

Legged Styrofoam and Malignant Determination

a well-beaten horse

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There is something to be said, I think, about the power of determination. Far more potent than intelligence, knowledge, or wisdom, the determined mind overcomes any and all challenges—impressively and frustratingly—not by defeating them in open intellectual combat or even by exposing through internal critique, but by the simple cessation of interest; the determined mind is fundamentally *disinterested*. Disinterested in argument, investigation, dialogue, and especially in evidentiary exercises, gaining the ability to sidestep without significant labor any and all demonstrations of clear foolishness. In the modern world, the few who persist and persevere in their determination have been gifted a title by the rest of polite society: Inerrantists.

Having had ample time to reflect upon my conversations with one Robert Groen and his mononymous toady, Gary, I am filled with a sort of disdainful bemusement at their most recent offerings. The content produced by Mr. FTWorthCrossTalk (now exclusively, might I add; Groen refuses to participate even in the time-honored Internet tradition of the Shameless Re-Upload) is intellectual junk food, which is to say devoid of nutrition in spite of its addictive, momentarily satisfying flavor. Since my participation in a formal debate with Groen early last month, I have made great efforts to balance my intellectual diet, adding more scholars and historians to my dinner plate. I would be lying, however, if I said that I don't sneak handfuls from the bag of stale chips in the pantry under the cover of night; we all have our cravings, I suppose. So as to not be accused of gluttony, though, I will “work off” the indulgence and pen a response this time to these men who are so very determined to deny the reality around them. I am under no illusion that my subjects will read and grasp any words directed to them, I am quite convinced that they are functionally illiterate—recitation of Bible verses by rote, unfortunately, counts only as much as it does for parrots, and the Inerrantist would not expect to see *those* in Heaven—but if I am meant to temper my bad habits, hesitations over audience are of little use.

The proverbial bag of stale chips has its home in a pantry named Rumble, a platform dedicated to hosting a myriad of malcontented and misanthropic men who fancy themselves maligned by mainstream media outlets like YouTube, Gary proudly among them as a fellow exilee. He predictably asserts his only crime was being a Christian openly on Google's demonic dime, claiming that his kind are under active persecution by the powers and principalities of Big Tech. Nevermind that plenty of Christians, even zealots under his chosen banner of Young Earth Creationism and his allies in the Flat Earth community, are not only allowed on YouTube but quite successful. Alas, the pattern with Gary is to ignore and accuse, never to learn or improve. His channel, unsurprisingly, is full of low-effort “discussions” on a few topics with a recent emphasis on atheists. It's here that we find our first and most laughable evidence of disinterest; a crude caricature of New Atheism in all its fedora-tipping glory plastered all over the thumbnails. One might be forgiven for thinking that Christopher Hitchens has any relevance to present-day atheist discourse, though his body of work is of undoubtable consequence, and one would assume a discerning member of the Christian Inerrantist *inteligencia* (an oxymoron if I've ever heard one) like Gary ought to know better, but his determination makes him disinterested in learning who his opponents are, what they believe, and how they live their lives. This disinterest rots and decomposes into a playbook of axioms—not arguments nor evidence—kept in heavy

rotation and delivered with the kind of smug satisfaction only seen in pigeons with recently evacuated bowels.

None of this is to say that these axioms make any sense, that the manner of their delivery is structured, nor that their ease of repetition makes them more palatable. On the contrary, conversations between Robert and Gary are often aimless and meandering, drifting from one lazy gotcha to the next with no real effort put into their dissections. That, of course, is the idea. Gary is already *determined* to believe, so there is no reason for him to actually engage with the arguments he's building straw men of, all he needs to say to get to his desired endpoint is the axiom that gets him there the fastest. An individual video, then, becomes an exercise in *rhetorical vomiting*, spending the runtime hurling insults and spewing his caustic bile on the conversation, rendering it permanently tainted with Bad Faith. Axioms like "*inorganic matter can't become organic matter*," and "*Where can I observe it in nature?*" exist solely as verbal IEDs, and there is no reason to even engage with them. The truth of the matter is, then, that *no* answer, no matter how well documented, researched, or explained it is, will suffice, because these questions are deliberately malformed to obfuscate the multiple snares that lie behind the veil of reasonableness and intellectualism these two petty snake-oil salesmen have built.

But...

...in the interest of getting my steps in, I'll step into them. Just for fun.

To distinguish between organic and inorganic matter, to begin in order, is to engage with organic chemistry, and in organic chemistry the only real difference between the two is the presence of carbon atoms in molecules, and the former has been made into the latter both intentionally and accidentally in labs multiple times. Here, I've now stepped into one of the several snares hidden behind this false challenge, which I'll label the *Laboratory Objection*. In springing this trap, Gary intends to set his opponent upside down by insisting that the synthesis of self-replicating molecules in a lab setting only shows that such a thing can be induced by an active agent, and not unassisted. Only once the interlocutor is caught does the reality of his inquiry show: "Inorganic matter cannot become organic matter *unassisted by an active mind*." And so, in moving the goalposts the apologist replaces a clearly falsifiable axiom with a nonsensical and hypocritical one. Here, the foundation is laid for the second axiom, which I will label the *Observation Objection*. This piece of mental gymnastics insists that valid scientific inquiry includes only what can be directly observed by the human eye, as if phenomena can only be studied *in situ* **and** *in medias res*. This is, to be sure, a gross perversion of the scientific method, carving out *Experimentation* and feeding it to the birds—this is less surprising when we remember that Gary and Robert have already thrown out *Peer-Review*. I would, generous as I am, caution Gary against swinging this sword at atheists, given it's double-edged: if abiogenesis could not have possibly happened simply because no human being in recorded history ever directly observed it in nature, it must logically follow that Creation (as described by the Inerrantist) *also* could not have possibly happened because no human being in recorded history has ever directly observed it in nature.

I should note as I cut myself free from *this* snare that the Inerrantist has several retorts to choose from as a counterpoint from this position:

- **Special Pleading** - The Inerrantist can sidestep by insisting that Creation or God is fundamentally different in some way that allows for the suspension of the rules of logic and reason. There is no real reason to continue after this point; the Inerrantist has shown his disinterest plainly and the conversation has reached an intellectually terminal state.
- **Misrepresenting the Bible** - Insistence may come in the form of an appeal to Genesis as a record of Creation. Even the most dogmatic reading of the book, however, does not produce any record of *human* observation, only a deity's retelling of events. We, of course, have no method of determining whether this deity is distorting, omitting, exaggerating, or even plainly lying about events as part of this account, nevermind the lack of *mechanistic descriptions* and *data*, which would be expected (and are indeed provided for abiogenesis and evolution, not that Gary and Robert would engage with them) in any serious discussion on scientific inquiries. This insistence on the part of the Inerrantist that Biblical passages must be understood uncritically and analyzed without skepticism is another show of disinterest, but suffice it for the moment to say that this is an intellectually terminal state for the conversation.
- **Misattribution** - In an attempt to pivot away from the matter at hand—and to dehumanize you, I would argue—the Inerrantist may begin to wrap a noose around your neck by asserting axiomatically that your ability to employ reason and logic can *only* be attributed to a deity. This kafeatrap can be discarded pending the demonstration of the mechanism of such attribution, leaving the conversation in an intellectually terminal state.
- **Argumentum ala Goebbels** - Often deployed by Inerrantists of similar intellectual challenges to Gary and Robert, repetition of previous axioms ad nauseam don't need to be humored. This is disinterest in its most slothful presentation.
- **Insults** - Though this may come as a surprise to the Inerrantist, opining that an idea or explanation is stupid or that you are stupid for understanding it and accepting it based on its merits is not actually an argument and wins no points. Most of the insults Gary and Robert waste other people's oxygen on are based in hostile caricatures of average atheists, which we will discuss later.
- **Change of Topic** - This is the closest you'll get to a victory, try not to gloat.

Human beings are, as we will see by the end of this excursion, creatures of habit. Gary and Robert are no different, and the next move in this dance they do as Inerrantists is to point to the successful use of the conversational snare to set up new snares. Lies build on lies, you see, and the lie brought in next by the dump truck is the notion that abiogenesis and evolutionary theory has been debunked, or at the very least exists in close competition with Intelligent Design. The tool of choice for the... let us say *efficiently-minded* Inerrantist is to discredit the extant scientific understanding with the use of misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and misexplanations of scientific research, findings, and analysis. Gary begins by asserting axiomatically that using abiogenesis and evolution as explanatory and predictive models for

understanding nature, we would expect to see styrofoam cups spontaneously grow legs and walk around. Besides the hilarious visual (which I have absolutely capitalized on), this statement is so absolutely devoid of any substance that I'm shocked he can say it with a straight face, because I certainly can't *hear* it with one.

The only reasonable place to start is with pointing out that evolution only acts on *living beings* that can reproduce. Styrofoam cups are man-made objects made up of synthetic materials and are—and I cannot believe I have to say this to a man likely 40 years my senior—absolutely not living things. So already this crude facsimile of a critique has disintegrated before our very eyes, but if we reverse the reductionism, we can see the kernel of inquiry at the bottom of the refuse, which I'll label the *Almaphyly Conflict*. The objection takes the form of yet another axiomatic assertion, that no living thing on the planet produces anything not “of its kind.” Dogs only beget dogs, houseflies only beget houseflies, and primroses only beget primroses. At first glance, this statement is uncontroversial to evolutionary theory, if a bit oversimplified. Engage with an Inerrantist long enough, however, and you will realize what is actually meant by this seemingly innocuous statement: Inerrantists are *convinced* that evolutionary theory *expects* speciation to happen via the horizontal—sometimes downwardly vertical—jumping of clades, in *direct violation* of the Law of Monophyly. This deliberate miscarriage of education has roots as deep as the Scopes Trial of 1925, where a Tennessee school teacher was convicted under what we would now call a blasphemy law for teaching to children that human beings are descended from ancient primates, a fact all but confirmed at the time by archeology. Believed with a popular fervor reminiscent of a music festival in Las Vegas, this narrative would be shattered when, some decades later, science would step in and shoot up the place with a machine gun named Genetics.

One need not go far into the subject to find the key piece of evidence that puts this matter to bed properly—no more glasses of warm milk—and ends this debate squarely: comparative genetics on modern humans and modern chimpanzees. The very same technology used in medical labs, courtrooms, and novelty ancestry services is used every day in evolutionary biology to compare the genomes of all sorts of organisms present on Earth, and has been successfully used to show that *H. sapiens* and *P. troglodytes* share 98.8% of their DNA, including numerous Endogenous Retrovirus Insertions. Not only this, but as a byproduct of this analysis further studies found that human Chromosome 2 is the modern derivative of a fusion event in the genes of our ancient ape ancestors. Coupling that with the well documented fossil record for genus *Homo* makes for a rather conclusive picture of evolutionary relation and development over time. Predictably, the answer to all of this from the few brain cells Gary can wrangle together at any one given time is that this all points not to common descent, but *common design*, and as the snare catches my foot the disinterest is plain to see. Here, the Inerrantist engages in a flourish of intellectual dishonesty called *accommodation*, wherein hand waving and rhetoric shamelessly wrestle direct evidence against an idea into a box labeled “proof” in permanent marker. I don't even need to cut myself out of this one, everyone can clearly see the snare has no actual weight; this is deflection incarnate.

But of course, any attempt to educate Gary elicits a rather shocking response: bewilderment. Not at the height of his stupidity, not at the vastness of his ignorance, not at the decades he's wasted devoting himself to an anti-human dogma, but at *your* willingness to look at the available body of scientific research and... accept it. To put it in his words:

"You were told you're an evolved monkey on a 12 billion year old spinning ball and you believe it? The nothing exploded and the nothing became a dinosaur and the dinosaur became a monkey after the world ended and then you became the monkey?"

In the hours I've wasted reviewing Gary's content, the single consistent theme has been his rabid *disinterest* in understanding any information or answers provided to him upon his request. Rather, Gary spends his time insisting that those who seek out knowledge are "intellectually incurious" and "fundamentally unserious." He would have you believe that the only way to achieve true scientific enlightenment is to commune with his chosen deity and fully commit to all of his mandates, to have faith without question or inquiry, to never test the veracity of the claims made by this deity, and certainly to never doubt the voices of those on high when they command you. Honestly, the projection would be funny if it weren't so tragic.

I will go out on a limb and wager a guess that Gary has never truly doubted the existence of his chosen deity and put it to the test. If he were such a curious intellectual, such a great and inquisitive scholar, he would waste no time analyzing and scrutinizing the religious tradition he holds membership in—and it *is* a religion, no matter how many times he insists it isn't—to get to the bottom of it all. Curiosity is the mother of Inquiry, and it is through Inquiry that we find answers to all of the universe's mysteries. If Gary truly sought knowledge, he would be willing to learn and engage with ideas and information that present a contrary view to his and go where the evidence leads him. Instead, like Robert, Gary flaunts his immaturity like a deformed peacock, taking any challenge to his inherited blind faith as an attack on his person, responding by spewing vitriol and hatred on anyone who dares to suggest he might be mistaken.

Unlike everything in nature, though, these unsightly birds were not *spontaneously generated*. Gary and Robert were not born with matted feathers and blistered skin, but as normal, rational people like you or I. My conclusion is then, rather than what their faith *is*, the more pressing matter at hand is what their faith has *made them into*.

Gary has on more than one occasion slandered those who disagree with him, calling them "retarded," "basement-dwelling freaks," who ought to be treated like "spoiled children" instead of fellow rational adults. He denounces them as "sexual deviants" who only reject the supposed truth of his chosen religious tradition over "emotional" and "moral" objections, not for any legitimate reasons. Nevermind that personal incompatibility with his dogma is a perfectly reasonable justification for abstaining from membership (why would you want sinners among you?), the only valid disagreement in Gary's and Robert's minds comes from proving the non-existence of their chosen deity beyond the shadow of even their infinitely stretched doubt (Watch as "Could it be possible for God to exist in the knowledge you don't have?" magically becomes "God definitely exists and you are just ignorant of him." in less than a second). The

malice with which these assertions and “arguments” (I shudder in disgust at the use of the label; I wouldn’t ordinarily label refuse as merchandise, but nevertheless, here we are) are presented is obvious to any rational person, and demonstrate their disinterest further. It’s not that Gary and Robert wish to genuinely arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of reality, far from it, they wish simply to attack and vilify their interlocutors in the eyes of their allies and followers.

Motivations, then, are the only thing left to scrutinize. I’m reminded of an exchange I had with Robert as part of a larger conversation, in which he was asked how he would feel if he were to find out that his chosen deity didn’t actually exist. His response was enlightening:

“If I found out that there was no God, no Creator, no Designer, I would find it maddening that this is all there is. [...] If this is all there is and nothing more—nothing more than what I see and perceive with my senses—I would find it maddening and depressing.”

I would be lying if I said that I didn’t feel a pang of sadness and empathy for Robert as a fellow human being. Existential dread is a terrifying thing to face, as many deconverts, including myself, can attest to. How we conquer it, though, speaks to who we are as people. Where I and most deconverts face this dread head on, Robert and Gary have instead become consumed by fear.

This is to be expected from zealots of the Christian Religious Tradition, which emphasizes—and at times demands—that the faithful adopt a subservient attitude, which instills a dependence in authority figures and a deep-seated anxiety towards self-determination. Instead of embracing the freedom presented by the prospect of there not being an ultimate order to reality, the response is despair. This is learned helplessness in its most sinister form, beaten into children until these patterns are hardwired in the adult, then repeated through the generations until an entire society is incapable of acting, speaking, *thinking* without looking to a pastor for approval. Like an antenna, permanently affixed to the skull, the conditioning has great effect even outside the confines of the congregation. The drip-feed of poisonous guilt and self-loathing can be activated remotely, artificially raising the difficulty for separation and deconversion; an experience Robert has publicly recalled on more than one occasion.

By his own admission, it seems that Robert’s human instincts kicked in as a young man, even if for a fleeting moment, and in seeing the monstrous nature of the organization he had been inducted into without his consent, ran for the hills. Of course, as a young man, Robert was likely ill-equipped to handle the reality of the world that lay outside his family’s church, and he was quickly overwhelmed. The Christian tradition, like Health class in American high schools, does not teach congregants how to safely interact with dispensaries of pleasure in moderation, rather opting for an abstinence-only strategy with fear-mongering sprinkled on top for maximum effect. Robert, then, being a repressed young man in an already confusing and difficult time of transition and growth, stumbled upon (or maybe sought out as part of his desire to see the truth of what he had been made fearful) his own Sodom and Gomorrah, and fell victim to one of the most predatory industries in the world: the sex trade. Upon waking up and realizing he had been

fed lotus flowers, the antenna in his head began to flood his mind with poison, and his overindulgence synthesized into fear, guilt, and cowardice. Where many deconverts would understand this experience as an individual being failed by their support network, Robert internalized it as confirmation of the “teachings” of his religious leaders. So, scared and alone in the world, he ran back into the familiar maw of his abuser, who of course welcomed him with open arms, knowing that his conditioning was now complete, and he would never again stray from the path given to him.

This, in turn, cements the central mantra of the zealot: *We are righteous and good, for we have the ultimate truth. Those who are outside are wicked and evil, for they deceive you with falsehoods.*

Robert has, as a product of his religious instruction, come to believe that the character of Jesus can be used as a safe deposit box for his so-called sins, repressing normal human thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in the hopes that he can collect a return on his suffering some day in the distant future. As we deconverts know, and as Robert has demonstrated, in the place of gold, these deposits have a habit of fermenting and escaping containment. The truth of the matter is that you cannot simply “give it up to Jesus” (read: forcefully suppress and bottle up); human emotions, including sexual arousal, demand to be felt and cannot be stowed away. Christian faith leaders know this, and so incorporate it into their vicious cycle of abuse, convincing their flock that they are reprehensible, disgusting, and deserving of retribution for their imagined transgressions, allowing the poison antennas to do the hard lifting involved in keeping folks in pews. This cycle turns and turns inside the mind of the zealot until they eventually break under the pressure, releasing their pent up frustrations on those around them. In Robert’s case, this involved harassing women online, in some cases exposing himself to them. At least here Gary has the upper hand; all he does is drool over well-endowed women on camera and berate them for daring to not be ashamed of their bodies.

Now properly illuminated, their projections are considerably more transparent. These two know, deep down, that they have not risen to the standard that has been demanded of them, but because reflecting on this would require them to reevaluate the validity and usefulness of the standard and those who set it, Robert and Gary instead choose to accuse others of the very things they do themselves. In doing so, they can lift a cloak of righteousness over their heads to hide their own failures from those they seek to discredit. To call such blatant hypocrisy impermissible, however, is to miss the point of the exercise: the problem is not the zealot, but the altar at which he worships. Robert and Gary, as complicit as they have been in perpetuating it, are indeed *victims* of their religious tradition, itself not an individual but a kind of meta-organism that has spent its lifetime evolving new and terrifying mechanisms for taking advantage of the vulnerable.

But, as we already know, they are *determined* to believe, and so no amount of effort will bring them to their senses. They will find any reason to continue holding on because they are unwilling to face their fears of uncertainty and self-determination, and so I must also tear myself away from this endeavor. If they must insist on disinterest, then so shall I. The door is now

closed, and this leviathan piece will be the final serious effort I make to engage with either of these pitiful snake-oil salesmen unprompted. In the spirit of intellectual openness, however, I will leave the door unlocked, should either of them be brave enough to solicit further correspondence.

I'll leave as parting words a portion of lyrics from Greydon Square's track *Stockholm Syndrome*, which sums up my thoughts on this matter.

"I don't know about you, but this looks like imprisonment.

What's worse is that the prisoners don't know that they're prisoners.

Even defend the tactics used to imprison them.

Another conquered mind trying to conquer other minds pleading: 'Come and hear our truth.'"