Which is an Illusion: Natural Selection, or DNA's Informative Language?

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Public discussions about origins tend to follow a familiar script. Academic institutions and legacy media present the evolutionary account as the only scientifically credible explanation for life's diversity, while alternative perspectives are often dismissed without examination. Yet many thoughtful readers sense that the standard narrative leaves important questions unanswered, especially when it comes to the origin of biological information and the mechanisms that make adaptation possible. This editorial invites readers to look more closely at those questions and to consider why biogenesis—the principle that life comes from life—remains a compelling and coherent explanation in light of what modern biology has uncovered.

For more than a century, the public has been taught a particular story about life's origins. In classrooms, documentaries, and legacy media, the dominant narrative is that life emerged from non-life through a long chain of chemical accidents, and that once the first self-replicating molecule appeared, natural selection took over and gradually sculpted the diversity of life we see today. This account is presented as settled science, a seamless progression from simple chemistry to complex organisms. Yet beneath the surface of this familiar story lies a set of profound scientific and philosophical challenges that are rarely discussed outside specialized circles. When examined closely, these challenges point not toward abiogenesis—the idea that life arose from non-living matter—but toward biogenesis, the principle that life comes from life, and that the information-rich systems found in living organisms require an intelligent source.

The first point of tension concerns the concept of natural selection itself. In popular presentations, natural selection is often described as if it were a purposeful force, a kind of invisible hand guiding organisms toward better adaptation. Phrases like "nature selects," "selection pressures," and "survival strategies" are used as if the environment were an agent making decisions. Evolutionary biologists acknowledge that this language is metaphorical, but fail to communicate this use of the phrase to the public. Nature does not select in any literal sense. There is no mind, no intention, no guiding intelligence. Natural selection is simply a description of the statistical fact that organisms with certain traits tend to leave more offspring than those without them. It is a pattern, not a power.

But this raises an important question: if natural selection is merely a description of differential survival, then what produces the traits that allow organisms to survive in the first place? Evolutionists answer that these complex organisms possess built-in biochemical mechanisms—gene regulation, sensory systems, feedback loops, and adaptive responses—that enable them to adjust to changing environments. Yet these mechanisms themselves presuppose a functioning genetic structure, a decoding apparatus, and a regulatory network already in place. In other words, the explanation

assumes the very information-processing machinery that needs explaining. Natural selection does not create these systems; it merely operates on them. This is why critics argue that natural selection, as commonly presented, is an illusion of explanatory power. It describes outcomes but does not account for the origin of the systems that make those outcomes possible.

This leads directly into the question of irreducible complexity. Many biological systems require multiple interdependent parts that have no survival value unless the entire system is already functioning. A heart that cannot pump is not a partial advantage. An eye that cannot see is not a partial improvement. A digestive system that cannot digest is not a step toward functionality. Evolutionary explanations often propose hypothetical intermediate stages, but these intermediates must be both functional and advantageous at every step. Such pathways are rarely demonstrated experimentally, and the proposed sequences often rely on speculative narratives rather than empirical evidence. The more we learn about cellular machinery, the more it resembles engineered systems rather than the product of incremental, unguided changes.

At the center of this debate is the nature of DNA. Evolutionists argue that DNA is simply chemistry, and that the term “information” is a metaphor for the sequence-dependent biochemical effects of nucleotides. But this view becomes increasingly difficult to maintain as our understanding of genetics deepens. DNA uses a four-letter alphabet, organized into codons that function like words. It employs syntax, semantics, error correction, start and stop signals, hierarchical organization, and regulatory logic. These are the hallmarks of a genuine code, not a metaphor. In every other context, codes require a mind. No unguided chemical process has ever been observed to generate a symbolic alphabet, a translation system, or a decoding mechanism. The genetic code is not merely ordered chemistry; it is a life-generating, life-sustaining language-like system that conveys functional instructions.

This brings us to the question of abiogenesis. Evolutionists insist that the origin of life is separate from evolution. They argue that evolution begins once replicators exist, and that the origin of the first replicator is a different problem. But this separation is artificial. Evolution requires replication. Replication requires information. Information requires encoding and decoding machinery. That machinery requires prior information. The origin of life and the origin of biological information cannot be separated. If the origin of the information system is unexplained, then the mechanism that supposedly operates on that system is also unexplained. Darwin did not know about DNA, information theory, molecular machines, or the complexity of cellular systems. His theory assumed what he could not see.

Evolutionists claim that adaptive features arise through cumulative, non-intentional processes. But adaptive responses are targeted, functional, coordinated, beneficial, and timely—features that resemble intent. Evolutionists say this appearance of intention is an illusion produced by chemistry. Critics argue that chemistry does not produce goal-directed systems, codes, sensors, feedback loops, or adaptation algorithms unless guided by intelligence. The evolutionary worldview reduces all of life to unintended

origins, unintended changes, unintended adaptations, unintended extinctions, unintended complexity, unintended consciousness, and unintended meaning. Instead of being a provable set of scientific claims; this strand of thought is an example of illogical defiance of sound reasoning.

The core issue, then, is whether the information in DNA is the result of biogenesis or abiogenesis. Biogenesis holds that life comes from life, and therefore the information-rich genetic system must originate from an intelligent source capable of producing such a code. Abiogenesis holds that life arose from non-living matter, and therefore the genetic code must have emerged through unguided chemical processes without any directing mind. These two positions are mutually exclusive, and the choice between them determines how one interprets every subsequent claim about natural selection, adaptation, and evolutionary change. If DNA is genuine information in the linguistic and functional sense, then unguided processes cannot account for its origin, and natural selection becomes a descriptive label rather than a meaningful description of the evolutionary force behind evolution. If DNA is merely chemistry that only appears to be information, then design, intention, and purpose are mere illusions, and life is the unintended outcome of billions of chemical accidents.

Most people are familiar with the evolutionary narrative because it is the only one presented in academic settings and mainstream media. Far fewer are aware of the growing body of scientific findings that challenge the plausibility of abiogenesis and support the logic of biogenesis. As our knowledge of molecular biology deepens, the evidence increasingly points toward life as the product of intelligence rather than accident. The debate is not merely about fossils or finch beaks; it is about the nature of information, the limits of chemistry, and the origin of the systems that make life possible. For those willing to look beyond the standard narrative, the case for biogenesis is not only scientifically compelling but philosophically coherent.

The purpose of this editorial is not to provoke controversy but to encourage clarity. When we move beyond metaphors and examine the underlying mechanisms of life, the evidence points toward information-rich systems that resist reduction to unguided chemistry. Readers who have only encountered the evolutionary narrative through textbooks or media summaries may find it surprising that the scientific case for abiogenesis is far less settled than commonly portrayed. By revisiting the foundational question of where biological information comes from, we open the door to a more honest and comprehensive conversation about origins—one that acknowledges both the limits of current theories and the strength of the case for biogenesis.

This editorial essay was inspired by an article by the Institute for Creation Research's Michael Stamp: Acts and Facts, "Why is Natural Selection an Illusion?" January/February 2026, p. 21.