

Letters

A Tale of Two Randomnesses

Craig Story's "The God of Christianity and the G.O.D. of Immunology" (PSCF 61, no. 4 [2009]: 221–32) states that ID proponents such as Lee Strobel and William Dembski categorically reject the possibility of randomness being involved in the ordering of the universe (producing "fine tuning" and "information"), while Story demonstrates "randomness with a purpose" in the human immune system. Story asserts that, "People whose conception of God allows for *no such randomness*" are forced into the horns of a dilemma where ID proponents must "either reject their God or ... ignore these observations of the natural world."

Story's point is a valid one if, first, the construction of his argument is sound and, second, his use of terms is unequivocal—but, in my opinion, he fails to meet the second criterion, particularly with his use of "randomness." Consider how he uses this term in the following segments from the article (*italics are mine*).

Story asserts that his goal is "to clearly demonstrate that a specific type of randomness *is an essential component* of some biological systems." At the conclusion of his article he adds, "... that from randomness in the world of biology *arise* the many good things we enjoy."

Closely scrutinizing the use of the term "randomness" in these two sentences above reveal a clear equivocation in the consequent meaning that is not made explicit by Story. These two uses can be understood thusly:

1. Randomness that *is generated within* an organized system that serves a purpose for that system (randomness as an *effect*).
2. Randomness that *gives rise to* purposeful systems (randomness as a *cause*).

In his explication of the G.O.D.'s function within the immune system, Story rightfully utilizes the first definition—randomness as an important component of a biological system that is an *effect* of a random generating machine within the immune factory for an ultimate purpose. Where he makes his error is in making the non sequitur that since randomness can be utilized as an *effect* to meet a goal, that randomness, *per se*, can therefore act as a *cause* and give rise to purposeful systems independent of any causal entity (i.e., standard evolutionary origins theory). Nowhere in his article does Story build a case for unguided randomness (randomness outside the governance of a demonstrable controlling entity) giving rise to anything purposeful—this is simply assumed.

It is my guess that most ID proponents would have no problem conceding Story's assertion that "specific types of randomness" are "essential components of some biological systems," in line with the first meaning of randomness, but would, correctly in my view, object to Story's imputation of causal ability to randomness, the second meaning used.

Story creates a false dilemma as his argument contains equivocal terms, and hence ID proponents can both keep

their God and their affirmation of reality—intelligent agents can utilize randomness to serve a purpose, but randomness itself has never been seen to give rise to intelligent agency nor is there any good *nonmetaphysical* reason to think that it can.

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How Far Can Science Take Us?

I found Craig M. Story's article on "The God of Christianity and the G.O.D. of Immunology: Chance, Complexity, and God's Action in Nature" (PSCF 61, no. 4 [2009]: 221–32) to be very controversial. I will briefly focus on only three points of philosophical interest.

Central to Story's article is the notion of randomness. He lists various distinct senses by which the notion of randomness is understood. But he defines his version of randomness as "biological randomness," that is to say, "extreme unpredictability." Story then attempts to show how an instance of biological randomness can be justified in immunology, which also underlies the very process of the rearrangement of antibody gene segments which form functional genes. In light of this, once the existence of randomness is accepted, Story thinks that we can show how the sovereign, all-knowing, and all-powerful God can exercise control over pure randomness. In fact, solving the problem of how God exercises complete sovereignty over pure randomness is what Story hopes his article succeeds in showing. Throughout his article, Story appeals to science to make his case. Here follow my objections.

First, Story conflated first-order discipline with second-order discipline. For instance, biology is a first-order discipline that studies living organisms. Put another way, biology does not take itself as an object of its own study. Such is the task of a second-order discipline, that is, philosophy. Taken in this sense, it is philosophy that studies biology, and the converse is not true. Thus, contrary to Story's claim, to say that God exercises control over randomness is not an empirical claim at all, and thus it can hardly be established on the basis of science. Rather, such a claim is strictly a philosophical thesis that requires a philosophical justification as opposed to a scientific one. If I am right here, then Story's attempt to resolve the problem of how God maintains sovereignty over randomness on a scientific basis remains a non sequitur. In my view, science is inherently unable to resolve such issues. We will do fine in leaving such issues to philosophy/theology. Yet I am not denying here that some sort of integrative approach can be taken between science and philosophy/theology. But that is another matter.

Second, Story mistakenly assumes that because *x* is random from the point of view of humans, therefore *x* is equally random from God's perspective. But such is unwarranted extrapolation which amounts to a fallacious argument: because I cannot see it, therefore it must be the case that God also cannot see it. Even if it may be true that for all that scientists know, that there is such a thing called biological randomness, such an account is only part