

“I Object to Your Article on Genesis Unbound”

I came across [your review](#) of the book *Genesis Unbound*. The article wasn't written as a way to see a parallelism in Genesis 1-3; it presents a substitute “Interpretation” of Genesis 1-3. It in fact totally misses an even bigger problem which this view causes: the worldwide flood.

I'm not saying that Mr. Milne hasn't a right to state his views. I am questioning its consistency with Probe's past overall Biblical worldview. It is questionable as an article representative of Probe.

I regret that you had such a negative reaction to Rich Milnes' review of John Sailhammer's book. The controversy over the age of the earth within the church is a critical discussion that often gets lost in people protecting their territory more than seeking the truth and being open to a different approach.

As Probe's main science speaker I still refer to Sailhammer's work not because I necessarily agree with his conclusions but because I think he challenged the underlying assumptions of both young- and old-earth creationists. If there is ever going to be an in-house resolution to this controversy, works such as Sailhammer's will need to be discussed openly and critically. That never really happened, unfortunately.

Please read Milnes' closing paragraph again:

You will have to read all of Dr. Sailhammer's provocative book to make up your own mind. But at least give him the chance to make his case directly from the text. Genesis Unbound is a book to stir your thinking, and should be read slowly. But go back and read Genesis to be reminded of God's greatness in His creation.

Rich (as well as I) simply thought it was a provocative work that deserved wider attention and response. If you haven't read the book, then I would ask that you suspend judgment on Sailhammer until you do. (Though I admit the book would be hard to find now.)

Thank you for your participation with us and for writing.

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“Your Bethlehem Star Article is Wrong”

Your Bethlehem Star article is out of date. Check out www.BethlehemStar.net. Also, they recently discovered there were 2 Sejanuses to correct the date. Finally, check out *The Case for Christ* by Strobel.

I did indeed write the [Bethlehem Star article](#) well before Rick Larson and his Star model became better known.

However, I have come across it many times since then though I have never had the pleasure of seeing him personally.

He hasn't convinced me.

1) He is correct that the Bible indicates that stars are for signs but it is very obscure as to what kind of signs. Psalm 19 only says the heavens declare God's glory. The following verses he quotes don't change the context. God's glory is not the same as historical information.

2) The Romans 10 passage he refers to as obviously indicating that the stars communicated the “gospel” to Israel is a huge

stretch for me. I just don't see how he arrives at that obvious conclusion.

3) You mention Lee Strobel's *Case for Christ* as apparently affirming something about Larson's theory. I found no references to the Star, Wise Men, or Magi. Bethlehem was only discussed as it relates to the massacre of the innocents by Herod. However what I did find was on page 101 where Strobel mentions that Herod died in 4 BC and his interviewee, John McRay from Wheaton does not correct him.

4) From my quick reskimming of the website, Larson still does not engage the very reasonable possibility that the star was the shekinah glory of God and has nothing to do with actual astronomical events. This is still the most reasonable explanation to me. Other Christian astronomers I have consulted don't give Larson's idea much credit.

5) Larson embarks on a rather naturalistic, modernist explanation that is not necessary and despite his confident proclamations otherwise, has not firmly established Herod's death in 1 B.C.

6) It's interesting to me that the quotes he gives on the website while congratulating him for his scientific and reasonable approach, no one explicitly says they agree with him. I would think that if they had said they agreed with his theory, it would be quoted on the website.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, PhD

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Is Intelligent Design Dead?

What Is Intelligent Design?

On December 20, 2005, Judge Jones handed down his decision in the lawsuit brought by several citizens from Dover, Pennsylvania, who objected to a new policy adopted by the Dover School Board. This policy mandated a statement be read before all biology classes indicating that evolution was a theory that needed critical evaluation and that Intelligent Design was a rival theory that students could seek information about from the library.

Judge Jones not only struck down the policy as unconstitutional; he went further to declare that ID is not science and was purely motivated by religion since it was just a repackaged creationism. His written opinion was scathing. This of course delighted proponents of evolution and many have declared that ID now is dead.

In what follows I will examine this “death certificate” and declare it null and void. ID is alive and well, and the coming months and years will demonstrate convincingly the health of ID. But first, let’s make sure we know what ID really is.

The media often simply portray ID in a negative context. One student reporter from Southern Methodist University recently put it this way: “Essentially ID is a theory that proposes that there are parts to a cell that are simply too complex to have been evolved.” He adds as an afterthought the idea “that rather they have been altered by some sort of ‘designer.’”^[1] But ID is truly more than just a critique of evolution. The Discovery Institute’s Web site describes ID this way: “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.”{2}

It’s interesting to realize that many evolutionists recognize that living things in particular *look* as if they have been designed. British evolutionist Richard Dawkins said, “Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose.”{3} Many in the ID community simply reply, “If it looks designed, maybe it is!” So ID is simply an attempt to quantify scientifically what most people clearly recognize: the design of the universe and of living things.

The major contention with evolution is the claim that mutation and natural selection can account for everything we see in living things. ID accepts that evolutionary processes do account for some change in organisms over time. But ID says certain structures, like the bacterial flagellum that closely resembles a human designed rotary motor, are better explained through an intelligent cause.

In particular, the universal genetic code has all the distinguishing characteristics of coded information or language. Our experience tells us that language only comes from a mind. If so, then the genetic code also likely came from a mind.

Is ID Science?

Judge Jones made several errors in his reasoning. The recent book from the Discovery Institute, *Traipsing Into Evolution*, answers Judge Jones on several levels.{4} I will focus on three areas: first, how a federal judge can tell us what science is and is not when philosophers of science continue to struggle with this; second, Judge Jones’ claim that ID has been refuted by scientists; and third, Judge Jones’ claims that ID has not been accepted by the scientific community. For these and other reasons, Judge Jones claimed that ID simply is

not science and is religiously motivated; therefore it should not even be mentioned in a high school science classroom.

The first question that should occur to you is, Why does a federal judge with no training in science use his courtroom as a means of determining what is and is not science? This problem has been referred to as the “demarcation problem.” How do we demarcate science from non-science? Philosopher of science Larry Laudan writes, “If we would stand up and be counted on the side of reason, we ought to drop terms like ‘pseudo-science’ and ‘unscientific’ from our vocabulary; they are just hollow phrases which do only emotive work for us.”[\[5\]](#)

In addition, philosopher Del Ratzch argues that there are very real possible payoffs for science in considering ID.[\[6\]](#) Judge Jones knew of these positions but chose to ignore them.

Judge Jones claims that ID has been refuted by mainstream scientists. He cites the work of Kenneth Miller in particular. This is rather strange indeed. For ID to be refuted means that it has been tested by science and found wanting. If it is testable scientifically to the degree that it can be refuted, then it is science after all. This logical contradiction does not seem to occur to Judge Jones.

The judge ruled further that ID cannot be science because it is not accepted by the scientific community. But science is not a popularity contest. New and controversial theories are never accepted by a majority of scientists at the beginning, but that doesn’t make them unscientific. The Discovery Institute now lists over six hundred scientists from around the world who are willing to sign a list saying they are skeptical of Darwinism. Surely that counts for something.

ID uses empirical data to demonstrate the plausibility of a design inference. It’s as scientific as Darwinism.

Is ID Just Reinvented Creationism?

Several parents challenged a directive by the Dover School Board allowing the mention of Intelligent Design in the science classrooms of this district. Judge Jones ruled the directive unconstitutional. One of his reasons was that ID is just reinvented creationism which the Supreme Court has already ruled is substantially a religious doctrine and not appropriate as science.

One of the texts that the Dover school board members made available was the supplemental text *Of Pandas and People*.^{7} Having subpoenaed early drafts of the book from the late '80s, the ACLU tried to show that *Pandas* only began using the phrase "Intelligent Design" after the Supreme Court struck down the Louisiana creation law. Therefore Judge Jones ruled that ID is in fact just creationism with a new label.

While it is true that the Supreme Court decision did indeed affect editorial decisions in *Pandas*, it's not for the reasons Judge Jones assumed. The authors and editors of *Pandas* knew their ideas were not the same as creationism and were wrestling with what to call it. Once the Supreme Court ruled that "creationism" meant a literal six day creation, the authors of *Pandas* knew they needed to use a different term.^{8}

In addition, the term Intelligent Design had been floating around for several years before *Pandas* was in print. Lane Lester and I used the term in our book *The Natural Limits to Biological Change* in 1984, three years before the Supreme Court decision in *Edwards vs. Aguillard* struck down the Louisiana creationism law. We said, "The simple point is that intelligent design is discernibly different from natural design. In natural design, the apparent order is internally derived from the properties of the components; in creative design, the apparent order is externally imposed and confers new properties of organization not inherent in the components themselves."^{9}

Furthermore, none of the leading scientists of the Intelligent Design movement were ever a part of the creationist movement. People like Phil Johnson, Michael Behe, William Dembski, Charles Thaxton, and Steve Meyer never considered themselves to be part of this group. Their ideas were always similar but definitely not the same.

Some creationist groups today even go to great lengths to distance themselves from the ID movement because ID essentially maintains that the Designer cannot be known from the science alone. Therefore, because of ID's attempts to stop short of naming the Designer, some creationist groups will sell some ID books but not endorse their program. This would be very strange indeed if ID is just relabeled creationism.

Once again, Judge Jones got it wrong.

Traipsing Into the Dover Court Decision

In their excellent discussion of the Dover decision, the authors of *Traipsing into Evolution* attack six accusations against Intelligent Design used by Judge Jones.[{10}](#)

On page sixty-two of the Dover decision Judge Jones said, "ID violates the centuries-old ground rules of science by invoking and permitting supernatural causation."[{11}](#) The main problem for Judge Jones is that ID scientists said repeatedly prior to the trial and in direct testimony during the trial that the science of ID is not able to identify the Designer. It was expressly pointed out to Judge Jones during the trial that the type and identity of the intelligent agent supposed by ID is only identified by religious and philosophical argumentation. That does not mean that design itself cannot be detected scientifically. Indeed, if we ever receive an obviously intelligent message from outer space, we will most certainly be able to determine it has an intelligent cause even though we may have no idea who or what sent it.[{12}](#)

Judge Jones also states that “the argument of irreducible complexity, central to ID, employs the same flawed and illogical contrived dualism that doomed creation science in the 1980s.” What Judge Jones is referring to is his notion that ID is just a negative argument about Darwinism. If Darwinism can be shown to be false, then ID wins.

But this grossly misrepresents ID. Michael Behe’s formulation of irreducible complexity asserts that Darwinian evolution does not predict irreducibly complex machines in the cell where Intelligent Design expressly does predict such machines. So there is definitely a negative component to irreducible complexity. But Darwin himself said that “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.”[\[13\]](#) Darwin invited a negative critique.

But there is also a clear positive case for irreducible complexity. When we come across a machine, we intuitively understand it to be intelligently caused, whether we think it functions effectively or not. Intelligent agents can and do produce machines. The concept of irreducible complexity is one way to determine what a machine is.

Judge Jones’ third complaint against Intelligent Design was that the attacks on evolution by ID advocates have all been refuted by the scientific community. Judge Jones ignored the fact that at the time of the decision, over five hundred scientists had signed a statement acknowledging their dissent from Darwinism. That list now stands at over six hundred.[\[14\]](#) Certainly some scientists have challenged Behe, Dembski, and others. But their criticisms have been answered effectively both online and in print.[\[15\]](#)

Judge Jones’ fourth accusation was that Intelligent Design had failed to gain acceptance in the scientific community. But

this is clearly a matter of opinion. As I mentioned previously, over six hundred scientists now express their dissent from Darwin, and most of those also support Intelligent Design, many of them at mainline universities.

No doubt there has been and continues to be strident opposition to Intelligent Design in the scientific community, especially among biologists. But there is always resistance in science to new ideas. And much of the opposition is for philosophical reasons, not scientific ones. Many Darwinists such as Will Provine from Cornell and Richard Dawkins from Oxford are very up front that their adherence to evolution and their disdain for Intelligent Design is over the issue of a Designer by any name. The science is just a backdrop.

Judge Jones' fifth complaint against Intelligent Design was that proponents of ID have not published in the scientific peer-reviewed literature. This is simply not true. De Wolf et al., in their book *Traipsing Into Evolution*, document in Appendix B a list of thirteen different peer-reviewed articles and books by ID scientists advocating different aspects of the theory. This is admittedly a small number, but that is because there is clear evidence, documented in the same book, of editors having to shy away from ID papers and responses for fear of intimidation by the scientific community. One editor who followed established procedure in getting an ID article reviewed and published was nearly run out of his institution for the offense.

Finally, Judge Jones declared that ID has not been the subject of testing and research. Indeed, any scientific theory needs to be testable in some form or it is not likely to be of some use. But ID microbiologist Scott Minnich testified right in Judge Jones' courtroom that in his laboratory at the University of Idaho he has demonstrated the irreducible complexity of the bacterial flagellum. Minnich also testified to other research he was familiar with which also was testing principles from ID.[\[16\]](#)

As I have summarized, Judge Jones failed to make a reasonable and fair evaluation of the evidence. Intelligent Design is far from dead. Rather, such a poor decision in the Dover case may actually serve ID well as it self-destructs in the years to come.

Notes

1. Brian Wellman, April 26, 2006, Merits of intelligent design, evolution debated, www.smudailycampus.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2006/04/26/444ef833078bc
2. The Web site of the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture, www.discovery.org/csc/topQuestions.php.
3. Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), 1.
4. David De Wolf, John West, Casey Luskin, and Jonathan Witt, *Traipsing Into Evolution: Intelligent Design and the Kitzmiller vs. Dover Decision* (Seattle, WA: Discovery Institute Press, 2006), 25-57.
5. Larry Laudan, "The demise of the demarcation problem," in Michael Ruse (ed.), *But Is It Science?*, (Amherst, MA: Prometheus, 1983), 337-350.
6. Del Ratzch, *Nature, Design, and Science: The Status of Design in Natural Science* (Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 2001), 147.
7. Percival Davis and Dean H. Kenyon, *Of Pandas and People: The Central Question of Biological Origins* (Dallas, TX: Haughton Publishing Co., 1989), 166 pp.
8. DeWolf et al., 22.
9. Lane P. Lester and Raymond G. Bohlin, *The Natural Limits to Biological Change* (Richardson, TX: Probe Books, 1984), 153-154.
10. DeWolf et al., 29-45.
11. *Kitzmiller et al. v. Dover Area School Board*, No. 04cv2688, 2005 WL 3465563, *26 (M.D. Pa. Dec. 20, 2005).
12. I don't expect we ever will hear from any

extraterrestrials. Earth appears to be more and more unique with every passing day. See my article "Are We Alone in the Universe?" at www.probe.org/are-we-alone-in-the-universe-2/.

13. Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (New York: New American Library [A Mentor Book], 1958), 171 (this is a reprint of the 1872 sixth edition).

14. From the Web site of the Center for Science and Culture, www.dissentfromdarwin.org/ accessed October 11, 2006. The statement reads; "We are skeptical of claims for the ability of random mutation and natural selection to account for the complexity of life. Careful examination of the evidence for Darwinian theory should be encouraged."

15. William Dembski, *The Design Revolution: Answering the Toughest Questions About Intelligent Design* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 334 pp.

16. De Wolf et al., 56.

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"What's Up With Animal Rights?"

My question is partially about the 'animal rights' movement that seems very popular these days. I was curious to know what you thought about the idea of giving animals rights. I have recently read a book about postmodernism and culture by Peter Augustine Lawler – it is not about animal rights, but he makes the statement that: "At the end of history, human distinctiveness is negated. The laughably incoherent 'animal rights' movement exists for a moment before the nonexistence

of rights." I don't know much about the subject of rights, but I was hoping you could possibly recommend some book that touched on the subject from a Christian perspective – not necessarily animal rights, just the philosophy of rights in general- or maybe tell me what you think about what rights are and who has them and so forth.

Former Probe staff member Rich Milne authored an [article on animal rights](#). You are essentially correct that post-modernism dictates an equalization of rights between animals and humans. We are after all just another animal. Non-human animals should be treated no differently than we wish to be treated. Animal rights ethicist Peter Singer now holds a professorship of ethics at Princeton University and is continuing to humiliate himself with the logic of his own position by recently suggesting that bestiality was OK! What else can he say and remain consistent?

Not being a philosopher, I am not familiar with the literature on human rights, but Probe published a book with Zondervan in the 70s which is now out of print titled, *Human Rights and Human Dignity* by John Warwick Montgomery. Montgomery now has the rights to this book and he may have republished it so you may want to do a search on Amazon or elsewhere on the net to find it or a book like it.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Why Don’t You Cite Young Earth Creationists in Your Material?”

Ray:

I couldn’t help but notice that ICR/Dr. Henry Morris and Answers In Genesis/Ken Ham aren’t cited (or at least I did not see their viewpoints) in some of your material about creation/evolution. Are there points of disagreement? Do you take a stand beyond design that commits to either a young earth or old earth?

I do occasionally refer to writings from young earth creationists. The [article on human fossils](#), for instance, comes directly from young earth creationist Marvin Lubenow’s book *Bones of Contention*. I focus on intelligent design because it is an area that nearly all creationists, young and old earth agree on. At Probe we do not take an official position on the age of the earth question primarily because most of us here, including myself are undecided (see [Christian Views of Science and Earth History](#)) about this critical issue. I agree with Phillip Johnson that we need first to stand united against the current naturalistic filibuster in science by opposing the naturalistic approach to origins and then come back to the age of the earth question later.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“What About the Ice Age?”

My son told his teacher that he was tired of learning about the Ice Age because there is nothing about it in the Bible and he shouldn't have to learn about things that aren't in the Bible. Any advice?

The quick and simple answer to your question is that yes, there was an ice age, but there is disagreement as to its extent, length of time, and actual time of occurrence. Standard old earth (this would include old earth creationists; see our article [Christian Views of Science and Earth History](#)) rendering concludes that there were several ice ages over the last 50,000 years with the ice advancing and retreating several times. Young earth creationists also accept an ice age but there was only one and it occurred much more recently (within the last 10,000 years) as a post-flood event.

The dilemma you write about can indeed prove difficult for young minds at times. They have difficulty drawing a distinction between learning about something and believing it is true. In my article [How to Talk to Your Kids about Creation and Evolution](#) I address this in section seven titled, “Responding to Evolutionary Theory.” I basically suggest you tell your kids that simply demonstrating knowledge about evolution is not the same as believing it. You can always phrase your answer this way, “According to evolution . . .” This way you can demonstrate you understand the material but not necessarily believe it. I also address this in the section “Cultivate a Teachable Spirit” in the article [Campus Christianity](#).

I think you'll find both of these articles helpful.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin
Probe Ministries

The Privileged Planet

An Unwanted Premiere!

In June 2005 I was in Washington D.C. for a most unusual premiere. A film based on the 2004 book called *The Privileged Planet*[\[1\]](#) was being introduced to an invitation only group of about 200 at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History.

The Smithsonian was approached several months earlier about allowing their Baird Auditorium to be used for this special showing. They asked to see the film. Several people on the museum payroll viewed the film and said great, let's show it. The inquiring organization was The Discovery Institute, the leading organization promoting Intelligent Design in the U.S. and abroad. Discovery was given instructions on how to use the Smithsonian logo on the invitation, was asked for a donation of \$16,000, and told the premiere was a go.

However, when the invitations went out in late May, the Smithsonian was instantly barraged by calls and emails from disgruntled Darwinians demanding that the premiere be canceled. How dare the prestigious Smithsonian give aid and support to the Intelligent Design Movement by allowing this film on its premises? Never mind that the film has nothing to do with biological evolution and natural selection. People (even some who likely hadn't seen the film or read the book) were on a rampage.

It didn't take long for the Smithsonian to withdraw its co-sponsorship of the event although they said they would honor their commitment to allow the film to be shown. In a letter to Discovery they said, "Upon further review, the Museum has

determined that the content of the film is not consistent with the mission of the Smithsonian Institution's scientific research." [\[2\]](#) Initially, the Smithsonian said Discovery would not be required to make the "donation," but eventually kept \$5,000 for expenses incurred.

As a Fellow of the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture I was issued an invitation, and as the storm of controversy raged in *The Washington Post* and *New York Times*, I decided to get myself to Washington for this controversial and special event.

The premiere itself was a bit of an anticlimax after all the fuss. Several local scientists, national TV and newspaper media, a Congressman from Texas, and other local dignitaries were treated to a special showing and question and answer period with the authors, Gonzalez and Richards. The reception was held two floors up in the Hall of Geology, Gems, and Minerals.

Most in attendance were quite impressed . . . and mystified! They were impressed with the quality and premise of the film and mystified how a purely scientific film could be so misrepresented. In what follows, we'll explore the thesis of the book and film and see what all the fuss is about. For now, just remember science is pursued by *people*, and everyone has a worldview that can alter dramatically how science is perceived and what counts as science.

Is the Moon Just for Signs and Seasons?

When I was in the seventh grade, I remember standing in my best friend's backyard with a box over my head in broad daylight. On one end of the box was a small pinhole. On the inside of the box, against the opposite side of the box from the pinhole, was a small piece of aluminum foil. The pinhole, when facing the sun, made a small circle, maybe one-half inch in diameter, on the aluminum foil wall. As the partial solar

eclipse progressed, I could watch the progress of the moon shadowing the sun inside the box. I was fascinated that I could safely watch the partial solar eclipse with such a simple device.

You could watch partial solar eclipses on every planet in our solar system with a moon. But earth is the only planet where a full or total solar eclipse can be seen. It turns out that our moon is $1/400^{\text{th}}$ the size of the sun. But the sun is 400 times farther away from earth than the moon. So when the moon comes between the sun and the earth a small portion of earth experiences a total solar eclipse, meaning the sun is fully blocked out by the moon.

When a total solar eclipse occurs, the sun is fully blocked out by the moon darkening the earth and providing a unique glimpse of the sun's atmosphere or corona. Normally the sun's corona is overwhelmed by the sun's brightness, but in an eclipse the moon so completely shuts out the sun that the corona shines brightly for a few minutes. It is then that scientists can measure the light spectrum of the corona which reveals what is burning inside the sun. Otherwise we would not be able to measure the elemental makeup of the sun. So the fact that earth experiences a total eclipse of the sun makes our planet unique in the solar system with respect to what we can learn about what goes on in the sun's interior.

If that was all that was unique about our moon, we could write it off as a curious coincidence. But the size, shape, and orbit of our moon do more for human life than just give us a glimpse of the sun's atmosphere every so often. Without the moon, life as we know it on earth would be impossible.

It turns out that our moon is just the right size and distance from the earth that, in conjunction with the gravity of the sun, it causes substantial diurnal [daily] tides which mix the waters of the oceans, evening out their temperature and stirring their nutrients. With no moon, or a few smaller

moons, the tides would lessen greatly in intensity, therefore reducing this mixing effect. Life would be limited to the upper few feet of the oceans, and complex life would be hard pressed to survive.

Is Earth's Atmosphere Just for Breathing?

The book and film, *The Privileged Planet*, reveal many other earth systems as well that combine to make earth unique for life and scientific discovery.

Take a deep breath. Now exhale! No, this is not the latest Probe Ministries exercise routine. If you did what I just recommended on any other planet in the solar system, you'd be dead right now.

Our atmosphere of mostly nitrogen, oxygen, and just the right amount of water and carbon dioxide provides so much more than breathable air. We so easily take it for granted every time we breathe. Earth's closest planetary cousins, Venus and Mars, have atmospheres dominated by carbon dioxide. Venus's atmosphere is so thick you can't see through it, and it creates surface temperatures as high as 900 degrees Fahrenheit. Mars' thin carbon dioxide atmosphere contributes to such cold temperatures that carbon dioxide freezes at the poles.

Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards, in their book *The Privileged Planet*, tell you more than you thought possible about the unique parameters of our atmosphere in allowing life and scientific discovery. Nitrogen, for example, is necessary for life as a critical component of the building blocks of DNA and proteins. Our atmosphere of seventy percent nitrogen also allows for a transparent atmosphere that allows light as we face the sun and dark nights that allow us to see the stars.

Oxygen, of course, is necessary for animal life, and our atmosphere contains just enough to support life and not so

much as to poison life. Oxygen is also a transparent gas, keeping our atmosphere transparent for observation of our dark night skies.

Water as well is necessary for life, but water in our atmosphere, along with nitrogen, oxygen, and carbon dioxide, creates an atmosphere that is breathable but also is the best atmosphere to transmit light in the visible spectrum. Water also creates clouds over about two thirds of the earth at any one time. Clouds help control our temperature by reflecting some of the sun's energy back out into space.

Without water in our atmosphere, we never would see a rainbow. Rainbows prompted scientists of the seventeenth century to search for an explanation of the rainbow's beauty and mystery. This search eventually resulted in understanding the solar spectrum and the effect of prisms in bending light of different wavelengths.

Carbon dioxide is life's major source of carbon, that versatile and stable element absolutely necessary for life of any kind. If earth were just five percent closer to the sun, however, we would end up much like Venus: nothing but carbon dioxide resulting in a runaway greenhouse effect and totally uninhabitable planet.

Once again, earth is shown to be just right—just right for life and just right for scientific observers. What an amazing coincidence!

More and more, scientists are coming to realize that the earth is not just some insignificant pale blue dot orbiting around an insignificant star. Our planet seems designed not just for life, but for scientific discovery as well.

So the Earth Has Oceans, Crust, Mantle,

and Core. So What?

The starship Enterprise from *Star Trek* used a nifty force field deployed around the ship to protect it from oncoming photon torpedoes. During an attack, those on the bridge were always concerned with how the “shield” was holding. There was great consternation if energy levels dipped low enough to make the shield ineffective.

Our planet earth has a similar protective shield. Earth possesses a magnetic field around it that shields us from the harmful solar wind. Our atmosphere would be slowly stripped away without our magnetic field. This magnetic shield is generated because the earth is just the right size to maintain a hot liquid iron core. The heat from this core convects through the mantle, creating plate tectonics and electricity. The electricity generates our magnetic field. But you have to have the right size planet with a molten metallic core and a crust that weakens somewhat due to chemical reactions with water so it will bend and not break. All this benefits life.

The size of earth is important for other reasons. A smaller planet would lose its atmosphere much too readily, and its interior would cool too quickly, eliminating the protective magnetic field. A more massive earth would retain too much of harmful gases such as methane. On a more massive planet, the thicker atmosphere would make breathing much more difficult.

Earth's voluminous quantities of water are also extremely necessary for life and even for technological life. Water helps regulate our atmosphere and, of course, provides the perfect soluble medium for life. Water is perhaps the most unique molecule in the universe with its unique solvent properties coupled with the fact that ice floats instead of sinks like all other solid/liquid pairs. This unique feature means that when temperatures are cold enough for water to freeze, only the top layer freezes and life can go on below the ice. If ice sank, then all liquid water would eventually

freeze and life would be extinguished in some environments every winter.

In order for earth to maintain its watery oceans it needs to be the right distance from the sun. As noted earlier, if the earth were just five percent closer to the sun we would end up like Venus with thick hot clouds of carbon dioxide for an atmosphere. If we were just twenty percent farther away we would end up like Mars, a frozen wasteland. The heat coming from our just right liquid core also helps maintain our watery home.

All in all earth is a remarkable place for its size, distance from the sun, elemental make-up, size and closeness of the moon, presence of water, stable liquid iron core that generates a magnetic field, and so many other features. The suspicion of design and purpose quickly arises.

Has the Earth Been Designed for Multiple Purposes?

In many circles of academia, the idea that our earth is both designed for life and for scientific discovery is both surprising and resented. For years the notion that we are just an insignificant planet circling an ordinary star, otherwise known as the Copernican Principle, has dominated the physical sciences.

But discovery after discovery has altered that view, and has brought many kicking and screaming to a design perspective. Simon Conway Morris, a paleontologist from England, is quoted on the dust jacket of *The Privileged Planet* as saying:

In a book of magnificent sweep and daring, Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards drive home the argument that the old cliché of no place like home is eerily true of Earth. Not only that, but if the scientific method were to emerge anywhere, Earth is about as suitable as you can get.

Gonzalez and Richards have flung down the gauntlet. Let the debate begin; it is a question that involves us all.

The book and film of the same name have been wildly successful and controversial. At the Washington premiere I discussed earlier, scientists and legislators agreed that the thesis the authors propose is deserving of wide discussion.

A father brought his eight-year old son to a showing of the film we sponsored at Probe Ministries. I privately thought he would be too young. They had to leave before the film was done, but they purchased the DVD before they left and finished viewing it at home. As soon as Mom walked in the door, the eight-year old promptly began to explain the intricacies of solar eclipses, the size of the moon relative to the sun, and how these factors were not only a boon for life but also for scientific discovery.

The film does an excellent job of taking sometimes complex scientific concepts and communicating them in a way that most anybody can appreciate. This film deserves as wide a distribution as possible.

But because much of the scientific community remains locked in a purely naturalistic worldview, the perspective of purpose and design will continue to be resisted. However, parents and educators can readily use this excellent resource to simply investigate the facts and help to eventually gain Intelligent Design a much deserved place at the roundtable of scientific inquiry.

One other comment from the dust jacket says it well:

Not only have Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards written a book with a remarkable thesis, they have constructed their argument on an abundance of evidence and with a cautiousness of statement that make their volume even more remarkable. In my opinion, *The Privileged Planet* deserves very special attention.

Notes

1. Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards, *The Privileged Planet* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2004).
2. June 1, 2005 entry on Discovery Institute's blog at www.evolutionnews.org/2005/06/.

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“You Misguided Piece of **!”**

What the h*ll are you, you misguided piece of sh**!!! What did your so called 'God' snap his fingers and wham! earth is 'created' hehe you are an idiot. Where is your God anyway? Floating up in the atmosphere somewhere? Religion is something misguided humans look for when their life is in the dumps (eg. crops fail, someone dies etc etc), they want to believe in something..... which does not exist. Homo sapiens increased brain size has allowed it to think of things like this. That is all Christianity is, you can believe in it but don't expect other people to believe a falicy.[sic]

Thanks for taking the time to visit at least one of my articles; whether you actually read anything I can't tell from your message. Unfortunately your comments follow a rather common pattern of showing a lot of bluster with no substance. If you think I have made an error of fact or judgment, I would be glad to discuss something specific with you. I am sorry you have such a low opinion of people of faith (who, by the way, in reference to your comment about other people not believing it, are in the vast majority). It sounds to me like you are more mad at God than convinced of His nonexistence.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, Ph.D.

Probe Ministries

“Help—My Daughter Just Attempted Suicide”

My 19-year-old daughter has been hospitalized because she has tried to commit suicide. This has not only created a moment of crisis with in our immediate family but a very big puzzling question. Why would a person who professes to believe in Christ attempt to commit suicide? What should I say to her? How can I tell her that Christ is bigger than any of her problems may be?

Please know that I will be praying for your daughter and your family in this difficult time.

Teenagers are universally having a difficult time sorting out their lives in this new millennium. There are so many competing pressures and influences that they easily get overwhelmed. While suicide is indeed a drastic measure, it is more common today among our youth than ever before.

If your daughter is a believer, as you suggest, she might be wondering where is God in her life and circumstances. She may have a false expectation that knowing God should make everything better. While Proverbs makes clear that we are better off living with wisdom and insight, there are no guarantees against trouble. In fact Jesus warned that we would have tribulation in our lives. We can often see the ungodly and wicked succeeding in life and wonder why we should bother

doing things right. Asaph wondered the same thing in Psalm 73. Check out my article on [Where Was God on 9/11?](#) for an exposition of this important Psalm.

She may also rationalize that heaven will be a far better place than earth and why not get there sooner if her life seems impossible for whatever reason. This logic is hard to refute especially since we believe in the eternal security of the believer. Suicide does not forfeit your place in heaven if you are a true child of the King.

If she is not truly a believer then she needs the hope only He can bring. Images of the Good Shepherd from Psalm 23 and John 10 (especially verses 9, 11, 14, 15, 27, 28, and 29) can be very helpful to someone struggling to make their way in this messy world. The entire Gospel of John may be a good project for the two of you to read together.

So what do you say? First, you assure her of your love and commitment to her no matter what she has done. As her father, you carry the major load in communicating your love and acceptance of her no matter her failures or perceived inadequacies. You must depend on the Lord to allow you to see her through Jesus' eyes.

Second, she needs to understand that God is sovereign and has planned out her life. In our relationship with Him we need to seek His wisdom and guidance not our own. Things may look bad now but she can't see her life ahead as the Lord does. There is a reason for everything even when it doesn't make sense to us. She may not be ready to trust God with her life yet but she needs to know you trust God with her life.

Third, there is undoubtedly some deep seated need or hurt in her life that causes her to disrespect herself so much. She will likely need counseling to uncover this. But she will need your support through the entire process. You may need to face a failure on your own part in her life that you are unaware

of. You have to be willing to face whatever it takes to bring her back to wholeness. For awhile you will need to supply the courage she needs to face every day. You can't do this in your own strength. Remember Isaiah 40:31:

But those who hope in (or wait upon) the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary
they will walk and not be faint.

Take courage, for your Savior has overcome the world and there is nothing impossible to Him.

Respectfully,

Dr. Ray Bohlin

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The Continuing Controversy over Stem Cells: A Christian View

Dr. Ray Bohlin brings a biblical worldview to this intersection of ethics and science. From a Christian perspective, is it right to harvest and destroy embryonic stem cells for the hope of possible finding a treatment for some diseases?

Different Kinds of Stem Cells

Stem cell research grew into a major issue in the 2004

election and will continue to be discussed and argued for years to come as research continues to make progress. Unfortunately, most people continue to be misinformed about the real issues in the discussion.

Most articles in the media fail to distinguish between the different kinds of stem cells and the different ethical questions each of them presents. Several states either already have or are working to get around federal restrictions on embryonic stem cell research in order to keep the research dollars at their state research universities.

So the controversy has far from abated. In order to think our way through this we will need some basic information. First, we need to understand some things about stem cells in general and the types of stem cells available for research.

What are stem cells? Stem cells are specialized cells that can produce several different kinds of cells in your body. Just like the stem of a plant will produce branches, leaves, and flowers, so stem cells can usually produce many different kinds of cells within a particular tissue.

There are over one trillion cells in your body. Most will only divide a few times. For instance, when you were born you basically already had all the brain and neural cells you would need. As you grew, those cells simply got bigger. However, other tissues need a constant renewing of cells. The lining of your intestines, stomach, skin, and lungs constantly slough old cells and need replacements. Your blood cells constantly need replacing. In these kinds of tissues, specialized stem cells continually produce new cells.

There are skin, bone marrow, liver, muscle, and other types of stem cells in your body. These are referred to as *adult* stem cells. Other common types of stem cells are those found in umbilical cord blood. Even though these are fetal tissues, they are referred to as adult stem cells because they are already differentiated to a large degree. There are no ethical difficulties in using these stem cells for research and therapy.



Now, what are *embryonic* stem cells? Embryonic stem cells exist only in the earliest embryo just a few days after fertilization. This is referred to as the *blastocyst*. The blastocyst contains a small cluster of identical cells called the inner cell mass. These cells eventually form the baby and therefore can produce all the cells of the body. These are embryonic stem cells (ESC). In order to retrieve them, the embryo is destroyed.

Here then is the problem. While adult stem cells offer no ethical difficulties—but are not likely to be as versatile as embryonic stem cells—embryonic stem cells can only be obtained by destroying the embryo.

The Promise of Adult Stem Cells

What is the overall hope for stem cells? Why are they so sought after?

Essentially, it is hoped that stem cells can be used to treat and even cure diseases like diabetes, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, and brain and spinal injuries. These are primarily degenerative diseases where certain cells no longer function as designed due to genetic defects or injuries. Generally it has been believed that embryonic stem cells offer the most hope since we know they can become any cell in the body.

But embryonic stem cells require the destruction of the embryo where adult stem cells can be harvested from the individual that needs to be treated. First, this involves only informed consent and is ethically non-controversial. Second, since the person's own cells are used, there is no chance of rejection of the cells by the patient's immune system.

In the last few years important discoveries have been made concerning certain types of adult stem cells. Essentially, we have learned that adult stem cells can switch tissues. Bone marrow stem cells seem to be the most versatile. They have been coaxed to generate new muscle, neural, lung and other tissues.

Additionally, we have learned that adult stem cells migrate throughout the body in the blood. It appears that adult stem cells are somehow informed of injury in the cell and can migrate from their source to the injury and begin at least modest repairs.

In January 2002, a group from the University of Minnesota announced what they called the ultimate adult stem cell. In creating an immortal cell line from bone marrow stem cells, early tests showed that these stem cells could become either of the three early tissues in an embryo that eventually lead to all the cell types of the body. This showed that adult stem cells are far more versatile than previously believed.

Last year the National Institutes of Health spent \$190 million on adult stem cell research and \$25 million on embryonic stem cell research. Clinical trials are already underway using bone marrow (adult) stem cells for treatment of heart attacks, liver disease, diabetes, bone and cartilage disease, and brain disorders. Adult stem cells can even be injected intravenously in large quantities, and they will migrate to where the injury is located. With such promise coming from adult stem cells it

is hard to justify the use of problematic embryonic stem cells.

The Promise and Peril of Embryonic Stem Cells

Embryonic stem cells have always held the greatest promise for research and therapies because we know for certain that they can become any of the over 200 types of cells in the body. All we needed to do was learn how to control their destiny and their potential for unlimited growth.

As mentioned previously, the major ethical problem with embryonic stem cells is that the early embryo, the blastocyst, must be

destroyed in order to retrieve these cells. It is my firm conviction that this earliest embryo is human life worthy of protection. Once the nucleus from sperm and egg unite in the newly fertilized egg, a biochemical cascade begins that leads inevitably to a baby nine months later as long as the embryo is in the proper environment.

But there are other problems aside from the ethical barrier. The proper chemical signals to direct stem cells to turn into the cells you want are unknown. This is certainly the goal of research. Human embryonic stem cells have been coaxed to differentiate but since nearly all of the experimental work to date has been done with embryonic stem cells from embryos leftover in fertility clinics there are immune rejection problems. These foreign cells are treated like they were from an organ donation.

Additionally, these cells are programmed to undergo rapid cell division. In China a man with Parkinson's was treated with human embryonic stem cells which turned into a tumor (teratoma) in his brain that killed him. The power of these cells is also a source of their peril.

In summary, embryonic stem cells possess uncertain promise. They require the death of the embryo. All therapies with any kind of stem cell are experimental and may not work. Right now, too much is being promised, and coverage in the media has been biased toward embryonic stem cells and is inaccurate.

When these difficulties and question marks are considered in the light of the exciting promise of adult stem cells, which are already producing positive results in human clinical trials, the pursuit of embryonic stem cell research is questionable at best. Just recently a major U.S. journal reported that bone marrow stem cells show great promise in treating the diseased lungs of cystic fibrosis patients.^[1] CF is the most common fatal genetic disorder in the Caucasian population. Adult stem cells continue to outperform embryonic stem cells.

Stem Cells and the Last Election

The first human embryonic stem cells were isolated from embryos donated from fertility clinics in 1998. Prior to that, Congress had passed—and President Clinton had signed—legislation that prohibited the use of federal money for the destruction or use of human embryos for research purposes. This was seen as worthy even for pro-choice advocates because no one wanted to go down the road of using even the earliest human life for research purposes.

When President Bush took office in January 2001, pressure had already come from the medical research community to revise this restriction so federal grants could be used to explore this promising research avenue. Adult stem cells were still viewed as being too restricted for general research use in humans. In August 2001, President Bush issued his now famous compromise

of allowing federal funds to be used to research embryonic stem cells already isolated from human embryos, but keeping in place the restriction for using federal dollars for destroying

human embryos to obtain additional cell lines.

The National Institutes of Health estimated that there were already over sixty human embryonic stem cell lines isolated around the world that would be available for research purposes. The President was criticized by pro-life advocates for allowing any federal money for research on embryonic stem cell lines, and the medical research community criticized the President for not allowing federal research money for the creation of new embryonic stem cell lines. If everybody is unhappy, it sounds like a good compromise!

The events of September 11, 2001 quickly removed this controversy from the public's attention, but the 2004 presidential election brought it back front and center. The Bush administration, supported by the President's Council for Bioethics, continued to argue against federal money for the destruction of embryos.

The Kerry campaign seized what they saw as an opening and began claiming that they would lift the ban on stem cell research. They enlisted Ron Reagan to deliver this message at the Democratic National Convention in July, 2004. Ronald Reagan had recently passed away from Alzheimer's, and many were claiming that embryonic stem cell research could bring a cure for Alzheimer's disease.

There were several problems with this message. First, President Bush never banned stem cell research. The Administration was funding adult stem cell research at about \$190 million a year and embryonic stem cell research at about \$25 million a year. Private money was always legal to use, but private investors were staying away because of the ethical problems and the lack of progress.

Second, researchers had already testified on Capital Hill that Alzheimer's was likely not curable by treating the brain with

stem cells since it was considered a whole brain disease and cell replacement would not do much good. The media just couldn't get it right.

The Distortion and the Hype of Embryonic Stem Cells

Those of us who are opposed to the use of embryonic stem cells for research are routinely accused of being hard-hearted toward those whose maladies can be addressed with stem cell research. Of course, this is not the case. We fully support adult stem cell research, but even if adult stem cells prove problematic in some cases I would still not support embryonic stem cell research when the embryo must be destroyed to obtain them.

When we think about saving lives we must count the cost. Is relieving the symptoms of disease worth the cost of the lives of the weakest and most defenseless members of society? Treating embryos with careless disregard will lead to further abuses down the road.

One of the problems with embryonic stem cells was the possibility of immune rejection. To avoid this, many want to clone the affected individual and use the embryonic stem cells from the clone. But this treats the human embryo as a thing, a clump of cells. The basis of this ethic is strictly "the end justifies the means." Even the term "therapeutic" is problematic. The subject is destroyed.

Many try to get around the destruction of the embryo problem by claiming the blastocyst is just reproductive cells and not a person. Medical mystery writer Robin Cook gave us an example in his most recent thriller, *Seizure*.[\[2\]](#) In the book a medical researcher appears before a Senate committee and says, "Blastocysts have a potential to form a viable embryo, but only if implanted in a uterus. In therapeutic cloning, they are never allowed to form embryos. . . . Embryos are not

involved in therapeutic cloning.”{3} Hm!

Later in the epilogue, Cook, who is an MD, says, “Senator Butler, like other opponents of stem-cell and therapeutic cloning research, suggests that the procedure requires the dismemberment of embryos. As Daniel points out to no avail, this is false. The cloned stem-cells in therapeutic cloning are harvested from the blastocyst stage well before any embryo forms. The fact is that in therapeutic cloning, an embryo is never allowed to form and nothing is ever implanted into a uterus.”{4}

Cook is greatly mistaken. A 1997 embryology text states plainly that “The study of animal development has traditionally been called embryology, referring to the fact that between fertilization and birth the developing organism is known as an embryo.”{5} So let’s be very careful and pay attention to what is said. Some are trying to manipulate the debate by changing the “facts.” We must promote the incredible success and continued promise of adult stem cells while continuing to spell out the long term peril of embryonic stem cells.

Notes

1. Wang, Guoshun, Bruce A. Bunnell, Richard G. Painter, Blesilda C. Quiniones, Nicholas A. Lanson Jr., Jeffrey L. Spees, Daniel J. Weiss, Vincent G. Valentine, Darwin J. Prockop, “Adult stem cells from bone marrow stroma differentiate into airway epithelial cells: Potential therapy for cystic fibrosis” PNAS online, www.pnas.org (accessed December 22, 2004).
2. Robin Cook, *Seizure* (New York: Berkeley Books, 2003), 429.
3. Ibid, 32-33.
4. Ibid, 428.

5. Scott F. Gilbert, *Developmental Biology*, 5th ed. (Sunderland, Mass.: Sinauer Associates, Inc., 1997), 3. Later in the same text, Gilbert clearly equates the blastocyst and embryo when he says on page 185, "While the embryo is moving through the oviduct en route to the uterus, the blastocyst expands within the zona pellucida." Gilbert seems to have had a change of heart between his fifth edition and the sixth. In the sixth edition of his textbook Gilbert defines embryology differently. "The study of animal development has traditionally been called embryology, from that phase of organisms that exists between fertilization and birth." This is on page 4 of the new edition and curiously leaves the word embryo out of the definition of embryology. Perhaps Cook and Gilbert know each other!

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See Also:

- [The Controversy Over Stem Cell Research \[2001\]](#)
- [Putting the Brakes on Human Genetic Engineering](#)
- [Stem Cells and the Controversy Over Therapeutic Cloning](#)
- [Probe Answers Our E-Mail: "Your Anti-Stem Cell Research Position Disregards Diabetics"](#)