

The Spiritual Scientist

An ezine for those who think!

Artificial Life

Question: What is the Vedic comment on recent news report about artificial life?

Answer: Let me quote Caltech biologist and Nobel laureate David Baltimore, who has said that has "overplayed the importance" of his results; he "has not created life, only mimicked it."

Let's see what he actually did:

1. Determined the sequence of the DNA in one of the world's simplest bacteria,
2. synthesized a copy of that DNA from components sold by a biological supply company, and
3. replaced the natural DNA in a living bacterial cell with this synthetic DNA.

Now we need to remember that DNA is not life. It is simply a sequence of biological codes storing the instructions for building proteins.



The machine code of the genes is uncannily computer-like
- Oxford biologist Richard Dawkins

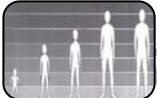
So, speaking analogically, not even the complete computer has been created; just a new program within a pre-existing computer.



"Scientists don't know enough about biology to create life. Although the Human Genome Project has expanded the parts list for cells, there is no instruction manual for putting them together to produce a living cell. It is like trying to assemble an operational jumbo jet from its parts list - impossible."

- Boston University bioengineer James Collins

Even if we grant for argument's sake that scientists may somehow, sometime use the chemical components to create a cell structure, would that amount to creating life? No, because that would just be like making the computer, not the person who would use the computer. Although



materialistic scientists would have us believe that life is a product of bio-chemicals, living systems behave in ways fundamentally and inexplicably different from nonliving objects. Nonliving objects are created, deteriorate over time and eventually meet with destruction. Living systems exhibits three additional features: *self-maintenance, growth and reproduction*. If a living human hand is cut, it can clot and heal itself; if an artificial hand is cut, it cannot. The simplest unicellular organism can grow; the most sophisticated computer cannot. The most primitive living systems can reproduce; even the most advanced robots can't.

What gives living systems these remarkable properties? It is the presence of the soul, which the *Bhagavad-gita* explains, is the source of life. The soul is eternal and can never be created. If the energy spent on creating artificial life were used to cultivate spiritual knowledge and practice, humanity would learn much more about life. The scientific establishment may or may not do this, but each of us individually can. Then we will no longer be taken in by overhyped reports about artificial life, for we would be constantly experiencing the fulfillment and joy of real life.

