

Anticipatory Erudition

Contra James Downard at *Talk Reason*

A further comment on Downard's diatribes from Bruce Gordon & David Berlinski

Of James Downard's recent essays on *Talk Reason*, one can only paraphrase Dr. Johnson's comment about Milton's *Paradise Lost*: None would wish them longer. David Berlinski has posted one response to Downard's critique ("The Vampire's Heart"). In prescient fashion, Jonathan Wells treated Downard's complaints about homeotic genes long before Downard's misdiagnosis of their significance. Wells' anticipatory erudition, most evident in a 1998 essay entitled "Unseating Naturalism: Recent Insights from Developmental Biology" (in W. A. Dembski, ed., *Mere Creation: Science, Faith & Intelligent Design*. Downers Grove: IVP, pp. 51-70, see esp. pp. 53-58), empties the air from Downard's over-inflated balloon rather quickly.

It is worth quoting Wells at length:

As homeotic genes turn out to be more and more universal, the control they exercise in development turns out to be less and less specific.... [T]he universality of homeotic genes is supposed to be due to their presence in a common ancestor, but the preponderance of the evidence suggests that the common ancestor lacked the features that those homeotic genes now supposedly control. From a Darwinian perspective this is a serious problem. According to neo-Darwinism complex gene sequences gradually evolve by conferring selective advantages on the organisms

that possess them. But gene sequences confer selective advantages only if they program the development of useful adaptations. If a primitive animal possessed homeotic genes but lacked all of the adaptations now associated with them, then those genes must have originated prior to these adaptations. How then, did homeotic genes evolve?

On recalling to mind what Wells had already said, James Downard will, no doubt, find reason to extend his polemical posturing to lengths rivaling *War and Peace*.

It is odd that a scientific position so widely claimed to be beyond dispute should not be beyond *disputing* – one reason, of course, to think that it is not beyond dispute at all.