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The state of Intelligent Design

by John Blanton

This month closes out our Darwin bi-centennial. The pseudoscience of Intelligent Design is the most pernicious attack on legitimate science today. In this final installment we summarize the new creationism.

With apologies to Dick Butkus, creationism is a lot like football.

Imagine you had a high school football team, and they never won any games. So they decided they had enough of that, and they went to college. And they now have a college football team. And they are still not winning any games.

In the past we had creationists like Don Patton, Carl Baugh, Ken Ham, Kent Hovind, and a few others. They may have tacked letters after their names, but they only had high school diplomas. And they never won any games.

Obviously, something was missing. Obviously it was not a problem of football skills. It was a matter of degree. They needed college degrees.

So the creationists shucked off the overalls, and they put on business suits. And they went to college. But they were still not winning any football games.

All of this is not to be taken literally. The high school creationists did not end up going to college. What happened is that creationists realized that creationism without benefit of real academic credentials was not selling well. Also, the lack of any real science, but that is another matter.

So, Intelligent Design was born.

Intelligent Design was hatched by college-educated creationists with real degrees in science and other disciplines. Early on they seem to have been sitting back and giving only lip service to the high school team. The college crowd jumped into the game when they noticed the home team was losing.

It's not that there were no college ringers playing high school ball. The creation science scheme was engineered by some real college boys. The California-based (now Dallas-based) Institute for



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Creation Science (ICR) was founded by the late Henry Morris, Ph.D. Granted, Morris' degree was in hydraulic engineering, but during all this time the principal speaker for the ICR has been Duane Gish, Ph.D. More pertinently, Gish's Ph.D. is in biochemistry from the University of California at Berkley.

Notwithstanding, these distinguished scholars, along with their high school tag team, were young-Earth creationists.

Creationists of all kinds began to get the message in 1982 when federal judge William Overton handed down an embarrassing decision against young Earth creationists who had attempted to introduce *creation science* into the Arkansas public school curriculum. The lesson hit home in 1987 when the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Edwards v. Aguillard* that *creation science* is a religious doctrine and could not receive government backing by being taught in Louisiana public schools.

It was about this time that Michael Denton published *Evolution, a Theory in Crisis*. Denton received a Ph.D. in biochemistry from King's College London, and his book argued for the existence of design in nature, particularly with respect to biological evolution. This is considered to be the root of the Intelligent Design movement.

One person who picked up on Denton's message was law professor Phillip Johnson. Johnson purchased and read a copy of evolutionist Richard Dawkins' book *The Blind Watchmaker*. *The Blind Watchmaker* argued against the 200-year-old concept of intelligent design proposed by William Paley, a noted Christian apologist of his day. Johnson happened on Denton's book and apparently decided to take action to correct evolutionists' abuse of science as he saw it.

Johnson taught law at UC Berkley and was formerly law clerk for Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren. His background in the natural sciences is totally lacking, but he wrote *Darwin on Trial*, in which he challenged Darwinian evolution as though the issue were a legal matter. His argument got at best a big yawn from scientists.

In 1992 Johnson attended the conference on "Darwinism: Scientific Inference or Philosophical Preference" at Southern Methodist University (SMU). The conference was inspired by Jon Buell, a local creationist. Buell's Foundation for Thought and Ethics (FTE) published the book *Pandas and People*, an early work pushing Intelligent Design. At the conference the departure from young-Earth creationism was stark. Johnson and Buell were standing together when I asked them the question. Their answer was significant. Yes, the Earth and the universe really are billions of years old, and yes, present life forms share a common ancestry. These were not your grandfather's creationists.

But that is as far as it goes. For the old-Earth creationists, nature, unaided, cannot explain current life forms. There must have been some sort of divine intervention. For these people, scientists and serious scholars that they are, this has to be the case. Nothing stands that does not reconcile with their religious beliefs.

Tidbits from Johnson's writings and public statements reassure us of his religious stand.¹

If we understand our own times, we will know that we should affirm the reality of God by challenging the domination of materialism and naturalism in the world of the mind. With the assistance of many friends I have developed a strategy for doing this, and a major purpose of this book is to interest young people, and persons with influence over young people, in preparing themselves to take part in the great adventure we have begun.

...

We call our strategy “the wedge.”

Johnson was a cofounder of the Center for Science and Culture (CSC) at the Discovery Institute, a conservative think tank in Seattle, Washington. The *wedge strategy* Johnson mentions is a program developed about eleven years ago by the CSC for promoting their view of science. It was originally an internal memo not meant for public consumption, but in 1999 somebody cruelly posted the text on the Internet for all to read. The wording of the document was so frank and so straight-forward; it proved an immediate embarrassment to the new creationists. A quick read shows why. Here is an excerpt from the preamble: ²

INTRODUCTION

The proposition that human beings are created in the image of God is one of the bedrock principles on which Western civilization was built. Its influence can be detected in most, if not all, of the West’s greatest achievements, including representative democracy, human rights, free enterprise, and progress in the arts and sciences.

The *Wedge Document* laid out the goals of the CSC’s strategy. ³

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.

The *Wedge Document* went on describe a course of action for achieving these goals.

In due time the CSC owned up to the *Wedge Document*. To help defuse the damage done by the exposure, the CSC published a document titled *The Wedge Document: So What?* The document’s second paragraph is pertinent: ⁴

Darwinian activists and self-identified “secular humanists” claimed that the “Wedge Document” provided evidence of a great conspiracy by fundamentalists to establish theocracy in America and to impose religious orthodoxy upon the practice of science. One group claimed that the document supplied evidence of a frightening twenty-year master plan “to have religion control not only science, but also everyday life, laws, and education.” Barbara Forrest, a Louisiana professor active with a group called the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association, similarly championed the document as proof positive of a sinister conspiracy to abolish civil liberties and unify church and state. Others have characterized it as an attack on science and an attempt “to replace the scientific method with belief in God.”

Also, this fairly well summarizes my own interpretation of The Wedge. Please review the complete text of the *Wedge Document* on line.

Regardless of their protestations, the CSC creationists have waged a continual war against Darwinian evolution. At the same time they have given comfort and advice to creationists of all kinds.

One whose ears picked up some encouragement from all this was Bill Buckingham, a member of the Dover Area Board of Education in Pennsylvania. Back in December 2007 we quoted Buckingham regarding the lawsuit *Tammy Kitzmiller, et al. v. Dover Area School District, et al.* ⁵

Intelligent design, in my way of thinking, is, states that life is too complex to happened at random, that there had to be a designer-uh, something to shape how things went, so to speak. In the Book of Genesis, the designer would be God.

We noted the following: ⁶

Buckingham pushed to introduce the creationist book *Pandas and People* as a condition for adopting a biology text co-authored by noted evolution advocate Kenneth Miller. The school rejected the *Pandas* book, but a few weeks later an anonymous donor supplied 60 copies for use by students.

The CSC gave the Dover board early advice then pulled back when they saw this train was going over a cliff. Several CSC fellows were deposed for the trial, including college professor Michael Behe. William Dembski at the time was the CSC’s recognized brain trust, and he made preparations to be deposed. But only preparations. He and other CSC fellows asked \$200 an hour for their services, and Dembski demanded to have his own lawyer present at the deposition. That wish not

being granted, Dembski withdrew his services and did not testify at the trial.

Kitzmiller, et al. won their case, and the federal judge threw the book (almost literally) at the defendants. PBS television recapitulated the *Kitzmiller* case in a documentary called *Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial*. We have previously printed some excerpts from the program transcript: ⁷

Citing what he called the “breathtaking inanity” of the school board’s decision, [federal judge John E. Jones] found that several members had lied “to cover their tracks and disguise the real purpose behind the intelligent design Policy.”

Finally, from the December 2007 issue: ⁸

Testifying on the stand, creationist Michael Behe was forced to concede his definition of good science would include astrology.

Research by Nick Matzke of the National Center for Science Education demonstrated the evolution of the Pendas book, switching from the language of creationism early on, then substituting the term “intelligent design” after the Supreme Court ruled in 1987 that creationism was religious and could not be promoted by government schools.

The CSC’s *So What* document mentions professor of philosophy Barbara Forrest. Forrest has made an intense study of the Intelligent Design movement, and she was a key resource for the claimants in the *Kitzmiller* suit. The book *Creationism’s Trojan Horse* by Forrest and Paul R. Gross is likely the most thoroughly researched and documented coverage of Intelligent Design available.

When Tammy Kitzmiller and others sued the Dover Area School Board, Forrest was a major witness for the claimants. The National Center for Science Education (NCSE) is the most active organization in the United States working for the teaching of evolution in public schools (and working against introduction of Intelligent Design and other forms of creationism). The NCSE threw its weight into the *Kitzmiller* case on the side of the claimants. They also provided some critical research. Here is what happened:

Nick Matzke, working for the NCSE, researched the

evolution of creationism to Intelligent Design. Matzke learned that the NCSE had on file the prospectus for a book titled *Biology and Origins*. Folks at NCSE wondered if the proposed book were a prelude to the Pendas book, and claimants’ lawyers subpoenaed the publisher for all their drafts. Examination of the drafts revealed that *Biology and Origins* was, indeed, an early draft of *Pendas*, and examination of successive drafts put the lie to any claim that Intelligent Design did not descend from creationism.

About the time of the *Edwards* case, when it became obvious creationism needed a new name, somebody ran a word processor over an earlier draft and substituted Intelligent Design language for creationist language. At the *Kitzmiller* trial, the claimants presented a trail of revisions that showed the transitional fossils linking *Creation Biology* (1983), p. 3-34 to *Of Pendas and People* (1987, “intelligent design” version), p. 3-41. The most humorous, if it were not so cynical, example

was the absurdity that resulted from the attempt to transform *creationists* to *design proponents*. The result was the evolution of “Evolutionists think the former is correct, **creationists** accept the latter view” to “Evolutionists think the former is correct, **design proponents** accept the latter view.” [emphasis added] ⁹

The basic metabolic pathways (reaction chains) of nearly all organisms are the same. Is this because of descent from a common ancestor, or because only these pathways (and their variations) can sustain life? Evolutionists think the former is correct, cdesign proponentsists accept the latter view. Design proponents

When creationists attempted a “creation science” book to an “Intelligent Design” book, they created this bizarre transitional fossil.

The creationist lost big time in *Kitzmiller*. Judge John E. Jones, III, a Republican appointee with no political ax to grind for evolutionary liberalism, was disgusted at the actions of the creationists’ witnesses. The duplicity of some school board members in trying to conceal their intentions and actions related to the case especially earned his ire. The word *perjury* was mentioned from the bench.

Creationist Michael Behe was the principal witness for the defense. His book *Darwin’s Black Box* had sought to argue that biochemical processes were too complex to have derived from evolution that invoked natural selection alone. The work of an intelligent agent must have been manifest.

Under cross examination Behe had to admit that in writing *DBB* he had ignored published science that contradicted his claims. The claimants’ lawyer presented Behe with a stack of books based on research *DBB* had asserted did not exist. Behe admitted he had not read any of the books.

What the creationists did in response to the *Kitzmiller* decision was typical of their game plan. Lacking any productive research in Intelligent Design, the CSC operates

solely as a propaganda mill for creationism. Judge Jones, who had previously been quite respectable, was now an *activist judge*, and incompetent, besides. He had been duped by the claimants' lawyers and had used large portions of their briefs in his 139-page decision. When Judge Jones received death threats, most likely not from evolutionists, he was given Secret Service protection.

One cog of the CSC's propaganda mill is the IDEA club web. *IDEA* stands for *Intelligent Design and Evolution Awareness*, and the clubs are the inspiration of CSC propagandist Casey Luskin. The clubs are student organizations on college campuses and at some minor schools. We have previously covered the state of the IDEA clubs. In April I noted the following activity:¹⁰

24 university chapters
6 high school chapters
2 community chapters

The CSC's propaganda engine is the Evolution News Web site. While not part of the main Discovery Institute site, the two are obviously closely joined.¹¹

Here is a quick summary of CSC propagandists. I have added some references to background material.

Casey Luskin¹²
David Berlinski¹³
John West¹⁴
David Klinghoffer¹⁵
Michael Behe¹⁶
Michael Egnor¹⁷
Robert Crowther¹⁸
Bruce Chapman¹⁹
Anika Smith

Anika Smith is on the CSC staff. She seems to be very good with words but not well informed regarding matters of science.

The term *propaganda* is not used loosely here. A little examination demonstrates that earnest and intense propagandizing is what is going on. Some examples:^{20, 21}

- The Discovery Institute distanced itself from the *Kitzmiller* trial when it became obvious the defendants were culpable and bound to lose. However, when Judge Jones handed down a stinging rebuke of Intelligent Design, propagandists (see above) for the CSC initiated a loud and public campaign against his judicial integrity. The terms *idiot* and *activist judge* were prominent.
- The CSC did not produce the *Expelled* video, but that organization has made extensive use of its core claims. The Darwin-Nazi connection and the claims of expelled

critics of Darwin routinely show up in the posts on the Evolution News Web site. Particularly, Stephen C. Meyer's new book *Signature in the Cell* repeats the debunked assertions regarding the Sternberg affair. "... Richard Sternberg, lost his office and his access to scientific samples and was later transferred to a hostile supervisor." Meyer is director of the CSC and is a co-founder with Phillip Johnson of the Intelligent Design movement. Meyer is the author of the dubious tract that Sternberg published in a journal for which he was the editor.²²

- The Ph.D. factor is critical to every message issuing from the CSC. When referring to any of the CSC fellows or allies, they place all applicable letters after the name. The public needs to know these new creationists are not playing high school ball.
- As for peer reviewed science, of which Intelligent Design has produced none, their ambition reaches these depths: a) Arranging for Intelligent Design advocate Richard Sternberg to publish Stephen C. Meyer's review article in the peer-reviewed *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington*. b) "Scott Minnich and Stephen C. Meyer, "Genetic Analysis of Coordinate Flagellar and Type III Regulatory Circuits," *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Design & Nature*, Rhodes Greece, edited by M.W. Collins and C.A. Brebbia." [Note: a "peer-reviewed" paper favoring Intelligent Design presented at an Intelligent Design conference truly is peer-reviewed, but not in the sense that would gain any respect.], c) Michael Behe's book *Darwin's Black Box* was "peer-reviewed." Michael Atchison is listed as a reviewer of *DBB*. "Atchison has stated that he did not review the book at all, but spent 10 minutes on the phone receiving a brief overview of the book which he then endorsed without ever seeing the text."²³

The new creationists are prolific publishers, forget about peer review.

Johnson has six books to his credit. Dembski has nine. Jonathon Wells has two. Regarding videos, *Unlocking the Mystery of Life* is founded on Behe's *DBB*. *The Privileged Planet* is based on a thesis by astronomer-creationist Guillermo Gonzalez. *Icons of Evolution* deals with most but not all of Wells' icons. *Expelled* features TV personality Ben Stein as the narrator. Besides detailing the stories of several individuals who were *expelled* for doubting Darwin, the movie tries to make a link between Darwinism and the Holocaust.

Intelligent Design, as the new creationism, is a darling of conservative politicians and their pundits. Very famously, Ann Coulter's book *Godless: The Church of Liberalism* devotes a large amount of space to her attacks on Darwinism. Read *Icons*, then read *Godless* and note the downstream connection.

Coulter either knows Wells personally or else she has read his book. Stephen C. Meyer's *Signature in the Cell* came to my attention when a posted clip showed him making outrageous statements about matter and energy.^{24, 25}

So, what is Intelligent Design, anyhow?

At the core it's an attempt to keep religious beliefs within our chain of existence. Darwin offered an argument, supported by science, that no external intelligence was necessary to explain evolution. Creationists first attempted to put down the whole idea of evolution. Intelligent Design is a retrenchment of the defense against a godless science. It asserts that, granting evolution, purely natural causes do not suffice. Here is the argument in brief:

Science asserts that evolution happened through natural processes only. No laws of nature are violated. When an organism produces an offspring, that child can possibly possess a novel feature that will persist in subsequent populations. No

EVENTS CALENDAR

December program

There is no December program! . . . But there will be a Christmas Party !!

Saturday, 12 December 2009
2 p.m.
Center for Nonprofit Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

There will be no Social Dinner in December.

Our annual elections for members of the board of directors and officers will be at the first meeting in January (on the 16th).

Future Meeting Dates

12 December 2009: Christmas Party!
16 January 2010
20 February 2010
20 March 2010
17 April 2010

physical laws are broken.

Intelligent Design, when it does allow for evolution, incorporates an additional feature. When an organism produces an offspring, some law of nature is violated, and the child can possess a novel feature that will persist in subsequent populations. In extreme cases, laws of nature are violated to the extent that entire populations are created in very few generations.

When examined in detail, the Intelligent Design argument says this: Chance alone cannot account for significant and beneficial features within a single generation. The features that can develop within a single generation are not beneficial enough to persist within a population. Therefore, there can be no net accumulation of beneficial features through purely natural processes alone. Some intelligent and benevolent entity must be at work.

What the new creationists want to do is to hide God within the vagaries of probability. This tactic does not work with the scientific community, but it gets a lot of leverage with the public at large, where scientific arguments often produce only glazed stares.

The philosophically inclined, including CSC fellow Robert Koons, and Stephen C. Meyer, argue that living organisms show evidence of *design*. This is a philosophically weak and shallow position. It supports my previous remarks that creationists tend not to be very deep thinkers.

The argument for design is revealed as anthropocentric, and not applicable to the physical sciences. In all the world and for all of history, only people (and other living things using a looser definition) do design. To impute design outside the realm of natural organisms is a stretch of the lowest order. The argument for design assumes that something or somebody, who has not suffered the living experience of competition with the elements and other life forms, feels the need to do design. Ironically, it appears that natural selection is the process that drives the practice of design by living organisms.

The new creationists realize they cannot present their case bald-faced. Their approach must be more oblique. Here are a few tactics:

Teach the controversy: Evolution is controversial. English translation: Insert into young minds the notion that real scientists have doubts about evolution, and you should, too.

Academic freedom: Do not use the power of a central government to suppress legitimate ideas. To do so would be a violation of a core ideal of American democracy.

Keep religion-based science out of the schools: Here the "religion-based science" is evolution.

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What does not get said is:

The controversy about evolution is nothing more than the creationists' opposition to evolution. Creationists produce the controversy by objecting to evolution. Then they propose to resolve the controversy by getting their own way.

Academic freedom is not an open door to everything. The classic movie *Debbie Does Dallas*, along with creationism, falls among the topics that might be excluded.

Calling reliance on natural causes a religion is sort of like calling a whale a fish. Herman Melville could get away with it, but *Moby-Dick* is fiction, and Melville was allowed a little artistic license. We do not need to be so kind to the new creationists.

An extended version of this presentation is available on our Web site.²⁶



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