



## Dialogue: Response

*What is the Logic of Functional Organization?*

tainty subject ultimate reality to mundane scrutiny. Neither design nor uncertainty is descriptive or proscriptive for God or for the human race. Since design can be detected, the question remains: Does the detection of design amid the detection of chance, uncertainty, and relativity tip the scales toward belief in the God of the Bible? While the design movement is of great interest for many Christians, design detection will probably not tip the scales for an unbeliever because a naturalistic world view gives philosophical uncertainty equal footing. ◇

# What is the Logic of Functional Organization?

**Organization directed to function [is] the essential feature of living organisms.**

Thorson has argued that “God and his mysterious agency in creation are not subject to mundane scrutiny; knowledge of God depends entirely on God’s sovereign and gracious choice to be known personally” (p. 12). This seems to me entirely consistent with experience—“God’s agency in creation” is readily recognized by those with faith, and routinely denied by those without it—and with what Scripture teaches both positively (Hebrews 11:3) and negatively (Romans 1:18–20) on the subject. Creatively knowledge of creation is therefore necessarily restricted, and “scientific naturalism” is an apt description of an approach that respects the limited scope of unregenerate rationality.

But as Thorson says, such matters are likely to remain academic unless they have real consequences for science, and he proposes that “we need a new ‘naturalistic’ biological science which is more than the application of physical science to biosystems” (p. 13).

Thorson argues that what distinguishes the biological world is that it is shaped by purpose:

What makes biological systems distinctive (and transcends purely physical description) is that they embody, at every level from a whole organism down to the molecular structure of the cell and its constituent parts and processes, a logic controlling achievement of certain tasks or functions. This abstract logic (rather than the causal logic of physical mechanisms) is what explains the particular organization of physical/chemical structure present (p. 15).

Thorson is, I believe, exactly right in emphasizing *organization directed to function* as the essential feature of living organisms. A simple thought experiment is instructive. Consider at what stage of biological complexity “life” is identifiable. Molecules themselves—even biological macromolecules and their assemblies—are not “alive” (references to the “native” conformation of a functional molecule notwithstanding); nor are individual organelles (filaments, vesicles, membranes, etc.) “alive.” But when large numbers of such components are *organized* in appropriate ways to form a cell, the features we identify as “life” emerge from the interactions of the components. The goal of cell biology is to discover the “logic” that produces this functional organization. ◇

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