

## Holy Humbug!

I hesitate to unravel James Kiefer's theistic confusions on limited data, i.e., Professor Veatch's review of Kiefer's lecture. But on the whole I think the likelihood of clarification is greater than the likelihood of greater confusion.

Readers who attempted to understand Veatch's summary will, no doubt, have been puzzled. Why is it supposed, by Kiefer and Veatch, that "natural selection can account for the adaptation of various things for various purposes, but never for purposes of knowledge?" There is a hint of how this not-so-rare argument is supposed to work in the startling claim that, "only if our minds are designed for knowledge, would there be the slightest reason to suppose that our minds could yield genuine knowledge."

Here is at least one version of how the argument is supposed to work: We know that our senses are informative independently of having any theory about the natural selection of informative sense organs. Thus, the explanation for our senses being informative cannot be that they developed through natural selection. But if not through natural selection and not through "mere coincidence," then through the Diety (or visitors from Mars?). This argument presumes that if one knows something (that the senses are informative) without knowing the truth of some particular historical explanation for the known fact, then that particular historical explanation is not the correct explanation. But this is a silly presumption. And it defeats the theist's own purpose. For one could just as easily argue: We know that our senses are informative independently of having any theory of God's purposes. Thus, the explanation for our senses being informative cannot be theistic. If "mere coincidence" is also ruled

out, then the explanation must be natural selection. Of course, neither of these arguments are any good. Knowing that our senses are informative has nothing to do with picking the historical explanation for this fact.

Readers interested in examining this version of the argument from design should read the clever exposition in the first edition of Richard Taylor's *Metaphysics*.

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After reading Veatch's review of Kiefer's *Objectivism and Theism*, I can only deplore retroactively the appearance of this obscurantist tract in your catalogue. Kiefer's argument for the existence of a God is based on the assertion that "knowledge . . . cannot be accounted for as having come about by [an evolutionary process cumulating the effects of natural selection and] chance." This assertion is ambiguous, meaning either that "if we assume that the human mind is a product of evolution, then we cannot prove that it is capable of knowledge," or that "chance and natural selection cannot result in an organized informational system capable of acquiring knowledge." The first of these is true, but irrelevant, since knowledge is axiomatic in the Aristotelian sense. One cannot prove that his mind is capable of knowledge, since the axiom of knowledge is logically antecedent to the possibility of proof. The second is demonstrably false, since the evolution of organization out of chance is a well understood natural process. (See, for example, W. R. Ashby's *Design for a Brain* or any of a dozen technical books dealing with the theory of self-organizing systems.) Kiefer's argument has other problems. For example, how would his assertion that a mind capable of knowledge can only result from design apply to his alleged God? Design requires knowledge, so if Kiefer's assertion were correct, the mind of our putative designer would have had to be designed in its turn, etc. It is difficult to find a solution more believable than an infinite regression of Gods, each designed by a predecessor.

Surely, the idea of a God traveling backward in time in order to design his own mind boggles the mind of a mere human . . .

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I must confess, I do not understand wherein lies the validity of James Kiefer's argument that man's conceptual abilities cannot be accounted for solely by natural selection. Natural selection does not mean things happen solely by chance. To assume that ignores the cybernetic relationship which exists between any organism and its environment. The development of the nervous system occurred in bits and pieces over millions of years; we did not all sprout eyes when Darwin stepped forward and said, "Let there be sight!" Nor did we just start thinking when Ayn Rand stepped forward and said, "Man is a rational being" (or whoever it was who said it first).

The structure of the human mind which allows man cognitive abilities developed in stages just as did the structure of the minds of lower animals which allowed them to integrate senses into percepts. And the force of nature which "directed" this development was not some god but the conditions of existence under which we live, i.e., reality.

While no other animal on this planet has developed conceptual faculties as has man, we can see the beginnings of these faculties in higher-order primates such as chimpanzees. This on the basis of recent experimental evidence from Yerkes.

No Athenian was ever independent of the length of Procrustes bed; no man was ever independent of the natural forces existing in the universe. (Note to the uninitiated: this is not a deterministic statement, nor does it have anything to do with the issue of free will). And the theory of natural selection is manifested in the laws of genetics is fully capable of explaining the development of any physical structure in the human body. James Kiefer is in error.

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