

Evolution is Not Science

July 2000 - NMSR Rebuttal to CSFNM Essay

For NMSR: John Geohegan

This is Essay 1B (Response) in the NMSR/CSFNM Debate Series.

At the heart of the creationist muddle lies a deep conviction that accepting the evolutionary viewpoint would result in a complete collapse of any basis for a moral order and civilized society. For a creationist to study and understand evolution is perilously close to consorting with the Devil. The messages we get from the creationists are thus full of errors and misunderstandings because the writer has consciously or unconsciously resisted and avoided an accurate understanding. The first essay from CSFNM is a good example. Below are explanations of some of CSFNM's misunderstandings.

It's not that evolution "disallows" falsification; it's just that evolution has never been falsified. As Richard Dawkins noted in *The Blind Watchmaker* (p. 225), "If a single, well verified mammal skull were to turn up in 500 million year-old rocks, our whole modern theory of evolution would be utterly destroyed." The first NMSR essay, by Dave Thomas, covers falsification more fully.

Evolution is observed today, both inside and outside of the laboratory where bacteria evolve to resist modern antibiotics. What we can't see is evolution that takes thousands of years.

Punctuated Equilibrium neither endorses saltationism nor denies transitional forms. Consider this quotation by Niles Eldredge, one of its co-authors; "I was (and remain) too much of a conventional neo-Darwinian ever to subscribe to the saltationist heresy" (p.75 Time Frames), and then read Eldredge's description of transitional forms of trilobites and how they support, not contradict, the punctuational model (pages 88-91). CSFNM's claim that Punctuated Equilibrium disagrees with Darwinism is false.

Survival of the fittest is **not** a tautology: Species are fit not because they survive, as CSFNM claims, but because they have been endowed with successful genes.

It isn't true that "virtually all mutations are harmful or lethal." Only large mutations are almost certainly harmful. Think about the plight of the cheetah which has come through a population bottleneck and is now in ecological danger precisely because it doesn't have a pool of mutated genes available which would allow it to evolve in response to a changing environment. Or consider the large number of humans who have mutations in their gene for the CCR5 chemokine receptor (*Science News*, Jan. 22, 2000). This mutation decreases susceptibility to the HIV virus which causes AIDS. You bet it's beneficial.

The CSFNM essay gives no hint of understanding that mutations build up in a population and that evolution doesn't depend upon a step-by-step accumulation of mutations.

Of course the biologists' "descent with modification" is easily distinguished from a Ming vase falling to the floor. Here's definition #2 of *descent*, from my Merriam-Webster: "Derivation, as from an ancestor; lineage; pedigree." Was this intended as a joke?

The charges that Richard Dawkins claims evidence to be unnecessary, and that some biologists claim birds aren't descended from reptiles will be ignored until CSFNM provides some documentation.

The presence of so many inaccuracies and distortions leads one to question the advisability of thinking like a creationist.

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