

The Gradual Emergence of Life? – A Myth

Paper I

The Emergence of Life on Earth obviously establishes the clear and certain proof that such a Form of spectacular Change **can** occur, and actually *has* occurred in the history of the Earth. But, rather surprisingly, when you read what has been written on this matter, you are, more often than not, given a somewhat slanted description of the nature of the process. It is frequently portrayed as the result of a kind of “incessant” gradualism, which can best be described in the phrase, “Try, try and try again, until you succeed!”

It is an odd way to look at it, but underneath that easy form there lurks a position which sees Mankind as an inevitable final blossoming of the process. Of course, I may well be misinterpreting the motives of the supporters of this standpoint, but, whatever their motivations, such a characterisation is certainly incorrect, whether implicitly homocentric or not!

Certainly, there is never any overt statement that openly espouses the above characterising “phrase”. So let us take the basic position on its merits, and address the obvious sources and assumptions of that viewpoint.

There are many experimental fragments, such as those conducted on different occasions by Miller and by Oparin, which are always enthusiastically taken up by believers in the “natural” Origin of Life on Earth, as un-dismissible proof that such a transition had indeed occurred, but they thought that the overall process was still one of gradual, step-by-step change: that it gradually emerged!

It was as if inanimate Matter was “trying” to produce Life, but on getting a few moves towards it was repeatedly stymied and pushed back again by natural, disruptive Events. The story became one of *multiple and various* “failed” attempts over vast periods of time, which separately and differently moved the situation forwards, but at different times and in different directions. The final “fulfilment” could only be when these things finally came together **simultaneously**, so that they could *blossom* into a co-ordinated, self-maintaining centre of Life, brought about by quite normal processes, but finally acting together.

No special processes were involved, merely the working through of all possibilities.

Now, this is a nice fairy tale, but it is a myth!

To portray it accurately, I must concede that some aspects are indeed true, while others are certainly not. It turns Life into an eventually inevitable, though gradual, halting and chance process. I’m afraid that this is not only too simplistic, but also quite definitely incorrect.

The essence of any Emergence is that it dramatically and irretrievably *changes its own Context*.

In the version of gradualism described above, NO mention is made of any speedy and dramatic overturn.

For, faced with an unchanging Context, a miracle like the Origin of Life could *never* occur.

The version of “probability” used in explaining how the impossible happens (also used in Quantum Theory) has **the impossible** ultimately and definitely happening – “but rarely!”

But, that is simply rubbish!

Ultimately, the most significant Event in the History of Matter on Earth is put down to Chance!

Things that are many billions to one as probabilities, especially as they are so significant, simply **do not happen**.

NOTE: Let us just see what is being put to us about such Events.

Something is a billion to one against it happening (though how the odds are calculated amazes me), and for 999,999,999 chance happenings, it doesn’t occur/

Then, on the one billionth chance, the odds have been exhausted, so it does happen, there and then.

What?

Someone is keeping count, Are they? And they throw a switch “as soon as its legal to do so”, and the exceptional case occurs?

Such an “explanation” is NO explanation!

It could only mean anything in an entirely mechanistic set of situations, all of which are absolutely equally likely to happen, and with exactly the same causes. Is that ever likely to be true of anything?

Of course not! When things happen which don't usually, there is ALWAYS an exceptional reason which causes it to happen. The “odds have just expired” is never a reason a reason for it to be so: it NEVER pertains!

To use “probabilities as explanation”, is an old and well-worn and illegitimate trick.

The wonders of Reality are by this argument ultimately put down to no cause at all! What a cop out!

It may well be an improvement on the “will of God”, but that isn't saying much, because it doesn't explain any real process at all.

And, let us be clear, Emergences, and particularly the Origin of Life, is too important to be “fobbed off” with a sentence or two of the ilk of the above lame-brained conception. The method is reprehensible because it is NOT an explanation. It is an Excuse for having NO Explanation..

But how is such an impasse ever reached?

The error comes from the basic assumptions behind current scientific methodology, which culminate in that banker of explanation – Reductionism. With this “General Theory”, individual fragments of Reality can be explained in terms of more basic laws, and these in turn by the ones that lie even deeper in the sequence of causality.

Taken to the limit, all laws are assumed to form a continuous hierarchy from irreducibly, fundamental elements and laws, all the way up to Human Consciousness. This banker is nonsense, for beyond many small separate and finite spans, it can NEVER be taken through the absolutely necessary Emergent Levels that are involved.

It is a cosy assumption because scientists believe that future generations will be constantly adding to the store of separate laws, and **filling the gaps**, until a “full set” is available which will clearly explain Everything.

You may have heard of the “very nearly there” Theory of Everything, promised by the String Theorists and their ilk. Such a Theory is Impossible, because NOTHING can be produced to directly deliver all the Levels of Reality. Such a conception is Pure Reductionism, and completely fails to understand the nature of Evolving Reality, and its many *created Levels*.

Neither do they understand the crucial difference between “dependent” and “determined”. Basic laws may underlie others. The Superstructure may depend on the Base. BUT, it is NOT **determined** by the base, but by the context and laws of its **Current Level**, which CANNOT be reduced to lower Levels at all.

Such erroneous simplifications of causal explanation make a caricature of it, and rationalise it into a crude, solve-everything “promise”. The profundity of the evolution of Matter is simply NOT understood when evoking this cure-all.

So, though Reality IS material and (someday) explicable, it does NOT operate so mechanistically.

Reality is no mere bag of multiple applications of universal Laws, but, on the contrary, it is a creative producer of dramatically new Emergent Levels, each of which multiplies the possibilities BEYOND the total span of all inferior Level laws, by creating entirely new possibilities, meaningful ONLY at the new Level.

To have any hope of ever tackling the most important changes in the Evolution of Matter, we HAVE to change our basic assumptions and methodology. We have to address Change itself, and even further deal with cataclysm – not merely as degenerative break-up, but also as creative opportunity too. We have to see how, what would be truly impossible by Chance alone, has its odds *successively and dramatically shortened* by significant changes in the constraining Context of a situation.

That is the direction to investigate!

To be continued

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