

Evolution by Design?

Exploring an Evolution-Compatible Natural Theology

The multifaceted evidence for common descent, a single tapestry of life, has convinced most biologists since Darwin. I believe that this evidence has become stronger in the genomics era. In this talk I explore what can be said about design arguments in light of the genomic evidence and purported counter-examples, and propose some ways forward for Christian scientists and apologists. In particular, I suggest a framework of ‘fine-tuning’ as helpful for both considering evolutionary theory from within a Christian worldview and introducing people to the coherence of this worldview.

Zachary Ardern is a postdoctoral researcher and junior group leader in bacterial evolutionary genomics based in Munich, where he is a member of an international church. He has a background in biology and philosophy. Zachary studied for his PhD in New Zealand and completed his thesis on the theory and analysis of experimental evolution in 2016. In his spare time he is active in organising and giving apologetics talks in various settings, from churches and IFES student events to skeptics’ groups.

I. Design Arguments

A. Design arguments and design intuitions in natural theology

B. The structure of design arguments

1. The core insight

2. Example – cosmological fine-tuning

3. Design arguments as conditional/hypothetical

II. Common Descent and Genomics

A. Of mousekind and mankind

B. But what about ...?

III. Evolution-Compatible Natural Theological Arguments

A. Fine-tuning in evolutionary history

B. Fine-tuning in ‘initial conditions’

C. Fine-tuning in evolutionary parameters

IV. Conclusion

A. The “too complex” objection

B. Strengthening the design intuition

Suggested Readings:

Scientific:

Wagner, A. (2012). The role of randomness in Darwinian evolution. *Philosophy of Science*.

Ilardo, M. et al. (2015). Extraordinarily adaptive properties of the genetically encoded amino acids. *Scientific Reports*.

Bartonek, L. et al. (2020) Frameshifting preserves key physicochemical properties of proteins. *PNAS*.

Theological/Philosophical:

Kojonen, E. The Intelligent Design Debate and the Temptation of Scientism.