

Natural selection as creation

By Shaun Johnston, see shaunjohnston.org. 2013.

“When does the contract kick in?” I asked.

“Week’s time,” Joe said. “We’ve got just six days. On the seventh you can take a rest.”

“Not funny, Joe,” I said. “Why didn’t you call me in earlier?”

He shrugged. “Didn’t see a problem. Won’t natural selection take care of it?”

God’s been running things for a zillion years, and they call me in on a week’s notice to handle the change-over!

I scribble a few notes. “Let me ask you a few questions,” I said. He shrugged.

“Let’s take anything—a mouse! One day it dies. Immediately it starts putrefying—its tissues start digesting themselves, all that biochemistry runs muck. Within a few days it’s nothing but a puddle of fluid on the ground with a few bones sticking up. What do you think holds it together while it’s alive, for, what, a couple of years?”

Joe shrugged again. That seemed to be his answer to everything.

“I’ll tell you what—about one million things, all working together, that’s what keeps it alive. No, not a million, a billion! Any one of them stops working, the creature dies. How’d you expect me to manage that?”

I’m not surprised God’s folding His operation. He wasn’t getting any credit for it these days, no worship, nothing, just a lot of criticism. He didn’t seem to be needed. He said, so He agreed to hand everything over. They made a contract. It starts next week. And they leave it to the last minute to call me in, their evolution guy, to fix things.

“Natural selection—know what it means?” He shrugged again. “It’s nothing but a sieve. Each generation it lets through a few creatures, discards the rest. That’s it! Any one of those billion things, you could select for just that, let through only the one’s that have it, throw away the rest. If it was only two or three things you had to worry about, you could select just the creatures that had all of them, as long as you had enough creatures to select from, say hundreds for each couple you let through. But millions of things? Billions of things? There aren’t enough atoms in the universe to equal the number of creatures you’d need in each generation to have to choose from, for that.”

“You’ve always told us natural selection did it,” he said.

“I only told you that so you’d not keep bringing God up. God this, God that! Like I didn’t know anything. So I told you it was natural selection. But I wish you’d checked with me before signing that contract.”

He shrugged again, like it was my problem. Then he said, “How does God do it?”

“Supernatural powers,” I said. “Miracles, things like that. He doesn’t have to use science, He can keep them all alive just because He wants to. No if, ands or buts. So here they are, they’re all working. But come next week, they’ll all stop.”

“But won’t natural sele...” he began.

“Don’t natural selection me!” I said. “It was all politics, us against then, you don’t know a thing!”

I was getting a headache. Let’s try to figure this out. What have we got?

30,000 genes! What kind of a mickey-mouse operation was that! Just work you way from one end of a creature to another and count how many things you’ve got to specify. A cat. Just the way the hairs lie on its face, around its mouth, its eyes, its ears, you’d need about 5000 bits of information to specify just that. Then the eye—don’t get me started! 30,000 genes! We’ve run out already. Let genes have more than one function each and you can’t select for them independently, that’s the whole point of natural selection.

“Mutation...?” Joe began, in a wobbly voice.

“You fell for that?” I said accusingly. “Look, natural selection is just a sieve, it reduces variation so you end with all the creatures in a species being the same. That’s what a sieve does. We thought you might figure that out, about ‘selection’ being just a sieve. So we came up with “mutation” to put some variation back, something you couldn’t figure out so easily. But there’s nothing there, we just made it up to keep you quiet about how ‘selection’ worked. It means the genes getting damaged, but how did you think genes getting damaged could help anything? How would creatures with damaged genes get ahead in a world of other creatures without damage?”

Joe was looking wide-eyed, his mouth dropping open.

“You fight fire with fire,” I said. “Religion, they had one set of ideas for their flock, and another for themselves. We did the same. Natural selection and mutation for you, while we struggled with what was really going on in evolution and development behind the scenes. We’re going to figure it all out one day, so we felt OK about telling you some just-so stories, but we didn’t expect you to take them seriously. Well, not this seriously.

“Forget the mice, forget the cat,” I said. “Take yourself. God made you too, right?” Joe nodded. “And what were you a billion years ago? A single cell? Maybe not even a cell, maybe a microbe? And you got here through that microbe’s genes getting damaged and

the most damaged being discarded. Is that what you think made you? Now you can see why we told you that stuff--you don't really think. You need someone else to do your thinking for you.

"You've got to cancel that contract, get out of it some way," I said. Then my blood ran cold. No way I wanted God back in control, and having to admit defeat. What was I going to do? Was there any way I could get this natural selection and mutation stuff to work? Well, was there?