

From a speech by Daniel Dennett March 2006:

“The late Steve Gould was really right when he called Richard and me Darwinian fundamentalists. And I want to say what a Darwinian fundamentalist is. A Darwinian fundamentalist is one who recognizes that either you shun Darwinian evolution altogether, or you turn the traditional universe upside down and you accept that mind, meaning, and purpose are not the cause but the fairly recent effects of the mechanistic mill of Darwinian algorithms. It is the unexceptioned view that mind, meaning, and purpose are not the original driving engines, but recent effects that marks, I think, the true Darwinian fundamentalist.

How can such heartless culling produce the magnificent designs that we see around us? It seems just about impossible that such a simple mechanical sieve could produce such amazing design in the biosphere.

Francis Crick called Orgel's Second Rule. "Evolution is cleverer than you are."

Again and again evolutionists, molecular biologists, biologists in general, see some aspect of nature which seems to them to be sort of pointless or daft or doesn't make much sense - and then they later discover it's in fact an exquisitely ingenious design - it is a brilliant piece of design - that's what Francis Crick means by Orgel's Second Rule.

This might almost look like a slogan for Intelligent Design theory. Certainly Crick was not suggesting that the process of evolution was a process of intelligent design. But then how can evolution be cleverer than you are?

What you have to understand is that the process itself has no foresight; it's entirely mechanical; has no purpose - but it just happens that that very process dredges up, discovers, again and again and again, the most wonderfully brilliant designs - and these designs have a rationale. We can make sense of them. We can reverse-engineer them, and understand why they are the wonderful designs they are.

It would help us to understand how this is possible if we could break all this brilliant design work up, into processes which we could understand the rationale of, without attributing it to the reason of some intelligent designer.

These processes are arms races. Not just arms races between armies of intelligent people, but arms races between trees, and between bacteria, and between any form of life you want to name. We can watch an arms race generate more and more design, more exquisite solutions to problems, in ways that are strikingly similar to the more intelligently (but not very intelligently) guided arms races that give us the metaphor in the first place.

Of all the species on the planet, Homo sapiens, is exceptional: it is the only species that has evolved that can understand that it's one of the fruits on the tree of life.”

http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/selfish06/selfish06_index.html