



## Finding Darwin's God: A Book Review

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*Preface:* Kenneth Miller's *Finding Darwin's God 1* is a stern rebuke to the intelligent-design community which is gaining headway among the educational establishment, fellow scientists, theologians, and many youth. Miller seeks to debunk I.D. and reaffirm naturalistic evolution while installing theistic evolution as God's chosen method of creating.

Miller's arguments for theistic evolution begin by criticizing scientists' claims about the meaningless of life, claims which fall outside the boundary of claims which science can make. Even though the universe is ruled by random undirected events as in the evolutionary process, God could have created the universe to achieve a purpose He intends, Miller supposes. According to Miller, "given evolution's ability to adapt, to innovate, to test, and to experiment, sooner or later it would have given the Creator exactly what He was looking for — a creature who, like us, could know Him and love Him, could perceive the heavens and dream of the stars, a creature who could eventually discover the extraordinary process of evolution that filled His earth with so much life." Thus, a process without purpose and direction is credited with achieving a finished product (like mankind) which has, according to God, a purpose. This is illogical and in this paper I point out the many fallacies in Miller's arguments. The essay is 1,791 words long.

I am a freelance writer and researcher of religion and philosophy and have been doing so for nearly ten years. I am also a contributor to Tektonics ministries ([www.tektonics.org](http://www.tektonics.org)) where I critique many agnostic and atheistic material, as well as a member of the Lutheran Science Institute. How evolution impacts morality and public behavior is a chief research area for me, and I am building material for a future book on the philosophy of evolution.

### *A critique of Kenneth Miller's theistic evolution:*

Kenneth Miller's *Finding Darwin's God* is a stern rebuke to the intelligent-design community which is gaining headway among the educational establishment. Even my wife, who is not philosophically astute as I, has discovered it. I fondly remember her coming home from work one day and asking whether I heard what creationism was called now, much like a child inquiring about a new toy. I paused a bit and replied "intelligent-design," at which time she indicated I was right. News of I.D. is getting around and certainly its proponents will have to spend much time convincing the public of their beliefs as well as replying to its criticisms in Miller's book. Some of Miller's arguments are scientific, but my concern here will be the philosophical and theological arguments by which he derives theistic evolution as a logical corollary of his religious and evolutionist beliefs.

I began my ruminations on theistic evolution by thinking of what ideas should be contained in a theistic evolutionary view of the origin of life which manifests itself in the origin of all life and the eventual late arrival of mankind and thought of a model that might suffice. Suppose you found a domino rally that, when it rallies, produces a design that looks like the U.S. flag. Now the creator of that rally had an end effect in mind and knew the methods to produce it. To achieve the result, the rally must be deterministic; it must achieve the desired result and nothing else. It would be possible, of course, I suppose, that atmospheric events or other Earthly events like an earthquake might, if they occurred at the right moment, interrupt such an event as the production of the flag. However, given nothing to interrupt the flow of events, one could say that the domino rally would be, in order to achieve the desired result, deterministic. One could then say, in all joy, that the flag was the creation of someone who put a process in place (the rally) to achieve the desired result (the flag).

Applying this analogy to theistic evolution, I find that to have a proper understanding of and logical belief in divine creation via a sequence of events (or process) such as evolution which achieves a desired divine result, one must suppose the process deterministic. A divine creator could also have the ability to foresee future events and therefore tailor specific natural events to achieve the desired result when external (external to the divine process) natural events take place. For instance, imagine a divine domino rally maker who knew future wind speeds near the site of his rally and knew at a precise time a wind gust would come up to move certain dominos over to compete a rally that was not originally joined domino to domino. The rally would complete its task only because the divine domino rally maker had taken into account natural phenomenon which aided the complete rally. In this way, a divine creator could know future environmental happenings and tailor biological life to respond to such stimuli and evolve. Like the domino rally creator who creates his or her rally to complete the rally when it responds to the environment in such a way as to complete the rally, a divine creator could create life to respond to the environment in such a way that when a specific natural event takes place, an evolutionary "jump" takes place. Either way, the end result would have to be predetermined whether taking into account external events or not.

Miller admits that evolution is dominated by undirected randomness, not directed progress as in the domino rally, and should be applauded for his clarity.

The explanatory power of evolution derives from its simplicity. Natural Selection favors and preserves those variations that work best, and new variation is constantly generated by mutations, gene rearrangements, and even by exchanges of genetic information between organisms. This does not mean that the path of evolution is random in the sense that anything can happen as we jump from one generation to the next.... Although not completely random, chance does affect which mutations, which mistakes, appear in which individuals. As we saw earlier, this inherent unpredictability is not a matter of inadequate scientific knowledge. Rather, it is a reflection that the behavior of matter itself is indeterminate, and therefore unpredictable. It is one of the reasons why we cannot predict, with any detailed certainty, the future path of evolution .2

There is a problem reconciling undirected processes with a process that yields a nonrandom directed end product, as in God's creation or a flag produced by a domino rally, and Miller admits this is where the problem for religious people lies. "Surely," Miller asks, "we could not be both the products of evolution and the apple of God's eye?" That's the problem in a nutshell: an undirected process which, by nature, acts with no purpose cannot be capable of producing a purposeful result which, by nature, must be the result of a directed process. Miller's "fix" to this dilemma detours us into Richard Dawkins' writings. Dawkins' *The Blind Watchmaker* 3 introduces us to an analogy between natural selection and a computer monkey trying to get the phrase "METHINKS IT IS LIKE A WEASEL" by typing on a keyboard. Dawkins eschews single-step production of this phrase and instead opts for multiple tries at this phrase, each attempt breeding from a previous attempt, keeping the parts of each attempt that match the target phrase. The target is eventually reached in 41 tries although Dawkins uses what has been called a "head monkey" to do it. 4 What insinuation comes from his discussion is that cumulative selection is the hero of natural selection and time is its ally. Miller gets us close to this analogy when he suggests a multitude of attempts natural selection "uses" to achieve different results. Unlike Dawkins, Miller does not use a "head monkey" in his postulates. Rather, Miller claims that "given evolution's ability to adapt, to innovate, to test, and to experiment, sooner or later it would have given the Creator exactly what He was looking for — a creature who, like us, could know Him and love Him, could perceive the heavens and dream of the stars, a creature who could eventually discover the extraordinary process of evolution that filled His earth with so much life."5 Certainly a divine or semi-divine creator could be considered an experimenter and Miller clearly transfers God's role as experimenter and creator over to natural selection.

Evolution is no experimenter, of course, but this mistaken personification of a natural process should not detour us from other criticisms of his position. If a computer program generating random phrases did somehow produce "METHINKS IT IS LIKE A WEASEL," the phrase would be an unintended purposeless result as much as the dropping of a potted plant out of a window, and the dirt mysteriously spelling out the weasel phrase, would create an unintended result of a process without purpose. If evolution did generate life capable of thinking about God, it

would not be out of purpose because evolution is not, by nature, a purposeful, directed process, as Miller admits. It would be entirely accidental and a Divine Creator would no more take credit for it than the potted-plant dropper would take credit for the accidental creation of the weasel dirt phrase.

The dilemma Miller finds himself in reveals itself in the odd conjunction of ideas he brings together in an argument which, unfortunately, reveals more fallacies than logic. Notice the various ideas strung together here:

Obviously, few religious people find it problematical that their own personal existence might not have been preordained by God, that they might not be here but for the decisions of their parents or the chance events that brought them together. But strangely, some of the very same people find it inconceivable that the biological existence of our species could have been subject to exactly the same forces. If we can see God's will in the flow of history and the circumstances of our daily lives, we can certainly see it in the currents of natural history. **6**

Certainly there is a degree of randomness in the creation of a human by his or her parents. The sperm and egg necessary for the beginning of life might join and then again they might not. We must agree, however, that sexual intercourse increases the chances of a child being produced, tilting the odds of that outcome in pregnancy's favor, and certainly there are little other forces shaping that possibility than the actions of the prospective parents. Yet, Miller compares the outcomes of the parents' actions to that of evolution where many possible outcomes are possible. I credit my origin to my parents but I do not credit or claim that in any way the course of evolution somehow brought about my parents' existence and then my own. I claim no divine guidance for the production of myself, through evolution, although God may know me and have interacted with me somehow after my birth.

This is not the least of the problems with Miller's arguments. He relies primarily on appeal to authorities and assumes that because the public believes God desires their existence and works to achieve their existence, it must be so. Yet, Miller does not accept the belief of the religious when they doubt evolution. Perhaps if they cannot be relied upon to have a correct opinion on the truth of evolution, they cannot be trusted to have a correct opinion on what is or is not preordained by God. This possibility is not taken up by Miller.

To conclude, I find much wrong with Miller's reasoning as far as how he tries to reconcile evolution and creationism. His problem lies in the contradiction between a directed end product and a random undirected process and I don't believe any reconciliation is possible. To cling to some theory of divine creative action, Miller must adopt some nonrandom, directed process or action by God. Such a theory is found in young-earth creationism or any creationism that embraces divine creative actions. *LSI*

## Notes

1 .Kenneth Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution*, (New York, Cliff St., 1999)

2. Ibid, p. 233-234

3. Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design*, (New York, Norton, 1987)

4. The "head monkey" is the part of the computer program that compares the phrase generated by the monkey to the target phrase and such a head monkey is absent in natural selection, as creationists point out when they criticize Dawkins.

5. Miller, p. 238-239

6. Ibid, p. 239