

INTELLIGENT DESIGN CREATIONISM: A Threat to Society – Not Just Biology

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

– Edmund Burke

The Intelligent Design (ID) movement is a reincarnation of a 200-year-old idea that goes back to William Paley. That theologian wrote that the existence of a watch is tantamount to the existence of a watchmaker, since natural forces could not have created a watch. By analogy, he claimed that complex living things should require direct, divine intervention by a creator. That argument – as science – has been demolished by two centuries of scientific progress.

This essay discusses the plans and intentions of the “modern” ID leaders, frequently in their own words. Many ID advocates believe they are doing “God’s work.” But in doing so, consciously or unconsciously, they are jeopardizing the nature of science itself, our education system, and even our form of government. They do not understand that the cause many of them promote would, if successful, terminate many of the freedoms that they and we currently enjoy.

It is time for those who cherish our republic and our freedom to take a strong stand against those who would prefer a theocracy, not in Iran or Afghanistan, but in the United States.

ID’s World View & Future Plans

About a dozen years ago, Phillip Johnson, the acknowledged father of the ID movement, resurrected Intelligent Design and assembled a group of people to introduce these ideas into society. The primary seat of ID is the Center for Science and Culture (CSC, which is amply funded by and housed at the Discovery Institute in Seattle, Washington). Its Web site (<http://www.discovery.org>) states that “The theory of intelligent design holds that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection.” Two well-known proponents are Michael J. Behe of Lehigh University and William A. Dembski of Baylor University.

The ID movement initially focuses on disproving evolution and allowing for the possibility of an unspecified designer in science (perhaps God, perhaps aliens from outer space). They claim that scientists have a naturalistic bias and that ID is scientific and not religious, despite the fact that it does not provide any description of the designer, nor any mechanistic model by which the design was effectuated. At best, this is disingenuous, as we will see from their own words.

This movement attempts to distance itself from its close relative, Genesis-based Creation Science. The goal of the creationists is to provide scientific support for the literal truth of the stories in Genesis. But at least they have a model: Genesis. And they are honest about their religious basis. Unfortunately for them, evidence conclusively demonstrates that the Genesis account is not a scientifically valid theory for cosmology, geology, physics, or biology.

But the ID movement has a much larger goal than simply discrediting evolution. Phillip Johnson and other ID proponents have formulated a strategic plan they call the “Wedge.” Evolution is only the initial target of the Wedge’s edge, to be followed by an attack on all of science, and ultimately by profound changes in our society, culture, and government. They wish to change much more than the content of science; they want to change the process of doing science, and with it the entire character of American society. Here are their own words, excerpted from their plan, the “Wedge Strategy” (<http://www.antievolution.org/features/wedge.html>):

Discovery Institute’s Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture seeks nothing less than the overthrow of materialism¹ and

¹ [Note: ID frequently uses the terms “philosophical naturalism,” “methodological naturalism,” and “scientific materialism” interchangeably. In science, methodological naturalism simply means that theories are restricted to natural causes; philosophical naturalism goes far beyond science by claiming that there are *no other* causes except natural ones.]

its cultural legacies. Bringing together leading scholars from the natural sciences and those from the humanities and social sciences, the Center explores how new developments in biology, physics and cognitive science raise serious doubts about scientific materialism and have re-opened the case for a broadly theistic understanding of nature.

FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY

The social consequences of materialism have been devastating. As symptoms, those consequences are certainly worth treating. However, we are convinced that in order to defeat materialism, we must cut it off at its source. That source is scientific materialism. This is precisely our strategy. If we view the predominant materialistic science as a giant tree, our strategy is intended to function as a “wedge” that, while relatively small, can split the trunk when applied at its weakest points. The very beginning of this strategy, the “thin edge of the wedge,” was Phillip Johnson’s critique of Darwinism begun in 1991 in *Darwinism on Trial*, and continued in *Reason in the Balance and Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds*. Michael Behe’s highly successful *Darwin’s Black Box* followed Johnson’s work. We are building on this momentum, broadening the wedge with a positive scientific alternative to materialistic scientific theories, which has come to be called the theory of intelligent design (ID). Design theory promises to reverse the stifling dominance of the materialist worldview, and to replace it with a science consonant with Christian and theistic convictions.

Governing Goals

- To defeat scientific materialism and its destructive moral, cultural and political legacies.
- To replace materialistic explanations with the theistic understanding that nature and human beings are created by God.

Twenty Year Goals

- To see intelligent design theory as the dominant perspective in science.
- To see design theory application in specific fields, including molecular biology, biochemistry, paleontology, physics and cosmology in the natural sciences, psychology, ethics, politics, theology and philosophy in the humanities; to see its influence in the fine arts.
- To see design theory permeate our religious, cultural, moral and political life.

The above quotes clearly demonstrate that Intelligent Design’s claim to be non-religious is false. It is also obvious that the ID movement has aims far beyond countering evolution in its intent to return society to the “idyllic” and “moral” culture that prevailed in Europe prior to the Enlightenment. Most importantly, the preservation of many freedoms, including the freedom to choose any religion, is not consistent with ID philosophy and goals. The writings of the leading senior fellows make this nostalgia for the Dark Ages frighteningly clear:

From the sixth century up to the Enlightenment it is safe to say that the West was thoroughly imbued with Christian ideals and that Western intellectual elites were overwhelmingly Christian. False ideas that undermined the very

*foundations of the Christian faith (e.g., denying the resurrection or the Trinity) were swiftly challenged and uprooted. Since the enlightenment, however, we have not so much lacked the means to combat false ideas as the will and clarity.” (William A. Dembski & Jay Wesley Richards, *Unapologetic Apologetics*, Intervarsity Press, 2001, p. 20.)*

*The scientific picture of the world championed since the Enlightenment is not just wrong but massively wrong. Indeed entire fields of inquiry, especially in the human sciences, will need to be rethought from the ground up in terms of intelligent design. (William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology*, Intervarsity Press, 1999, p. 224.)*

John Mark Reynolds is a CSC fellow on the faculty at Biola University (listed by Access Research Network as an ID College, www.arn.org/college.htm). He writes, “Torrey Honors Institute (at Biola) is at war with the modern culture. Torrey does not want to ‘get along’ with materialism, secularism, naturalism, post-modernism, radical feminism, or spiritualism. We want to win over every facet of the culture, from the arts to the sciences, for the Kingdom of Christ.” (J.M. Reynolds, “Origin of Torrey,” Torrey Honors Institute, Biola University, www.biola.edu/academics/torrey/origin.cfm.)

ID’s Current Strategies & Tactics

The Intelligent Design movement has already targeted several states in an attempt to alter the K-12 science standards. They have presented an array of arguments that are meant to appear “fair and balanced” but

actually mask their true intentions. They want the definition of science altered to accommodate divine agency. They do not accept the essence of science; the foundation that has made it so successful as a special way of learning about the world: science as the search for natural causes for natural phenomena.

Here are some common tactics, many of which have already been employed in New Mexico, Kansas, Ohio, West Virginia, Louisiana, and many other states:

- Place ID advocates on school boards and science standards writing committees.
- Go as public as possible in print and visual media.
- Make the inclusion of ID in science classes seem like a free-speech and academic freedom issue.
- Make scientists seem like the dogmatists.
- Claim that “Darwinism” is a religion, but ID is science.
- Claim that “others” are biased, and that teaching ID is only fair.
- Cite popular poll results and ignore the scientific consensus.
- Refer to ID in scientific-sounding rather than religious language.
- Redefine science to allow supernatural causes for natural phenomena.
- Settle for any change or modification in their goals, and declare anything as a victory.
- Create loopholes in state science standards, using innocuous-sounding language, to allow the presentation of so-called “evidence against evolution.”

Given the reactionary and theocratic nature underlying ID, one

might think that most Americans would not lend much credence to the movement. But, in fact, ID has been spreading rapidly at both the state and national levels. The Discovery Institute now has state subsidiaries in Kansas, New Mexico, and Ohio. These subsidiaries began with the establishment of the Intelligent Design Network (IDnet) in Kansas, which has now branched out into New Mexico. New Mexico now has its own ID Web site: <http://www.nmidnet.org/>. The Kansas IDnet site is at: <http://www.intelligentdesignnetwork.org/>. IDnet also helped establish another state subsidiary in Ohio, Science Excellence for All Ohioans (SEAO), <http://www.sciohio.org/>.

ID advocates now sit on state and local boards, in state houses, and in seats of the U.S. Congress. Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) is a strong opponent of evolution. Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA) is an ID advocate with close ties to CSC fellows. He introduced language in the U.S. Senate’s *No Child Left Behind Act* language that sanctioned teaching the “controversy” surrounding evolution; it passed the Senate by a preliminary vote of 91 to 8 (see <http://www.discovery.org/viewDB/index.php3?program=CRSCstories&command=view&id=1172> and http://www.agiweb.org/gap/legis107/evolution_update0601.html). A primary author of that Senate language was Phillip Johnson! That language does not appear in the final NCLB act, but survived in the committee report. Furthermore, the law itself contains prohibitions against the federal government “mandating ... academic achievement standards...” (NCLB, page 55). Santorum has also criticized President John F. Kennedy for his belief in the separation of Church and State (see Alan Cooperman, *Washington Post*, April 25, 2003, p. A04). Other Senators and Congressmen are openly or

clandestinely supportive of ID’s claims. Antievolution rhetoric and actions are the wedge to moving the U.S. toward a theocracy. Underestimating the power and influence of the ID movement would be a grave mistake.

The ID movement wants to bypass scientific peer review and go directly into public school science classrooms. But ID includes no theory other than “The Designer Did It.” No scientific article promoting ID has ever been published in any mainstream peer-reviewed scientific journal. Nevertheless, they argue that it is legitimate science. To the ID supporters, supernatural interventions should be part of science. They want the scientific community to accept miracles as part of the scientific method, the exact antithesis of natural explanations of natural phenomena. But as we have seen, their objections to evolution are merely the “wedge” to ultimately completely overhaul all science, and eventually our culture. That is the real threat.

Recognizing the threat is only the first step. All scientists, as well as teachers, parents, and citizens need to get involved in local and state efforts to develop strong, unequivocal science standards, to ensure high-quality textbooks, to improve science education at all levels, and to engage in politics as the need arises.

Dr. Marshall Berman
Past Vice President, New Mexico State Board of Education
Sandia National Laboratories manager, retired
Founder and Past President, Coalition for Excellence in Science and Math Education (CESE)
Past President, New Mexico Academy of Science
Executive Director, retired, Council on Competitiveness, Washington DC
Past University of New Mexico-Sandia Distinguished Professor of Chemical and Nuclear Engineering