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JERRY BERGMAN DEBATES P.Z. MYERS

FOLLOWING THE DEBATE, CREATIONIST ROSS OLSON POSTED THE LETTER BELOW ON THE WEB. MY REPLIES FOLLOW HIS STATEMENTS.

Thanks to you all for keeping the debate on a courteous intellectual level.

(NEO: MAYBE YOU MISSED THE END OF THE DEBATE WHEN BERGMAN, IN DESPERATION, TRIED TO PLAY THE "HITLER = EVOLUTION" CARD?)

Obviously not all the questions were addressed but the event illustrated that it can be extremely valuable to do so.

Dr. Myers, you have a unique position, with your immensely popular blog, to change the whole complexion of the discussion. Remember how you treated Dr. Bergman on your blog?

(NEO: NOW ROSS QUOTES MYERS):

"On Monday, 16 November, I'm going to be doing a debate. I hate debates, but I've been dragged into this one. It's being promoted by the local creationist loons and CASH (NEO: CAMPUS ATHEISTS, SKEPTICS, AND HUMANISTS), and I'd like to see a good turnout from the sensible, scientific, godless community. I'll be arguing with a loud clown, Jerry Bergman, on "Should Intelligent Design Be Taught in the Schools?" I think you can guess which side I'm going to be on".

(NEO: RETURNING TO ROSS' EMAIL):

You can, by the power of example and occasional criticism of overzealous followers, turn the blog into an actual forum of ideas. It would be a great contribution to the intellectual world.

(NEO: PZ MYERS' WEBSITE "PHARYNGULA" IS A GREAT CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTELLECTUAL WORLD).

To be addressed is your claim that evolution adds information. That needs to be supported.

(NEO: THE ADDING OF INFORMATION BY EVOLUTION IS NOT A CLAIM MADE BY PZ MYERS - IT IS AN INDISPUTABLE FACT OF BIOLOGY - AND IT HAS BEEN MORE THAN ADEQUATELY "SUPPORTED").

Your closing remarks about evolutionary research into the beak changes of Darwin's Finches need to be answered with the point that they are still finches and the changes cycle with changing environmental conditions.

(NEO: AND THEY WILL REMAIN FINCHES FOR QUITE A WHILE LONGER UNTIL, EVENTUALLY, THEY ARE NO LONGER FINCHES.

CHANGES DO OCCUR AS A RESULT OF ADAPTATION TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS - EXACTLY AS EVOLUTION PREDICTS. ODDLY, THAT IS PREDICTED NOWHERE IN THE BIBLE).

The only point at which the crowd got rowdy was with the mention of evolution's influence on Hitler.

(NEO: OBVIOUS LIES WILL TEND TO DO THAT TO "EDUCATED" CROWDS. BUT NOT TO WORRY, THAT SAME STORY WILL ELICIT ONLY APPROVING NODS IN CHURCH).

Actually, that issue is not solved by shouting because there is a strong case that the desire to improve the race leads to eugenic and ethnic cleansing policies.

(NEO: ETHNIC CLEANSING HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IMPROVING THE RACE - IT HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH ELIMINATING ANOTHER RACE. AS A STAUNCH BIBLE BELIEVER, YOU SHOULD BE VERY FAMILIAR WITH THAT CONCEPT - AS YOUR GOD PRACTICED IT - OFTEN).

Indeed, your claim that morality comes from our culture needs to answer the question, "What if my culture is the Mafia?"

(NEO: WELL, LET'S LOOK AND MAFIA CULTURE AND SEE. IF YOUR CULTURE IS THE MAFIA, THEN YOU WILL PROBABLY GROW UP BELIEVING THAT IT IS OKAY TO TAKE MONEY FROM THE POOR, AND PHYSICALLY ENFORCE YOUR WILL UPON THE HELPLESS. PRETTY MUCH THE SAME, AS CHRISTIAN CULTURE WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT).

Other evolutionary apologists

(NEO: WAIT, I HAVE TO INTERRUPT: THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS "EVOLUTIONARY APOLOGISTS." SCIENCE DOESN'T REQUIRE "APOLOGISTS" BECAUSE IT IS BASED ON PROVABLE EVIDENCE. APOLOGISTS ARE ONLY NECESSARY IN RELIGION).

have candidly pointed out that the only morality that can come out of evolution is that I leave my genes, as many of them as possible, to the next generation.

(NEO: MORALITY DOES NOT COME OUT OF EVOLUTION. EVOLUTION IS A SCIENTIFIC THEORY EXPLAINING THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE ON EARTH. MORALITY IS ANOTHER TOPIC).

Also, a truly interactive academic blog would allow posting of the studies on the academic success of students exposed to both evolution and intelligent design. You have consistently claimed that those students who do not get pure evolution will fail, but without offering any experimental or observational data.

(NEO: ACTUALLY, I THINK YOU WOULD BE BETTER OFF NOT ASKING FOR A COMPARISON OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS BETWEEN STUDENTS WHO BASE THEIR BELIEFS ON SCIENCE AND THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN GHOSTS).

And to claim that evidence against evolution does not represent evidence for intelligent design needs closer analysis.

(NEO: YOU GOT THAT ONE RIGHT. THAT CLAIM DOES NEED CLOSER ANALYSIS BECAUSE THERE IS NO EVIDENCE AGAINST EVOLUTION).

There is a logical dichotomy involved. Life either has a natural origin or not. If not, then the origin must come from outside natural mechanisms. You can claim that we just don't know, but while waiting, need to entertain the possibility that there is a cause outside of nature.

(NEO: WHY DO SCIENTISTS NEED TO ENTERTAIN THAT POSSIBILITY WHEN, YOU GUYS NOT ONLY ENTERTAIN THE POSSIBILITY - BUT BELIEVE IT TO BE TRUE WITH ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY?

SCIENTISTS CAN ENTERTAIN THE POSSIBILITY WHEN SOME EVIDENCE IS PRESENTED TO INDICATE THAT THERE MIGHT BE A POSSIBILITY: SO FAR - NONE HAS).

To say there can be no such thing is not a scientific statement or even a logical one but an a priori elimination of one whole field of inquiry.

(NEO: THAT PRETTY MUCH DESCRIBES YOUR POSITION ON EVOLUTION, DOESN'T IT?).

Your redefinition of vestigial organs as reduced function may get some traction but is not the way they were presented 100 years ago,

(NEO: BERGMAN WAS THE ONE WHO "REDEFINED" VESTIGIAL ORGANS. SINCE THAT ACCUSATION IS TRUE AND YOU CANNOT DEFEND AGAINST IT, YOUR ONLY OPTION IS TO TRY TO DISTRACT EVERYONE FROM THAT FACT BY THROWING THE ACCUSATION BACK AT MYERS. GO TO ANY TEXTBOOK OR INTERNET SCIENCE SITE, AND VESTIGIAL ORGANS ARE CLEARLY DEFINED, AS USED BY MYERS.

IT IS IRRELEVANT WHAT WAS PRESENTED 100 YEARS AGO. WHAT IS RELEVANT IS TODAY'S DEFINITION. IF THEY WERE DEBATING DURING WORLD WAR 1, THEN YOU "MIGHT" HAVE A POINT - BUT I DOUBT IT).

but there is no doubt that "Junk DNA' was clearly touted as evolutionary leftovers and delayed the search for function, which was predicted by Intelligent design.

(NEO: WHAT EVIDENCE DO YOU HAVE THAT THE SEARCH FOR FUNCTION WAS DELAYED?

EXACTLY WHAT ARE YOU CLAIMING WAS "PREDICTED" BY INTELLIGENT DESIGN?)

Also, you have not only personally attacked Dr. Bergman, you have allowed your followers to misrepresent his qualifications by focusing on the institution granting one of his PhDs. Here is a CV:

(NEO: I REMOVED THE BORING LIST OF "APPEALS TO AUTHORITY" THAT HIS LIST WAS MEANT TO CONVEY. LET'S AGREE THAT HE HAS SPENT A LOT OF TIME AS A "STUDENT" - BUT HE LACKS THE ONE DEGREE HE REALLY NEEDS: THE MASTERS DEGREE IN CRITICAL THINKING).

If your case is strong, students will be enriched by being allowed to see it interact with the opposition.

(NEO: FUNNY YOU MENTION THAT - THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE DEBATE).

And your call for punishment of those who reject the ruling paradigm conflicts with the view of science as growing and self correcting.

(NEO: IF BY PUNISHMENT, YOU MEAN FAILING GRADES, THEN NO, IT DOESN'T CONFLICT WITH THE VIEW OF SCIENCE AS GROWING AND SELF-CORRECTING. ALL CLASSES WORK THAT WAY. DON'T TAKE MY WORD FOR IT - ASK BERGMAN, HE SPENT MOST OF HIS LIFE SITTING IN CLASSES).

How can purveyors of new ideas work hard to establish them if they are not allowed to do so?

(NEO: NEW IDEAS ARE "ESTABLISHED" BY EVIDENCE - NOT BY PURVEYORS OF IGNORANCE.

BESIDES, YOU HAVE NO NEW IDEAS - YOUR TEXTBOOK IS 2,000 YEARS OLD).

Thomas Kuhn in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions pointed out that it is very difficult for those entrenched in the establishment to change and paradigm shifts come with generational revolutions by those whose life work and reputations are not tied to the current model.

(NEO: NONE OF THAT IS RELEVANT - "ONLY" EVIDENCE IS RELEVANT.

YOUR BELIEFS HAVE "NONE" - THAT IS WHY YOUR BELIEFS ARE IRRELEVANT, NOT BECAUSE SCIENCE IS AFRAID TO CHANGE).

Dr. Borrello, because you have participated in a debate with me, I know you are in favor of interactions and Dr. Bergman, I know you not only are in favor of dialogue but would be delighted to bring this to the next level.

(NEO: AFTER BERGMAN'S PERFORMANCE IN THIS DEBATE, IT MIGHT BE BETTER TO LET HIM RECUPERATE FOR AWHILE.

THERE IS A RULE IN PROFESSIONAL BOXING THAT WHEN A FIGHTER HAS SUFFERED A KNOCKOUT - HE CANNOT FIGHT AGAIN FOR AT LEAST 30 DAYS. IN BERGMAN'S CASE, I THINK WE SHOULD ALLOW HIM 30 "YEARS").

Because you have been willing to change in the past, you have demonstrated that data makes a difference to you and I dare say that you might even refine some of the arguments you made at the debate given the chance.

(NEO: I DON'T THINK "REFINING" HIS ARGUMENTS WILL DO MUCH GOOD. IF IT IS TRUE THAT BERGMAN IS "WILLING TO CHANGE" AND THAT "DATA MAKES A DIFFERENCE" TO HIM, HE MIGHT CONSIDER STARTING WITH LEARNING THE "LOGICAL FALLACIES." FROM THERE HE CAN ADVANCE TO OTHER AREAS OF CRITICAL THINKING, AND WHO KNOWS, HE MIGHT EVEN END UP AS A REGULAR LISTENER ON THE SKEPTIC'S GUIDE TO THE UNIVERSE).

So, Dr. Myers, are you willing to take your debate persona and transplant it to the Blogosphere?

Ross Olson

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

ENORMOUS NEW RING FOUND DISTANTLY ORBITING SATURN

THERE'S A NEW KING OF RINGS IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM: AN ENORMOUS NEW RING HAS BEEN DISCOVERED AROUND SATURN, MADE UP OF DEBRIS FROM THE GAS GIANT'S DISTANT MOON PHOEBE.

BEFORE THE DISCOVERY OF THIS MASSIVE RING — ABOUT 12.5 TIMES THE AVERAGE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE EARTH AND THE MOON IN WIDTH AND 6 TIMES THAT DISTANCE IN THICKNESS — THE LARGEST KNOWN PLANETARY RINGS WERE JUPITER'S GOSSAMER RINGS AND SATURN'S E RING.

ASTRONOMERS HAVE LONG SUSPECTED THE PRESENCE OF THIS RING, WHICH ORBITS SATURN AT A RADIUS OF ABOUT 8 MILLION MILES (13 MILLION KM) — 200 TIMES THE RADIUS OF THE PLANET ITSELF.

"THERE WERE HINTS THAT IT COULD BE THERE," SAID DOUGLAS HAMILTON OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, ONE OF THE ASTRONOMERS WHO FOUND THE RING.

ONE SUCH HINT WAS THE UNUSUAL COLORING OF SATURN'S MOON IAPETUS, WHICH HAD ONE DARK SIDE AND ONE LIGHT SIDE. SOME ASTRONOMERS SUSPECTED THAT THE DARK SIDE, WHICH LOOKED SUSPICIOUSLY SIMILAR IN COMPOSITION TO ANOTHER OF SATURN'S SATELLITE, PHOEBE, WAS ACTUALLY DEBRIS DUST FROM PHOEBE STUCK TO IAPETUS' SURFACE.

BUT ASTRONOMERS HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO DETECT IT UNTIL NOW BECAUSE, "THIS THING IS JUST IMMENSE," HAMILTON TOLD SPACE.COM. "IF YOU LOOK AT JUST A SMALL PATCH OF IT, YOU JUST SEE FUZZINESS."

HAMILTON AND HIS COLLEAGUES WERE FINALLY ABLE TO SEE THE BEHEMOTH RING WITH THE INFRARED CAPABILITY OF THE SPITZER SPACE TELESCOPE. SPITZER WAS ABLE TO DETECT THE SUNLIGHT REFLECTED BY THE TINY DARK BLACK PARTICLES. THE DISCOVERY IS DETAILED IN THE OCT. 8 ISSUE OF THE JOURNAL NATURE.

THE PARTICLES WERE LIKELY CREATED WHEN ASTEROIDS, METEORS OR OTHER BODIES COLLIDED WITH PHOEBE OVER THE EONS. WHILE SOME OF THE PARTICLES ARE SMALL ENOUGH TO DRIFT OUT OF SATURN'S GRAVITATIONAL GRASP AND INTO INTERPLANETARY SPACE, OTHERS DRIFT INWARDS TOWARD THE PLANET, WHERE SOME GET STUCK TO THE LEADING HEMISPHERE OF IAPETUS, WHICH TRAWLS THROUGH THEM. PERIODIC COLLISIONS REPLACE THE PARTICLES LOST IN THESE WAYS.

INTERESTINGLY, PHOEBE AND ITS ASSOCIATED DUST RING TRAVEL IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION OF SATURN'S OTHER RINGS AND SATELLITES.

THE TINY PARTICLES ARE EXTREMELY DIFFUSE, WITH ONLY ABOUT 20 IN EVERY CUBIC KILOMETER OF THE RING, HAMILTON SAID.

"IF YOU WERE THERE, YOU WOULDN'T KNOW YOU WERE IN A RING," HE SAID.

AND BECAUSE THE OTHER GAS GIANTS ARE KNOWN TO HAVE FAR-OUT, IRREGULAR SATELLITES LIKE PHOEBE, IT IS LIKELY THAT THEY ALSO HAVE SIMILARLY LARGE, DIFFUSE RINGS ORBITING MILLIONS OF KILOMETERS OUT.

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ABROAD

AFGHANISTAN: AMERICAN MILITARY BURNS BIBLES

MILITARY PERSONNEL THREW AWAY, AND ULTIMATELY BURNED, CONFISCATED BIBLES THAT WERE PRINTED IN THE TWO MOST COMMON AFGHAN LANGUAGES AMID CONCERN THEY WOULD BE USED TO TRY TO CONVERT AFGHANS, A DEFENSE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN SAID TUESDAY.

THE UNSOLICITED BIBLES SENT BY A CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES WERE CONFISCATED ABOUT A YEAR AGO AT BAGRAM AIR BASE IN AFGHANISTAN BECAUSE MILITARY RULES FORBID TROOPS OF ANY RELIGION FROM PROSELYTIZING WHILE DEPLOYED THERE, LT. COL. MARK WRIGHT SAID.

SUCH RELIGIOUS OUTREACH CAN ENDANGER AMERICAN TROOPS AND CIVILIANS IN THE DEVOUTLY MUSLIM NATION, WRIGHT SAID.

"THE DECISION WAS MADE THAT IT WAS A 'FORCE PROTECTION' MEASURE TO THROW THEM AWAY, BECAUSE, IF THEY DID GET OUT, IT COULD BE PERCEIVED BY AFGHANS THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT OR THE U.S. MILITARY WAS TRYING TO CONVERT MUSLIMS," WRIGHT TOLD CNN ON TUESDAY.

TROOPS AT POSTS IN WAR ZONES ARE REQUIRED TO BURN THEIR TRASH, WRIGHT SAID.

THE BIBLES WERE WRITTEN IN THE LANGUAGES PASHTO AND DARI.

THIS DECISION CAME TO LIGHT RECENTLY, AFTER THE AL JAZEERA ENGLISH NETWORK AIRED VIDEO OF A GROUP PRAYER SERVICE AND CHAPEL SERMON THAT A REPORTER SAID SUGGESTED U.S. TROOPS WERE BEING ENCOURAGED TO SPREAD CHRISTIANITY.

THE MILITARY DENIED THAT EARLIER THIS MONTH, SAYING MUCH IN THE VIDEO WAS TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT.

"THIS WAS IRRESPONSIBLE AND DANGEROUS JOURNALISM SENSATIONALIZING YEAR-OLD FOOTAGE OF A RELIGIOUS SERVICE FOR U.S. SOLDIERS ON A U.S. BASE AND INFERRING THAT TROOPS ARE EVANGELIZING TO AFGHANS," COL. GREGORY JULIAN SAID.

THE MILITARY SAYS A SOLDIER AT BAGRAM RECEIVED THE BIBLES AND DIDN'T REALIZE HE WASN'T ALLOWED TO HAND THEM OUT. IN THE AL JAZEERA VIDEO, WHICH SHOWS THE BIBLES AT THE PRAYER SERVICE, AN UNNAMED SOLDIER SAYS MEMBERS OF HIS CHURCH RAISED MONEY FOR THEM.

THE CHAPLAIN LATER CORRECTED THE SOLDIER AND CONFISCATED THE BIBLES, WRIGHT SAID.

MILITARY OFFICERS CONSIDERED SENDING THE BIBLES BACK TO THE CHURCH, HE SAID, BUT THEY WORRIED THE CHURCH WOULD TURN AROUND AND SEND THEM TO ANOTHER ORGANIZATION IN AFGHANISTAN -- GIVING THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY HAD BEEN DISTRIBUTED BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT.

THAT COULD LEAD TO VIOLENCE AGAINST TROOPS OR U.S. CIVILIANS, WRIGHT SAID.

AL JAZEERA ENGLISH, A QATAR-BASED INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE, SAID ITS REPORTERS TRIED TO GET A RESPONSE FROM MILITARY OFFICIALS FOR ITS STORY BUT WERE UNABLE TO DO SO.

THE U.S. MILITARY AIR BASE AT BAGRAM IS HOME TO THOUSANDS OF TROOPS FROM ALL BRANCHES OF THE U.S. MILITARY. THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE TROOPS DO NOT LEAVE THE BASE AND ARE IN VARIOUS SUPPORT ROLES FOR U.S. TROOPS ACROSS AFGHANISTAN.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

SAMUEL LANGHORNE CLEMENS (1835 –1910) 74 YEARS.

HE IS BETTER KNOWN BY THE PEN NAME MARK TWAIN.

HE WAS AN AMERICAN AUTHOR AND HUMORIST. TWAIN IS MOST NOTED FOR HIS NOVELS ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN, WHICH HAS SINCE BEEN CALLED THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL, AND THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER. HE IS EXTENSIVELY QUOTED. DURING HIS LIFETIME, TWAIN BECAME A FRIEND TO PRESIDENTS, ARTISTS, INDUSTRIALISTS, AND EUROPEAN ROYALTY.

TWAIN ENJOYED IMMENSE PUBLIC POPULARITY. HIS KEEN WIT AND INCISIVE SATIRE EARNED HIM PRAISE FROM BOTH CRITICS AND PEERS. WILLIAM FAULKNER CALLED TWAIN "THE FATHER OF AMERICAN LITERATURE".

"FAITH IS BELIEVING WHAT YOU KNOW AIN'T SO."

"IT AIN'T THE PARTS OF THE BIBLE THAT I CAN'T UNDERSTAND THAT BOTHER ME, IT IS THE PARTS THAT I DO UNDERSTAND."

"I AM QUITE SURE NOW THAT OFTEN, VERY OFTEN, IN MATTERS CONCERNING RELIGION AND POLITICS A MAN'S REASONING POWERS ARE NOT ABOVE THE MONKEY'S."

"THE POWER WHICH A MAN'S IMAGINATION HAS OVER HIS BODY TO HEAL IT OR MAKE IT SICK IS A FORCE WHICH NONE OF US IS BORN WITHOUT. THE FIRST MAN HAD IT, THE LAST ONE WILL POSSESS IT."

"I WAS DEAD FOR BILLIONS OF YEARS BEFORE I WAS BORN AND NEVER SUFFERED THE SLIGHTEST INCONVENIENCE FROM IT."