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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Are we Alone?

From: Dennis Stacy <dstacy@texas.net>
Date: Sat, 13 Nov 1999 15:07:49 -0600
Fwd Date: Sun, 14 Nov 1999 09:40:48 -0500
Subject: Re: Are we Alone?

>Subject: Re: Are we Alone?
>From: Mark Cashman <mcashman@ix.netcom.com>
>Date: Fri, 12 Nov 1999 18:17:01 -0500
>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>

>>From: Graeme Best <graamebest@hotmail.com>
>>To: updates@globalserve.net
>>Subject: Re: Are we Alone?
>>Date: Fri, 12 Nov 1999 03:33:47 EST

>>Paul Davies article in Melbourne Age

>>But even if life obligingly pops up on other earth-like planets,
>>there is no known law that compels it to develop in the
>>direction of intelligence. Evolution is ruled by blind chance.
>>The popular notion that life emerges from the slime and then
>>strives for advancement has no scientific basis.

>Neither does the above author's notion that evolution is ruled
>by "blind chance". Evolution is the cumulative selection of
>natural variation. Every evolutionary model leads to organisms
>of greater complexity over time. This strongly suggests the
>potential for the evolution of intelligence in any evolutionary
>system.

>Mark Cashman

Mark,

Are you calling Paul Davies a liar?

Just joking!

But for those on the list who may not know who he is, Davies is presently Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Adelaide, South Australia, and the author of more than 20 books, including About Time, Are We Alone? and The Last Three Minutes, several of them bestsellers. He won the 1995 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

That said, a couple of quick comments. In his article in The Anomalist 5 referenced earlier, Mike Davis summarized Darwinian evolution under a table called "Earth as a Closed System (Old Axiomatic Framework)." Newton's Guarantee and Lyell's Principle are also summarized, but let's concentrate on the summary of Darwin as follows:

a) Biological evolution follows Lyell's gradualistic pace of environmental

evolution. "Nature never progresses by leaps."

- b) Extinction and speciation, as a result, are uniformitarian in scale and rate. Natural selection fine-tunes adaptation.
- c) Evolution, therefore, has a subtle, progressive logic.

This seems to be saying pretty much what you're saying above.

The picture changes dramatically, however, when the Earth is viewed as an open system, resulting in Davis's New Axiomatic Framework. In this table the section on some of the latest thinking about evolution is found under the heading, "Vernadsky's Legacy (Gaia dances with Shiva)," where we find the following:

- a) The biosphere is adapted, via the evolution of biological cooperation, to chaotic crises of its planetary environment. Nature usually proceeds by leaps.
- b) Mass-extinction events are non-Darwinian factories of natural selection. At its extremes, evolution is a punctuated equilibrium between autonomous dynamics of environmental and genetic change.
- c) Natural history, like planetary history, is characterized by its irreversible and unpredictable contingency.

Put politely: Shit happens and on a grand scale.

Lyell and Darwin subsumed the Earth as a sort of peaceful paradise (or closed system) in which life (and evolution) simply went about its merry way, resulting in ever higher and complex lifeforms.

Increasingly, that appears not to be the case.

New evidence is suggesting that not only does evolution not take place in an Earthly vacuum, but that external inputs (in the form of the occasional, largescale disaster) act as necessary impetuses for reaching the next level -- provided, of course, that you aren't killed in the process.

This is what is meant when Davies, Davis, Gould and others speak of blind chance and contingency. You can't guarantee when and to what degree the external influences are going to arrive, or enter into the overall, local equation.

In fact, I find an interesting parallel here with the story of Adam and Eve. Would life evolve in a perfect paradise of constant temperature and no stress, etc., or would you need to have your butt kicked into a changing world in order to grow? Metaphorically speaking, of course.

Anyway, I don't know what models of evolution you're looking at, but you might try some of the newer ones.

Or maybe even an older one...

Here's what Charles Fort had to say about Darwinism, circa 1919, in *The Book of the Damned*:

The fittest survive.

What is meant by the fittest?

Not the strongest; not the cleverest --

Weakness and stupidity everywhere survive.

There is no way of determining fitness except in that a thing does survive.

"Fitness," then, is only another name for "survival".

Darwinism: That survivors survive.

Fort, ever the crusty curmudgeon!

But at least he recognized the role contingency, or blind chance, plays in evolution.

Dennis Stacy
<http://www.anomalist.com>

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