Self-Organization and the Origin of Life

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Editor:

If anyone out there is still interested in current mechanistic theories about the origin of life or the workings of evolution, I suggest they read Stuart Kauffman's "Origins of Order: Self-organization and Selection in Evolution" (Oxford University Press, 1993).

It is commonly held now that most natural systems are complex, and that complex systems exhibit the property of self-organization. In "The Origins of Order" Start Kauffman outlines in great detail mechanisms of self-organization at every level of evolution, including the chemical transition from inanimate to animate. In addition, Kauffman presents a treasure chest full of projects to TEST his theories of evolutionary mechanics.

The mechanistic details explaining how evolution works are just now becoming theoretically feasible, in part through the study of complexity. Natural selection apparently works on self-organized complex sub-systems within complex systems, even at the chemical level. That explains why the details of life's origin(s) have been hard to duplicate or predict chemically.

Most likely we humans exist not because a simple thread of chemical reactions became more complex, then finally achieved self-reproduction. Kauffman suggests that many reactions among many substances, all interacting in an enormously complex system of systems and subsystems, spun their intricate webs until the heartiest persisted to interact at another level even more complex -- and so on.

Evolution is one subject in biology, an observational science just coming into its own as a theoretical science. None of its concerns have any bearing on faith in a Creator, except to inspire awe. Faith always requires a leap; answers to questions of faith are not testable. Problems arise when religious documents are read literally, as if they contained testable information instead of deeper universal truths.

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