



A CLOSER LOOK

AT THINGS PERTAINING TO THE FAITH

January 2000

THE INTELLIGENT DESIGN MOVEMENT

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A powerful coalition was formed in the 90's now known as the Intelligent Design Movement. It got its start through the efforts of Berkley law professor Phillip E. Johnson. And while the members of this movement are not in agreement on some of the details, the one thing they all agree on is the fact that this universe is filled with evidence of intelligent design.

Of course, much of the literature available from the atheistic side of the fence wants us to believe that the whole design argument is dead. But it's not. It's far from dead! And if it ever was dead, it's been resurrected.

Phillip Johnson set this ship on it's most recent voyage with his book, *Darwin on Trial*. He followed this effort up with a second book, *Reason in the Balance*. And a barrage of books have been published in the past 10 years that lends credibility to the case Dr. Johnson has built against Darwinian evolution.

IRREDUCIBLE COMPLEXITY

Michael Behe, Associate Professor of Biochemistry at Lehigh University was enlisted and wrote

Darwin's Black Box which added to the devastating logical critique Phillip Johnson made against Darwinism in his first book.

Charles Darwin argued: "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down" (Behe 1996, p. 39).

Mr. Behe's contribution to the movement is found in his identification of irreducibly complex systems. He explains: "By irreducibly complex I mean a single system composed of several well-matched, interacting parts that contribute to the basic function, wherein the removal of any one of the parts causes the system to effectively cease functioning" (ibid., p. 39).

He illustrates the idea of irreducible complexity by pointing to the simple mousetrap. There are no extraneous parts to a mouse trap. If you eliminate any part of it, it will not work. A mousetrap is irreducibly complex.

The rest of his book argues that there are irreducibly complex biological systems that could not have evolved and that exhibit remarkable design—intelligent design.

SPECIFIED COMPLEXITY

Another key player in the movement is Dr. William Dembski. Mr. Dembski is a thirty-eight year old man with a Ph.D in Mathematics from the University of Chicago as well as earned degrees in Theology and Psychology.

He began his most recent book defining the movement: "Intelligent design is three things: a scientific research program that investigates the effects of intelligent causes; an intellectual movement that challenges Darwinism and its naturalistic legacy; and a way of understanding divine action" (Dembski 1999 p. 13).

I think Dr. Dembski's contribution can be best seen in light of Richard Dawkin's judgment that the design we think we see in the universe is no evidence of design at all. Dawkins argues that what-



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focus:
**Darwin's
Demise**

Apparent versus Intelligent Design

ever looks like it has been designed in the realm of nature only carries with it the mere appearance of design.

William Dembski asks the question, “How can we tell the difference between something that merely resembles design and something that is designed, thus evidencing intelligence behind its production?” Dembski realized that we recognize design in what he calls “specified complexity” or “specified small probabilities.” Michael Behe explains what this means in the preface of Dembski’s book: “In other words, we apprehend design in highly improbable (complex) events that also fit some independently identifiable pattern (specification)” (Dembski 1999, p. 10).

For example, the letter “A” is specified but not complex. The letters “NDEIRUABFDMOSH-INKE” all strung together are complex but not specified. A sonnet by William Shakespeare is both specified and complex.

If you tie Dembski’s “specified complexity” to Behe’s “irreducible complexity” you have some extremely effective tools at your disposal to combat the naturalism of Darwinian evolution.

RECOMMENDED READING

I knew when I began writing this article that I could not do justice to the excellent material already available. So, I decided to give a simple overview of the Intelligent Design Movement and then to provide you with a list of books you would profit from if this article whets your appetite.

I recommend all of the book written by Phillip Johnson. Dr. Johnson is not a scientist. He is a professor of Law. He was trained in and is skill at analyzing arguments. His books expose the fallacies of some of the arguments made by Darwinists. They also analyse the impact evolutionary thinking has had on our society. I recommend the following:

Darwin on Trial. Washington, D.C. Regnery Gateway, 1991.

Reason in the Balance. Illinois: IVP, 1995.

Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds. Illinois, IVP, 1997.

Objections Sustained. Illinois, IVP, 1998.

William Dembski’s first book contribution is titled *The Design Inference*. It runs between \$40-\$50 and was not written for the average reader. He

also edited a book in which a more accessible version of his first book, *Mere Creation* (IVP, 1998) and it contains contributions by most of the key players in the movement. His most recent book is a more accessible rendition of his first book. It is titled *Intelligent Design: The Bridge between Science and Theology* (IVP).

If you have access to the web you might also want to check out: www.arn.org.

A CAUTIONARY NOTE

At the outset of this article I said that the members of this movement are not in 100% agreement with each other on every point in the creation/evolution controversy. Some of the proponents of the movement are progressive creationists, meaning they believe that God created all things initially and then oversaw their evolutionary development. Michael Behe, for example, confesses: “For the record, I have no reason to doubt that the universe is the billions of years old that the physicists say it is. Further, I find the idea of common descent (that all organisms show a common ancestor) fairly convincing, and have no particular reason to doubt it” (Behe 1996, p. 5). On the other hand you have young earth ceationists like John Mark Reynolds and Paul Nelson.

While I do not espouse every point made by these writers and, in fact, find some of their positions seriously flawed, I have found their work as a whole stimulating and informative enough to justify wading through their material myself. Many of them have relegated the issues over which they differ to prefaces or footnotes and they plan to come back to them the day the battle between supernaturalism vs naturalism is won. Those future discussions should prove as interesting as studying the issues over which they agree.

Behe, M. 1996. *Darwin’s Black Box*. Free Press

Dembski, W. 1999. *Intelligent Design*, IVP



A Closer Look is a journal I have considered printing for over two years. It has finally come to fruition with the hopes of publishing it every three months. Tom Steed has graciously consented to help edit the paper. Others will be recruited to write in future editions. And if all goes well, we may even print it monthly.

Imagine that you and a companion are walking along the beach when you notice an arrangement of seashells in the sand that spell: “Welcome to Newport Beach.” Although you were not present to observe how the shells formed into this pattern you nevertheless intuitively conclude that someone had placed the shells there so as to convey a message. Fully satisfied with your explanation you continue on your walk.

Your friend, however, suggests that your explanation is mistaken. He reminds you that the waves wash up thousands of seashells every day and that they could settle upon the sand to form an almost infinite variety of patterns. It just so happens that this time the arrangement turned out to be in the form and sequence of letters that convey a message. Thus, what you thought could only be understood in terms of purposeful arrangement was instead the product of chance and the action of the water upon the shells.

In the first instance the pattern of the shells was explained by referring to an *intelligent cause*. In the second account the pattern was described in terms of a *natural cause*.

While I doubt that any rational person would seriously consider the latter explanation, the story does help to illustrate the issue that lies at the very heart of the creation-evolution controversy: *Can we explain the origin, diversity and complexity of living things by solely natural processes or must we conclude that living things are the product of intelligent design?*

Prior to the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* in 1859 the answer to that question was virtually unanimous: living organisms exhibit the unmistakable characteristics of design and thus are the product of a designer. That answer has now been completely overruled. The scientific community is firmly committed to the idea that natural processes *alone* can account for the existence of living organisms and that Darwin’s great achievement was in demonstrating how it happens by means of a process he called “natural selection.” We know it today as “evolution.” The regular, predictable processes of nature, combined with immense periods of time, are all that is needed

to “create” life in all its manifold complexity. There is no need for a designer, a supernatural cause, or any other “godlike” entity in order to provide an intelligent answer as to how living things arrived on this planet. Like our companion’s account of the seashells along the shore, Darwinists have been telling us that living things only *appear* to be designed.

We have set before us then two competing and mutually exclusive perspectives concerning the origin of life and species. Most have sided with the Darwinian view precisely because they are persuaded that it has been “scientifically established.” But recent insights in philosophy and discoveries in science are seriously challenging the evolutionary view and at the same time reviving the design model of origins. Let us first consider the claim that Darwinism is science.

IS DARWINISM SCIENCE?

A leading critic of Darwinism, Phillip Johnson, has suggested that there are two distinct ways that the term “science” is employed. The first one defines science as a rationally guided process of investigation and experimentation. The scientist examines the evidence, tests it, and then draws only those conclusions that the evidence warrants. This describes “science” as a *method of inquiry* governed by objective principles that help us to gain a reasonable measure of knowledge about our world and how it operates. Certainly the Christian would not object to this understanding of science.

The second understanding of science does not refer to a method of inquiry but rather a *view of reality* usually described as “Naturalism.” Naturalism affirms three key ideas: (1) “Nature”, that is, the material universe, is all there is. The totality of reality can only be described in terms of matter, space, time and energy. (2) Everything in the universe can be explained ultimately by referring to the fundamental laws by which matter operates. (3) The scientific method is the *only* way we gain knowledge of anything. It is important to understand that Naturalism is a *philosophical* assessment of reality and not one arrived at by means of the scientific method.

Johnson correctly observes that, since the time

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of Darwin, in order for something to count as science it *must* embrace a naturalistic philosophy of the universe. Thus, when inquiries about origins arise, the scientist *begins* with the uncritical acceptance of naturalism which means that life *must* have arisen and evolved by natural processes apart from any kind of divine intervention. With Darwinists there is no fair assessment of the evidence and then seeing which model of origins best explains the evidence because the design model of origins is ruled out as impossible before the investigation ever begins! As Phillip Johnson observes, "There can be argument about the details [of evolution], but if God was not in the picture something very much like Darwinism simply has to be true, regardless of the evidence" (Johnson 1998, 24).

Contrary to what we have been taught from grade school on, Charles Darwin's evolutionary conclusions did not result from scientific inquiry but philosophical naturalism. As George Grinnel writes, "I have done a great deal of work on Darwin and can say with some assurance that Darwin did not derive his theory from nature but rather superimposed a certain philosophical world-view on nature and then spent 20 years trying to gather facts to make it stick" (Geisler and Anderson 1987, 83).

REINSTATING DESIGN

A staunch defender of Darwinism, Richard Dawkins begins his book *The Blind Watchmaker* by stating, "Biology is the study of complex things that give the *appearance* of having been designed for a purpose" (Dembski 1999, 125). Darwinists like Dawkins know that "design implies a designer" is a self-evident principle of reason but because of their dogmatic commitment to naturalism they seek to find a way to avoid its power by contending that the "design" in living organisms is merely apparent. They also argue that we can never be certain if any living thing really is designed at all. Why? Because once Darwinists admit design they end up denying Darwinism.

This "last ditch" effort to avoid the force of the design argument has finally been put to rest with William Dembski's landmark book *The Design Inference*. Dembski has demonstrated with compelling reasoning how humans detect design and from that insight infer the existence of an intelligence cause.

What does all of this mean when applied to the issue of origins? The "apparent design" argument of the Darwinists is dead. Because living things *are* designed there *is* an intelligent cause beyond the universe. With that simple, yet profound observation, Darwinism is beginning to die a slow but sure death.

CONCLUSION

I realize that some Christians may be saying, "That's all interesting, but I know evolution is false because God's word says so. Why do I need to know this stuff?" This is understandable in many ways. The problem is that we do not have the common ground of appealing to the Bible in order to resolve these kinds of issues with most of our unbelieving friends. We can, however, appeal to the common ground of *reason* if they are willing to be reasonable. Thus, we can help them to see that evolution is false *on its own terms* apart from making appeals to the authority of a book they already reject.

Such insights can also serve to strengthen our confidence in the Bible as we live in the midst of a skeptical world. Christians can feel very intimidated by someone who challenges their belief in God by raising objections they don't know how to answer and evolution is the number one weapon used by the unbeliever to repudiate belief in and accountability to God the Creator. As we begin to appreciate the fact that Darwinism cannot stand up to the test of reason we will also begin to appreciate the apostle Paul's insight that as we consider the things that are made we can apprehend God's "eternal power and Divine nature" (Romans 1:20).

Anderson, K. and Geisler, N. 1987. *Origin Science*. Baker
Dembski, W. 1999. *Intelligent Design*. IVP (emphasis mine)
Johnson, P. 1998. *Objections Sustained*. IVP



Does the
human eye
evidence
design or
the mere
appearance of
design?