was pulling the strings.

Likewise, the religious evolutionist sees the tremendous diversity of the natural world and appreciates that, if there are laws of evolution that can produce such complexity, those laws must have been decreed by a lawmaker. The "randomness" of Darwinian evolution is no more antithetical to religion than the superficially chance events of the Book of Esther, which we ascribe to God's salvation, or the randomness of a lottery, about which it states in Proverbs 16:33, "When the lot is cast in the lap, its entire verdict has been decided by God."

RABBI SAMSON Raphael Hirsch, himself skeptical of evolution, wrote that if it were ever to be accepted by the scientific community, "Judaism in that case would call upon its adherents to give even greater reverence than ever before to the one, sole God Who, in His boundless creative wisdom and eternal omnipotence, needed to bring into existence no more than one single, amorphous nucleus, and one single law of 'adaptation and heredity' in order to bring forth, from what seemed chaos but was in fact a very definite order, the infinite variety of species we know today, each with its unique characteristics that set it apart from all other creatures."

Discovering a scientific explanation of a naturalistic mechanism does not paint God out of the picture - instead, it demonstrates the creative wisdom that He used.

The religious evolutionist sees intelligent design all around him. But the Intelligent Design movement is something else. Generally, ID proponents are claiming that there are certain specific cellular structures which cannot be explained by naturalistic evolutionary processes. It is claimed that the human blood-clotting system, the bacterial flagellum and other such structures exhibit "irreducible complexity" - that no step-by-step natural process could have produced them, and an Intelligent Designer (i.e. God) must have intervened to create them in a single instant.

WHETHER THIS is "good science" is debated. Many scientists challenge whether such structures do indeed exhibit irreducible complexity. Others suspect that even if science does not currently have a satisfactory naturalistic explanation for how these things came about, it is likely to discover it at some point.

But there are also significant theological problems here. If God's existence is being demonstrated in phenomena

for which there is argued to be no scientific explanation, then what about all those phenomena for which there is a scientific explanation?

The prophets said that "the Heavens declare the glory of God." Some of the ancients interpreted this to mean that since (in their time) there was no explanation as to why the planets move in the way that they do, they attest to a Designer. But now that physics and astronomy have explained planetary motion, does this mean that the Heavens no longer declare the glory of God? Of course they do; and the unavoidable position for the religious person is that God's grandeur is seen in the laws of nature.

THE PROBLEM with ID was demonstrated by David Klinghoffer's November 9 *Post* op-ed "Wayward religious reconcilers." He argued that for the universe to meaningfully attest to a Creator, it must do so in a way that is potentially scientifically falsifiable, just as the testimony of witnesses is only meaningful if it could theoretically be proven false.

ID, claims Klinghoffer, uses certain cellular structures to present evidence for design that, if proven wrong (i.e. if proven to be explicable in terms of ordinary naturalistic processes), would no longer attest to a Creator.

So where does that leave the rest of the universe? What about all those structures that do not, even by the admission of the ID camp, present irreducible complexity? The unstated implication of their position is that these things do not attest to a Creator. Don't have a grasp of cellular biology? Sorry, you won't be able to perceive that the universe was created by God.

Either God is everywhere or He is nowhere. But He is certainly not limiting His appearance in the universe to the bacterial flagellum and the blood-clotting system.

*The writer, a rabbi, directs Zoo Torah and is the author most recently of The Challenge Of Creation: Judaism's Encounter with Science, Cosmology, and Evolution.*

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