Does Intelligent Design make predictions?

Critics of the scientific viability of ID argue that it fails to provide that essential element of all true scientific theories – predictability. They argue that because we cannot use it to make specific predictions, which may then be either verified or falsified through observation and/or experiment, it cannot qualify as science, even though it might still be acceptable as philosophical or theological speculation.

Natural selection on the other hand, does furnish us with predictability and must, so the ID critics argue, be accepted as genuine science. In a very condescending tones, Australian Science Teachers Association even went so far as to suggest that ID might have a value as "teachers of science may wish to contrast it or other belief systems with scientific theories like Evolution as a means of assisting students to understand better the nature of science" [ASTA's Response on Intelligent Design].

I would argue that it is simply not true that ID lacks the power of prediction. Consider the following examples

1. **The first pulsar discovery in 1967**.

The pulses detected by radio astronomers J Bell and A Hewish were so regular that intelligent design in the form of an alien civilization was suspected [in fact, the pulsing radio source was informally named LGM-1, "LGM" standing for "Little Green Men"!]. Nevertheless, this interpretation was fairly quickly discounted owing, in part, to the constancy of the pulses. They were certainly regular, but they did not carry any actual information as one might expect a genuine alien signal to do. Suppose that the pulses had come in bursts with the following pattern -- --- ----- -------, then a longer pause, followed by a repeat of the pattern. This would quickly be recognized as the set of the first four prime numbers and it would be very difficult to explain except in terms of intelligence.

Clearly, astronomers back in '67 at least covertly applied this test to the pulsed radio source. If it was the result of intelligence, further scrutiny should reveal increased evidence of design; some 'message' over and above the mere regularity of the pulses. If this could not be found (as, in fact, it was not) the chances of the source being the work of 'LGM' diminished.

2. **Patterns on Mars**.

There have been two major assertions of design on Mars; the (in)famous 'canals' of Percival Lowell and the more recent 'face' picked up on Viking imagery.

In each case, more accurate imagery revealed a less convincing appearance of design. The 'canals' (which looked very artificial on Lowell's drawings) broke up into strings of dots in the best Earth-bound observations and vanished completely into a random scatter of craters and similar features in the images obtained by spacecraft.

Similarly, the 'Mars face' looked convincing to some enthusiasts in the initial, and rather fuzzy, Viking images, but likewise dissolved into random markings on later images of higher quality and resolution.

In each case, the sceptics of the design explanations of Lowell's canals and the 'face supporters' predicted that this is exactly what would happen. The supporters of Lowell's canals and the 'face', on the other hand, effectively predicted that further evidence of higher quality would show the features to

increasingly resemble known artefacts. In bother instances, the predictions of the sceptics were validated and the design inference for these features rejected.

From these examples, and others of similar nature, I argue that we can make a general assertion that an instance of genuine design will become increasingly apparent as more data is amassed. When applied to the situation involving the alleged design of biological structures, I think that the ID hypothesis can be used to predict the following:

1. As understanding of the structure of the DNA molecule increases, the percentage of apparent 'junk DNA' will decrease. That is to say, much of what now appears to be useless DNA will be found to have some purpose.

2. Nano-scale biological structures will be increasingly found to reveal 'design-like' structures and functions.

In other words, just as increasingly detailed scrutiny of the first pulsar, the Martian canals and the face on Mars distinguished between the predictions of the ID and non-ID explanations of these phenomena, so a similarly detailed scrutiny of biological systems – especially at the molecular level – will likewise determine whether ID or random process is at work here also.

Unlike the former instances, the trend in biology appears to be more consistent with the predictions of intelligent design. The real test will now be to see if future research supports or reverses this trend.

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