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Stream C: Innovating for Adaptation

Title: Remembering the Big Question

Abstract: The big question, the important question, is to ask what explains the apparent design of life (Dawkins 1986, Dennett 1995). The big question unfortunately keeps being forgotten in philosophy. Recently, there has been a push to dilute natural selection from the algorithmic formulation of differential fitness, heritability, and variation. Instead it is argued that natural selection is solely differential persistence of types (Bouchard 2008). This permissive account of natural selection is defended so as to include phenomena such as 'Gaia' and 'ecosystems' as evolving systems (Doolittle 2014, Dussault and Bouchard 2017). I argue we should reject permissive selection as it includes far too marginal cases. In applying to such marginal cases, we lose sight of what should be explained. This interpretation of the relationship between natural selection and adaptation inverts the assumed relationship between these concepts. Often adaptationism is understood as a position which inflates the role of natural selection. But I contend that our best representation of natural selection is a product of our stance towards adaptations. The *Leibnizean stance* constrains the scope of natural selection in the world (Dennett 1995). This position has surprising repercussions for environmental ethics.

Bio: Christopher Lean is a philosopher of biology and conservation science. He has published primarily on the topic of biodiversity. His work in philosophy of medicine has influenced the growing literature on cancer. While finishing his PhD at ANU he has lectured at both the University of Sydney and the University of Otago.