

“Can You Recommend Good Books on Intelligent Design?”

Grace and peace to you, Dr. Bohlin:

I am a returning college student and a home-schooling parent. In my classes I find myself facing animosity toward those of us who reject evolution. I want to be able to defend myself in class as well as prepare my children to do the same. I want to be able to say to my children and in class, “I believe [THIS], because [of THIS]; and here’s the difference.” I know there is good information available on Intelligent Design and Creationism, but I simply do not have the ammunition of knowledge and information that I desire.

Unfortunately, with so many works available, I am at a loss as to where to begin. Thus, could you recommend a few? Are there any that force evolutionists to base their critical examinations mainly (or exclusively) upon emotional arguments? (I.e., points that naturalistic “science” cannot honestly ignore or refute.) Alternatively, could you recommend an assortment that, when combined, thwart the mass of evolutionist droning? (And a good order in which to read/study the works.)

I honor you for your desire to become more knowledgeable in this important arena. I wish there were more Christians like you.

Below is a brief annotated bibliography in the order I feel they should be read by someone just starting out.

*1. For an overview of the many issues and publishing events surrounding this question, you can start with the Probe book *Creation, Evolution, and Modern Science*, (Kregel, 2000) which I edited. This will introduce you to several topics without going into too much depth. [This link](#) will give you some more*

information.

2. *Darwin On Trial* by Phillip Johnson (IVP 1991). Phil Johnson has emerged as the leader of the Intelligent Design movement and here lays out in logical manner some of the important evidential problems with evolution as well as the all important academic and educational problems. [See this related article.](#)

3. *Reason in the Balance* by Phillip Johnson (IVP 1995). Here Johnson lays out just what is at stake in this naturalism vs. theism clash within the culture in law, science, and education. Not his most popular book, but by his own admission, his most important book. [See this related article.](#)

4. *Icons of Evolution* by Jonathan Wells (Regnery, 2000). A superb expose' of the ten most popular evidences for evolution in high school biology textbooks. The evolutionary and educational communities are falling all over themselves trying to explain or discredit this book. They are looking more and more foolish as time goes on. [See this related article.](#)

5. *Darwin's Black Box* By Michael Behe (Free Press, 1996). This is a narrower work explaining the necessity of intelligent design in understanding the molecular workings of the cell. Not as technical as you think. I have a good review of it in *Creation, Evolution and Modern Science*. [See this related article.](#)

6. *Intelligent Design* by William Dembski (IVP, 2000). Dembski shows how important Design is within a broad perspective across disciplines while also demonstrating the academic rigor of a design hypothesis. [See this related article.](#)

7. *Defeating Darwinism* by Phillip Johnson (IVP, 1997). A short book for students, parents and teachers highlighting the critical thinking skills needed to weave through the mine fields of the creation/evolution controversy. [See this](#)

[related article.](#)

8. *The Wedge of Truth* by Phillip Johnson (IVP, 2000). Johnson's latest book, providing an update and analysis of the current controversy and an explanation of overall strategy (*The Wedge*). Insightful and quotable as always.

There are other books to help you in specific areas and anthologies to offer more technical perspectives of important aspects of the controversy, but these should get you started.

There are reviews of books 2-7 on our website in the science section. URLs listed at the end of each description.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin
Probe Ministries

The Coming Revolution in Science

The Design Inference



True scientific revolutions that impact more than a single discipline rarely occur more than once a century. Newton's *Principia*, published in the 17th century,

truly qualifies. Darwin's *Origin of Species*, published in 1859, also belongs on the list. Standing in the wings, ready to join these esteemed works and perhaps even overturn the latter, stands William Dembski's *The Design Inference*.^[1] This impressive work published by the distinguished Cambridge University Press outlines the mathematical principles necessary to distinguish intelligently caused events from natural events.

Just listen to some of the comments from the dust jacket of the book from secular philosophers and mathematicians. One wrote, "Dembski has written a sparkingly original book. Not since David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* has someone taken such a close look at the design argument." Being put in the same sentence as David Hume is no small potatoes. Mathematician David Berlinski warns, "Those who agree with its point of view will read it with pleasure, and those who do not will ignore it at their peril."

Dembski has rigorously detailed the key trademark of intelligent causes, what he calls *specified complexity*. The term *specified* refers to the notion that an event conforms to an independently given pattern. Complexity refers to an event of small probability. For instance, people win improbable lotteries all the time. The odds are usually in the millions to one. But when the number of tickets purchased is considered, nobody questions the legitimacy of *someone* holding the winning ticket. This would be an event of small probability without any specification. Somebody will win, but nobody can predict whom. But let's propose that the same person wins the same lottery three times in a row! Suddenly there is an independent pattern and we immediately become suspicious that more than just chance is involved. We now have an event of extremely small probability that also conforms to a pattern or is specified. The most likely cause for such an event is that someone has intelligently tampered with the lottery.

Dembski boldly suggests that these same principles can be applied to the question of the origin of life and other evolutionary questions and still maintain the integrity of science. While Dembski has been sharply criticized by the evolutionary establishment, to their discredit, their critiques have been largely emotional and dismissive. No one has successfully challenged the heart of his thesis.

Now before you decide to run out and get a copy, please be advised that this book is not for the casual reader. Loaded with technical jargon and symbolic logic, you had better have eaten your mental Wheaties before tackling this one. But Dembski has written a scaled down version, which I will now discuss.

Hasn't Science and Philosophy Ruled Out Design?

✖ William Dembski's groundbreaking book, *The Design Inference* from Cambridge University Press, is highly technical. Dembski has therefore written a follow-up book titled, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge between Science and Theology*, [\[2\]](#) which is more accessible to the general reader. *Christianity Today* has named it their 1999 Book of the Year in the "Christianity and Culture" category.

Listen to a few sound bites from comments of those recommending Dembski's *Intelligent Design*. A quantum chemistry professor from the University of Georgia says, "William Dembski is perhaps the very brightest of a new generation of scholars." A professor of philosophy from the University of Texas says, "William Dembski is the Isaac Newton of information theory." Another university professor proclaims "If Dembski is right, and I believe he is, then it is unscientific to deny the existence of God." Wow! Unscientific to deny God! Do you think that comment is rankling a good number of evolutionary biologists? Finally, another University

of Texas professor of government goes further by claiming that “Dembski strengthens the case for saying that our deepest moral inclinations not only look designed, they are.”

Let me now begin to satiate your curiosity by telling you a little more about this groundbreaking work. The book is divided into three parts. In the first part Dembski gives a historical backdrop to the current controversy over design. In academia, the design argument has been considered dead for over 150 years. Dembski identifies two major reasons for this demise of design. The first was the continual attack on miracles, which culminated in the 18th and 19th century. Dembski cogently explains that their arguments don’t work.

The second blow to design came from Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. Darwin dismissed the prevalent British natural theology of his day by not so much refuting it, but by announcing that it simply wasn’t scientific. Dembski quotes evolutionary philosopher David Hull, “He dismissed it not because it was an incorrect scientific explanation, but because it was not a proper scientific explanation at all.” Darwin’s faulty conception of science is still with us and Dembski sets out to refute it.

The criteria used by the British natural theologians were naive in the sense that they believed that design was self-evident. This led to far too many false positives, that is, assignments of design that were later proved to be naturalistic. The design argument was forced to retreat. In the second part of *Intelligent Design*, Dembski articulates the principles laid out in his *The Design Inference* for the general reader.

What Does a Theory of Design Look Like?

Having told you about Dembski’s work and the impact it is beginning to have, I will summarize Dembski’s prescription or cure for the rule of naturalism in science.[{3}](#)

No one in the design movement as far as I know seeks to invoke God at every turn as an explanation for natural phenomena. So why bring God into the picture at all? For most scientists, God is only a hypothesis, and an unnecessary one at that. But beyond the ordinary operation of nature is its order. Dembski references Einstein's remark that the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible. This order must come from outside the universe or from within. But science tells us today that the only allowable answer is that it comes from within. This naturalistic philosophy has become a form of idolatry. Nature becomes the do all and end all. As Dembski says, "Rather it is a matter of investing the world with a significance it does not deserve." [\[4\]](#)

Naturalism is pervasive in the culture. Even most Christians think and live naturalistically without realizing it. So how can naturalism be defeated? What is needed, says Dembski, is a means of detecting God's actions in the natural world. In other words there must be a reliable way to distinguish natural causes from intelligent causes. Some sciences already employ such methods such as forensic medicine, cryptography, archeology, and even the SETI program, the search for extraterrestrial intelligence. SETI depends on the ability to distinguish an intelligent message from space from the surrounding radio noise. This can be done without necessarily understanding the message or knowing the message sender.

This brings up another crucial point of intelligent design. Dembski says that intelligent design is theologically minimalist. [\[5\]](#) By this he means that intelligent design empirically detects design without speculating about the nature of the intelligence. This is crucial to answer the critics who accuse design theorists of simply wanting to bring the Bible into science. If one detects design or concludes that a particular natural phenomena contains the necessary earmarks of design, that's all that needs to be said. One can personally reflect on the nature of this intelligence, but it

is not a part of the scientific test.

Dembski calls for a new generation of scholars open to pursuing intelligent causes in the universe. Here at Probe we're committed to helping find, select, and train such potential scholars to take part in a true scientific revolution.

Does Intelligent Design Offer a Bridge between Science and Theology?

In this review and summarization of Dembski's insights let's now explore the future Dembski foresees for the dialogue between science and theology.[{6}](#)

Of course most within the scientific community see no future at all for such a discourse. Most within modern academia hold to either of three models that Dembski labels as conflicting, complementing, or compartmentalizing. Most of us are very familiar with the conflict model. Most who call themselves rationalists or secular humanists would subscribe to this view. Basically they see science as having explained all of reality and that there is no room for theology at all. I once attended a conference where a theology professor was so intimidated by this view that he said that theology was a dead discipline and would cease to exist in twenty years.

Stephen J. Gould, a Harvard paleontologist, and the National Academy of Sciences have advocated the compartmentalization view. Basically they maintain that science and theology inform different parts of reality—science the realm of facts and theology the realm of morals and faith. There is no conflict and also no dialogue between the two. It is also not hard to see that this view basically rules theology out of any important discussions about real facts. Theology inhabits only the fuzzy world of morals, which must be relative if naturalism rules in science.

Similar is the complementarity view, which essentially states that science and theology can actually inform the same reality, but their language is so foreign to the other that no meaningful discourse can take place. Both are necessary to give a complete account of reality, but you can forget about the two ever talking to each other.

In one way or another, each of these three views will eventually rule theology as irrelevant to the important questions and a fully naturalistic science will eventually be the wellspring for all useful information and discourse. But as you might expect, Dembski offers a fourth view and argues that it is the only proper view of the two disciplines.

Dembski compares science and theology to two different windows that view the same reality. Since the windows are different, they gain a different perspective. But since they are viewing the same reality, what is seen from each window can in many cases be meaningfully related. Both science and theology may on occasion, be capable of further explaining observations from each window. He offers the current discussion concerning the cosmology's Big Bang and theology's act of Creation as an example. If the Big Bang is true, then Christianity's theology of creation *ex nihilo* is a better explanation than naturalism's attempt to explain something from nothing.

There is much more work to be done here as Dembski readily admits, but the tone and direction is very refreshing.

What Are the Standard Objections to Design in Science?

There is the potential of the intelligent design movement bringing about a revolution in science. I have summarized the work of William Dembski, a double Ph.D. in philosophy and mathematics with a Master's of Divinity thrown in for good measure. In the appendix of his much acclaimed book, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge between Science and Theology*,

Dembski investigates several of the more common objections to intelligent design. To conclude this review I will examine one of these objections.

Dembski states the first objection this way, "Design substitutes extraordinary explanations where ordinary explanations will do and thereby commits a god-of-the-gaps fallacy." Those believing that God used evolution as His means of creation usually voice this objection. This view is motivated by the tremendous history of naturalistic science in explaining very difficult natural phenomena by natural means. This often occurs after someone has claimed that God was necessary to explain a particular observation. Isaac Newton thought divine intervention was necessary to explain the irregularities of planetary orbits. It was eventually shown that these irregularities were periodic and not random and thus explainable by natural law.[\[7\]](#)

Newton was widely criticized for this view, and many Christians fear that appealing to design now will end up in ridicule later when natural processes may also explain contrivances of intelligent design later. While this fear is understandable in the light of history, there are considerable differences. Design does not claim to simply explain what we do not understand. Rather, intelligent design is attempting to demonstrate a real solution to problems based on what we know about design, not what we don't know about natural explanations.

Besides, if we believe that the laws of nature are incapable of producing certain natural phenomena, such as the genetic code of DNA, just how long are we supposed to keep looking for a naturalistic solution instead of looking elsewhere? This puts shackles on scientific inquiry and stifles new ideas. Certainly we should attempt to exhaust all known naturalistic possibilities before pursuing a design answer. But fear of failure should not be our deterrent. There is always risk in proposing new scientific ideas and hypotheses. The risk is

that you just might be wrong. But this has never permanently hindered the proposal of a new idea. Failure should be a constant risk in science. Otherwise nothing new will ever be discovered.

“Not all gaps are created equal. To assume that they are is to presuppose the very thing that is in question, namely, naturalism.”^{8} William Dembski has issued a strong challenge through his books and more are to follow from others dealing with the philosophy and science of intelligent design. The next several years should be very exciting indeed.

Notes

1. William A. Dembski, *The Design Inference: Eliminating Chance by through Small Probabilities* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
2. William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999).
3. Ibid., 97- 121.
4. Ibid., 101.
5. Ibid., 107.
6. Ibid., 187- 210.
7. Nancy Pearcey and Charles Thaxton, *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 91-92.
8. Dembski, *Intelligent Design*, 245.

Why Does the University Fear Phillip Johnson?

Who Is Phillip Johnson?

Best-selling author Phillip Johnson has become the leader of the Intelligent Design movement. His books *Darwin on Trial*, *Reason in the Balance*, *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds* and the recently released *Objections Sustained* have become rallying points for Christian scholars across the academic spectrum. Johnson has addressed university audiences around the country, sometimes on his own, often in debate with a leading proponent of evolution. He has even addressed in private session entire science, law, and philosophy departments at top universities. Well, just who is Phillip Johnson and how does he rate such attention?

Johnson was raised in a nominally Christian family, but he grew to become a convinced skeptic of the faith. This process was greatly aided by his education, first as an undergraduate at Harvard and then at the University of Chicago Law School where he graduated first in his class. Johnson became convinced that people were basically good, education would solve whatever problems you had, the stuff of Sunday school was okay but mythology, and he could achieve success by thinking for himself and absorbing the culture around him.

This is the enticing picture the academic community paints for students and Johnson bought it. But things began to unravel in his mid-thirties. He had achieved his goals. He served as law clerk for Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren and held a distinguished professorship of law at UC Berkeley, but he lacked fulfillment. He was publishing papers nobody read, or

ought to read. His marriage to a beauty queen fell apart and he was single parenting for awhile. The writings of C. S. Lewis had impacted him greatly, but he thought, "Too bad we can't believe in that anymore." Eventually he heard the gospel preached in a way that seemed plausible and attractive. Johnson envied the speaker's combination of commitment and fulfillment. "Do I have something so wonderful?" he questioned. Johnson said, "They believed it, I could too."

Johnson put his faith in Christ, but faced a dilemma. If the gospel is true, why are all the "intelligent" people agnostic? He prayed for insight. Beginning with a sabbatical at University College in London in 1987-88, Johnson embarked on an intellectual journey. This journey has developed into a project that has seen him publish four books, deliver hundreds of lectures on college campuses, and become the leader of the fledgling Intelligent Design movement over the last ten years. Primarily through his study of evolution, Johnson learned that the academic community's primary intellectual commitment is to the philosophy of naturalism. If the "facts" contradict materialistic conclusions, then the "facts" are either explained away, ignored, or just plain wrong.

Therefore, evolutionists like Richard Dawkins can say things like "Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose," and actually say it with a straight face. The appearance of design is an illusion, you see, because we "know" that organisms evolved and the primary reason we "know" this is because naturalistic philosophy demands it.

Johnson's primary task seems to be continually provoking the scientific community into facing the reality of its naturalistic presuppositions. In earlier years, the scientific establishment was able to dismiss creationists and not officially respond. But when a tenured law professor from Berkeley starts messing with your head, people start answering back. The National Academy of Sciences has issued two

publications in the last two years trying to stem the tide.[\[1\]](#)
The cracks in Darwinian evolution are beginning to show.

What Could a Law Professor Say About Evolution?

What could a legal scholar possibly have to say about evolution? Many in the academic community have raised the same question as Phillip Johnson has visited their university. In his own words Johnson states: "I approach the creation-evolution dispute not as a scientist but as a professor of law, which means among other things that I know something about the ways that words are used in arguments."[\[2\]](#)

Specifically what Johnson noticed was that both the rules of debate about the issue as well as the word *evolution* itself were defined in such a way as to rule out objections from the start. Science is only about discovering naturalistic causes of phenomena, therefore arguing against the sufficiency of natural causes is not science! Also the "fact of evolution" is determined not by the usual definition of fact such as collected data or something like space travel which has been done, but as something arrived by majority vote! Steven J. Gould said, "In science, fact can only mean 'confirmed to such a degree that it would be perverse to withhold provisional assent.'"[\[3\]](#)

In the early chapters of *Darwin on Trial*, Johnson does an excellent job of summarizing the evidence that has been around for decades calling Darwinian evolution into question. These include problems with the mechanism of mutation and natural selection, problems with finding transitional fossils between major groups when they should be numerous, problems with the molecular evidence for common descent, and severe problems with any scenario for the origin of life.

In a chapter titled "The Rules of Science" Johnson excels in illuminating the clever web evolutionists have drawn to

insulate evolution from criticism.[{4}](#) In order to limit discussion to naturalistic causes, science is defined in purely naturalistic terms. In the Arkansas creation law decision, Judge Overton said science was defined as being guided and explained by natural law, testable, tentative, and falsifiable. Overton got this from the so-called expert testimony of scientists collected for the trial by the ACLU. These criteria were used against creation on the one hand to say that a creator is not falsifiable, and also that the tenets of creation science were demonstrably false. How can something be non-falsifiable and false at the same time?

The conflict enters in when one realizes that creation by Darwinist evolution is as un-observable as creation by a supernatural creator. No one has ever observed any lineage changing into another and the few fossil transitions that exist are fragmentary and disputable. "As an explanation for modifications in populations, Darwinism is an empirical doctrine. As an explanation for how complex organisms came into existence in the first place, it is pure philosophy."[{5}](#)

In a chapter titled "Darwinist Religion" Johnson points out that despite the claims of scientists that evolution is secular, it is loaded with religious and philosophical implications. Most definitions of evolution emphasize its lack of purpose or goal. This makes evolution decidedly non-purposive in contrast to a theistic, purposive interpretation of nature. If it is the philosophic opposite of theism, evolution must be religious itself. Darwin himself constantly argued the superiority of descent with modification over creation. If scientific arguments can be made against theism, why can't scientific arguments be made for theism?

Darwin on Trial continues to sell, to be read, and to influence those open to consider the evidence. Since Johnson is not a scientist his book is highly readable to the educated layman. If you have never picked it up, you owe it to yourself to read what has become a classic in the creation/evolution

controversy.

Johnson Extends His Case against Evolution into Law and Education.

Over the years of speaking on the creation/evolution issue I have been asked many times why people get so upset over this issue. If it is just a question of scientific accuracy, why does it produce such emotional extremes? The answer, of course, is that the creation/evolution debate involves much more than science. At question is which worldview should hold sway in making public decisions.

In Phil Johnson's second book, *Reason in the Balance*, he makes this very point when he says, "What has really happened is that a new established religious philosophy has replaced the old one. Like the old philosophy, the new one is tolerant only up to a point, specifically, the point where its own right to rule the public square is threatened."[\[6\]](#)

The old philosophy Johnson speaks of is the theistic or Judeo-Christian worldview and the new philosophy is the materialist or naturalistic worldview. Johnson has referred to *Reason in the Balance* as his most significant and important work. That is because it is here that he lays the all important philosophical groundwork for the scientific, legal, and educational battleground of which the creation/evolution controversy is only a part.

That we no longer live in a country dominated by Judeo-Christian principles should be inherently obvious to most. But what many have missed is the concerted effort by the intellectual, naturalistic community to eliminate any possibility of debate of the worthiness of their position. On page 45 Johnson says,

"Modernist discourse accordingly incorporates semantic devices—such as the labeling of theism as religion and

naturalism as science—that work to prevent a dangerous debate over fundamental assumptions from breaking out in the open. As the preceding chapter showed, however, these devices become transparent under the close inspection that an open debate tends to encourage. The best defense for modernist naturalism is to make sure the debate does not occur.”{7}

Johnson is quick to point out that there is not some giant conspiracy, but simply a way of thinking that dominates the culture, even the thinking of many Christians.

Therefore, in the realm of science when considering the important question of the existence of a human mind, only the biochemical workings of the brain can be considered. Not because an immaterial reality has been disproved, but because it is outside the realm of materialistic science and therefore not worth discussing. Allowing the discussion in the first place lays bare a discussion of fundamental assumptions, the very thing that is to be avoided.

In education, “The goal is to produce self-defining adults who choose their own values and lifestyles from among a host of alternatives, rather than obedient children who follow a particular course laid down for them by their elders.”{8} The reason, of course, is if God is outside the scientific discussion of origins, then how we should live must also exclude any absolute code of ethics. This also precludes the underlying assumptions from being discussed.

In law, naturalism has become the established constitutional philosophy. Rather than freedom *of* religion, the courts are moving to a freedom *from* religion. The major justification is that “religion” is irrational when it enters the domain of science or a violation of the first amendment in public education. “Under current conditions, excluding theistic opinions means giving a monopoly to naturalistic opinions on subjects like whether humans are created by God and whether

sexual intercourse should be reserved for marriage.”[{9}](#) What then are the strategies for breaking the monopoly?

Can Darwinism Be Defeated?

The main thing Christian parents and teachers can do is to teach young thinkers to understand the techniques of good thinking and help them tune up their baloney detectors so they aren't fooled by the stock answers the authorities give to the tough questions.[{10}](#)

So says Phillip Johnson in his recent book, *Defeating Darwinism*. (For a fuller review see Rick Wade's article, [Defeating Darwinism: Phil Johnson Steals the Microphone.](#)) Johnson is at his best here, relaying the many semantic and argumentative tricks used to cover up the inadequacies of Darwinism. In the chapter "Tuning Up Your Baloney Detector," Johnson introduces the reader to examples of the use of selective evidence, appeals to authority, ad hominem arguments, straw man arguments, begging the question, and lack of testability. This chapter will give you a good grasp of logical reasoning and investigative procedure.

Johnson also explains the big picture of his strategy to weaken the stranglehold of Darwinism on the intellectual community. He calls it *the wedge*. Darwinism is compared to a log that seems impenetrable. Upon close investigation, a small crack is discovered. "The widening crack is the important but seldom recognized difference between the facts revealed by scientific investigation and the materialist philosophy that dominates the scientific culture."[{11}](#) In order to split the log, the crack needs to be widened. Inserting a triangular shaped wedge and driving the pointed end further into the log can do this. As the wedge is driven further into the log, the wider portions of the wedge begin widening the crack.

Johnson sees his own books as the pointed end of the wedge, finding the crack and exposing its weaknesses. Other books in

these initial efforts would certainly include the pioneering works of Henry Morris,{12} Duane Gish,{13} Charles Thaxton,{14} and even the agnostic Michael Denton.{15} Following close behind and fulfilling the role of further widening the crack are the works of J. P. Moreland,{16} Michael Behe,{17} and William Dembski.{18} What is needed now to widen the crack further and eventually split the log are larger numbers of theistic scientists, philosophers, and social scientists to fill in the ever widening portions of the wedge exposing the weaknesses of naturalistic assumptions across the spectrum of academic disciplines.

Here Johnson's strategy meshes nicely with Probe Ministries. Much of our energy is spent educating young people in a Christian worldview through Mind Games Conferences, the ProbeCenter in Austin, Texas, and our website (www.probe.org). We share with Johnson the joy of encouraging and opening doors for young people in the academic community. Johnson says,

"If you know a gifted young person, help him or her to see the vision. Those who are called to it won't need any further encouragement. Once they have seen their calling, you had better step out of the way because you won't be able to stop them even if you try."{19}

There is also an inherent risk in all this. Teaching young Christians to think critically and have the courage to join this exciting and meaningful cultural battle means they will also begin to examine their own faith critically. Some may even go through a period of doubt and deep questioning. While this may sound threatening, we shouldn't shy away. If Jesus truly is the way, the truth, and the light then any "truth" exposed to the light will endure. Our children will be stronger having put their faith to the test. The reward of possibly making a directional change in our downward spiraling culture is worth the risk.

Johnson Responds to the Intellectual Elite

One of the reasons that Phillip Johnson has become a leader in the Intelligent Design movement is the combined effect of his tenured position on the law faculty of the prestigious University of California at Berkeley and his deftness and sheer enjoyment in taking on the power brokers within the established halls of academia. Johnson has traveled extensively in the U.S. and abroad. He has also lectured and debated before university audiences and faculties. His knowledge of debate, concise prose, and his likeable demeanor allows him to bring the issues to the table skillfully. Many are able to think clearly about these issues for perhaps the first time.

Another avenue Johnson has pursued with great success has been to write articles and review books for some of the leading magazines and newspapers in the country. Johnson's fourth book, *Objections Sustained: Subversive Essays on Evolution, Law & Culture*, [{20}](#) is a collection of his essays since the publication of *Darwin on Trial* in 1991. While most of the essays in the book were originally published in either the journal *First Things* or the paper *Books and Culture*, Johnson's pen has also been found in the pages of *The Atlantic*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Times*, *The New Criterion*, and many other national and local magazines and newspapers. He has openly challenged some of the leading spokesmen for naturalistic evolution such as Stephen J. Gould and Richard Lewontin of Harvard, Richard Dawkins of Oxford University, and Daniel Dennet from Tufts University.

The point of all this is to draw the Darwinists out into the open where the debate can be seen and heard by all who are interested. Previously, creation was routinely dismissed as religion, but Johnson is not so easily swept aside since he has been able to expose the house of cards behind the bluster

of Darwinism. The debate has crept more and more out in the open.

Two examples come to mind. First, the National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT) was caught with its hand in the cookie jar. In 1995, they released a statement about evolution describing it as, among other things, unsupervised and impersonal. Such theological/philosophical concepts should have no place in a “scientific” statement. A storm of controversy sparked both within and outside the teachers’ ranks culminated in a reconsideration of the statement by the NABT board. At first the board voted unanimously to uphold the statement, and then a few days later, voted to remove the offending words. The *New York Times* remarked that “This surprising change in creed for the nation’s biology teachers is only one of many signs that the proponents of creationism, long stereotyped as anti-intellectual Bible-thumpers, have new allies and the hope of new credibility.”[\[21\]](#)

Second, the prestigious National Academy of Sciences has published two official publications attacking creationism[\[22\]](#) and supporting the teaching of evolution.[\[23\]](#) Rather than taking its critics head-on, these two books timidly revert to old and tattered evidences and appeals to authority. For instance, the National Academy boldly asserts that “there is no debate within the scientific community over whether evolution occurred, and there is no evidence that evolution has not occurred.”[\[24\]](#)

Science and Creationism says on the one hand, “Scientists can never be sure that a given explanation is complete and final.”[\[25\]](#) But evolution cannot really be questioned because “Nothing in biology makes sense in biology except in the light of evolution.”[\[26\]](#) Such obfuscation is now officially in the open arena—precisely where Johnson has been trying to force it to appear. The next ten to fifteen years promise to be exciting. I hope you continue to read Phillip Johnson and observe the ever broadening wedge drive deeper into the chinks

of the Darwinian armor.

Notes

1. National Academy of Sciences, *Teaching About Evolution and the Nature of Science* (Washington, D. C.: National Academy Press, 1998), 140. Available online at <http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/creationism/>.

National Academy of Sciences, *Science and Creationism: A View from the National Academy of Sciences* (Washington D. C.: National Academy Press, 1999), 35. Available online at <http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/evolution98>.

2. Phillip Johnson, *Darwin On Trial* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 8.

3. Stephen J. Gould, "Evolution as Fact and Theory" in *Hen's Teeth and Horse's Toes* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), 255.

4. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, 111-122.

5. Ibid., 115.

6. Phillip E. Johnson, *Reason in the Balance: The Case Against Naturalism in Science, Law and Education* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 37.

7. Ibid., 45.

8. Ibid., 157.

9. Ibid., 29.

10. Phillip E. Johnson, *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 116.

11. Ibid., 92.

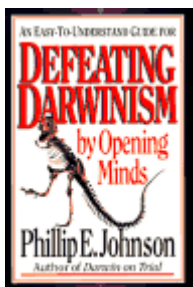
12. Henry Morris, *Scientific Creationism* (San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1974).

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14. Charles B. Thaxton, Walter L. Bradley, and Roger L. Olsen, *The Mystery of Life's Origin* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1984).
15. Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, MD: Adler and Adler, 1986).
16. J. P. Moreland, ed., *The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
17. Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).
18. William A. Dembski, *The Design Inference: Eliminating Chance through Small Probabilities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.) And, William A. Dembski, ed., *Mere Creation: Science, Faith and Intelligent Design* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998).
19. Johnson, *Defeating Darwinism*, 96.
20. Johnson, *Objections Sustained: Subversive Essays on Evolution, Law & Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998).
21. Quoted in Johnson, *Objections Sustained*, p. 88.
22. *Science and Creationism*, see note 1.
23. *Teaching about Evolution and the Nature of Science*, see note 1.
24. Ibid., 4.
25. *Science and Creationism*, 1.
26. Ibid., ix.

Defeating Darwinism

Introduction

What's this? A lawyer debating philosophy with scientists? If you keep close tabs on the creation/evolution debate, you've probably already heard the name Phillip Johnson. If not, but you're interested in seeing how one Christian is challenging the dogma of Darwinism, you'll want to know about this man.



Phillip Johnson is a law professor at the University of California, Berkley. In 1997 InterVarsity Press published *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds*, Johnson's third book in his debate with naturalistic evolution. His first book, *Darwin On Trial*, examined the scientific evidence for evolution and launched a series of lectures and debates across the United States and overseas in universities and on radio and television. His second book, *Reason in the Balance*, examined the influence of naturalism in the spheres of science, law, and education. *Defeating Darwinism* brings his case to high school and early college-level students and their parents.

So, what prompted a law professor to take on the evolutionists? It seems that Johnson became aware of a significant difference between the way the theory of evolution is presented to the public and the way it's discussed among

scientists. To the general public, evolution is presented as being settled with respect to the really important questions. Among scientists, however, there is still no consensus as to how evolution could have occurred. As another author said, evolution is a theory in crisis. Professor Johnson studied the literature closely and concluded that what keeps the “evolution-as-fact” dogma alive is not scientific evidence at all, but rather a commitment to the philosophy of naturalism.

Naturalism is the belief that everything that exists is on the same basic level, that of nature. There is no God who created the universe whether in six days or in 40 million years.

One needs to be cautious here. Many scientists believe in God. However, the rule of the day in the laboratory and the classroom is a commitment to the philosophy of naturalism or at least to practical naturalism. Consequently, whether there is a God or not, no reference can be made to Him in the realm of scientific study.

Two reasons come to mind to explain why Johnson has received such a wide hearing in secular academia. First, he keeps the focus on evolution, *not* on a particular theory of creation. This is annoying to evolutionists. But Johnson knows that as soon as he allows his views to be put under the spotlight, the debate will be over. Why? Because the evolutionists will immediately label his views as “religious,” and he will be dismissed out of hand. Second, he is a legal scholar with years of experience in the logical analysis of evidence. He has the skill to carefully dissect the arguments of evolutionists, show their weaknesses, and reveal their unargued presuppositions.

In this essay we’ll take a closer look at Johnson’s book *Defeating Darwinism*. We’ll see how evolution gained dominance as a theory of origins, and we’ll learn how Johnson exposes its UNscientific foundations. I urge you to get a copy of this book even if science isn’t your area, just to learn one way to

engage our culture in the realm of ideas.

Where's the Beef?

In his new book, *Defeating Darwinism By Opening Minds*, Phillip Johnson seeks to help high-school and college students and their parents evaluate the claims of Darwinism.

In his first book, *Darwin on Trial*, Johnson described the evidential problems with evolution in some detail. In *Defeating Darwinism*, he simply notes that possible transitional forms in the fossil record are very few in number and they are not found where fossil evidence is most plentiful. The problem, he says, is that textbooks and museums often present evidence in a way that implies there is more evidence available than there really is. As an example, Johnson points to an exhibit in San Francisco called the "Hard Facts Wall" which fills in gaps in the fossil record with imaginary ancestors. Says Johnson:

Visitors to the museum at first take the exhibit at face value; after I explain it to them, they are astonished that a reputable museum would commit such a deception. But the museum curators are not consciously dishonest; they are true believers who are just trying too hard to help the public get to the right' answer. [\(1\)](#)

Even though the physical evidence is not there, and there is no known mechanism for the transition from one type of organism to another, the scientific community clings to evolution as fact. The reasoning seems to be this: Since science studies the natural order, scientific theory must remain within naturalistic bounds. Since neo-Darwinism is the best naturalistic theory, it *must* be true. This commitment extends beyond simply influencing scientific study; it is indoctrinated into students as the way things are. Johnson says that, "When students ask intelligent questions like 'Is

this stuff really true?' teachers are encouraged or required not to take the questions seriously." [\(2\)](#)

A fifteen-year-old high school student found out about the power of Darwinist orthodoxy when he challenged a requirement to watch a program on public television which promoted the "molecule to man" theory as fact. When school administrators showed an inclination to go along, the bottom fell out. Johnson stated, "the Darwinists, . . . flooded the city's newspapers with their letters. Some of the letters were so venomous that the editorial page editor of the Denver Post admitted that her liberal faith had been shaken." [\(3\)](#) When CBS carried the story, a prominent evolutionist made the teenager out to be an enemy of education. Orthodoxy is not to be questioned.

One of the most significant factors in establishing the reign of evolution was the movie *Inherit the Wind*, the imaginative re-telling of the story of the Scopes "Monkey Trial" of 1925. The trial is presented as a David-and-Goliath match between the few reasonable and enlightened advocates of progress and the forces of ignorance and oppression who are shackled by their "Old Time Religion." The important players were caricatured and significant details were completely falsified, but the point was made: religion can co-exist with science, but only if it minds its own business.

The book *Defeating Darwinism* is an important contribution not only because of the questions it raises about evolution, but also because it teaches the reader *how* to think about issues. Next, we'll look at some fallacious arguments evolutionists use.

Baloney Detectors Wanted

In his book *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds*, Phillip Johnson analyzes the role *Inherit the Wind* played in our thinking about the relation of religion and science. This was

the play—and later the movie—which retold the story of the Scopes “Monkey Trial” of 1925. One significant character who only appeared for a few minutes was the Radio Man, the radio announcer who made a live broadcast from the courtroom.

Near the end of the play, when the prosecuting attorney launches into a long speech denouncing the evils of evolution, the radio program director decides that the attorney’s speech has become boring, and Radio Man turns off the microphone. This is the only microphone in the courtroom. Johnson sees this move as symbolic. He says: “That is why what happened in the real-life Scopes trial hardly matters; the writers and producers of *Inherit the Wind* owned the microphone, making their interpretation far more important than the reality.” [\(4\)](#)

This example illustrates one of several logical fallacies evolutionists sometimes commit which Johnson exposes in his chapter “Tuning Up Your Baloney Detector.” This first fallacy is the selective use of evidence. Radio Man could broadcast what *he* wanted people to hear without giving the other side equal time. What we hear about today, says Johnson, are the evidences which seem to support evolution. What we don’t hear about is the absence of significant evidence in the fossil record as a whole. Seeing the entire picture can, and should, easily give one doubts about the story we’re now being told by the evolutionists.

Another fallacy evolutionists sometimes employ is the *ad hominem* argument, or the argument “against the man.” If a doubter can be labeled a “fundamentalist” or a believer in “creation science” (meaning creation in six, twenty-four hour days), his doubts can be set aside on the grounds of religious prejudice.

Johnson cautions us to watch out also for “vague terms and shifting definitions.” The word *evolution*, for example, can mean different things. Are we speaking of microevolution, small changes within a species, or are we talking about

macroevolution, major mutations from one type of organism to another? As Johnson says, “That one word *evolution* can mean something so tiny it hardly matters, or so big it explains the whole history of the universe.”[\(5\)](#)

Johnson notes that fewer than 10 per cent of Americans actually believe that “humans . . . were created by a materialistic evolutionary process in which God played no part.”[\(6\)](#) Nonetheless, the vast majority who doubt this are not allowed to think for themselves on the matter of the fact of evolution. Rather than being educated to think for themselves, students are indoctrinated with the dogmatic claims of evolutionists.

In response, Johnson urges students to discern whether what they are being taught is simply assumed or whether it is based on real evidence. When evolutionists insist on the *fact* of evolution without having concrete evidence, and without having any idea of the *mechanism* of evolution, they’re revealing a faith commitment.

Although Johnson’s particular strength is in exposing the flaws in evolutionists’ arguments, he also presents a positive case for intelligent design in the creation of life. We’ll look at that subject next.

Intelligent Design

When Charles Darwin presented his theory of evolution, little was known about what goes on inside living cells. They were “black boxes,” objects the insides of which were unknown. With the development of molecular biology, scientists have come to realize that cells are extremely complex.

In his book, *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds*, Phillip Johnson introduces the reader to some exciting new discoveries in biology which he believes deal a significant blow to Darwinian evolution.

Johnson says it's now recognized that there's information encoded in cells which can't be reduced to matter. The evolutionist Richard Dawkins writes,

Each nucleus . . . contains a digitally coded database larger, in information content, than all 30 volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica put together. And this figure is for each cell, not all the cells of the body put together."[\(7\)](#)

This information is distinct from the physical structure in the same way that the message of a book is distinct from the ink and paper which records it. The question biologists must answer is, Where did this genetic information come from? Information implies intelligence. It can't be explained by physical mutations and natural selection. This is a serious problem for Darwinists.

Another finding which also is a major problem for Darwinists is what is called the irreducible complexity of living organisms. Johnson explains what this means: "Molecular mechanisms . . . are made up of many parts that interact in complex ways, and all the parts need to work together. Any single part has no useful function unless all the other parts are also present."[\(8\)](#) The eye, for example, requires the coordinated working of many different parts to do its work. Each of these parts, however, can accomplish nothing on its own. That being the case, why would the individual parts have been preserved through time by natural selection? If there were gradual development, there must have been some intelligence behind it to know what to retain and what to destroy.

These two factors, then—information content and irreducible complexity—are strong physical evidence for intelligent design. Information implies intelligence, and complexity can't be accounted for by mutation and selection. It requires design.

In spite of the evidence, however, Darwinists still insist that the origin of life can't lie in supernatural creation. As we noted on earlier, the key issue for them is their prior commitment to a naturalistic philosophy. As geneticist Richard Lewontin said, "[W]e are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, . . . Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door." [\(9\)](#)

It's Phillip Johnson's project to expose this prior commitment and to convince evolutionists to acknowledge it. Now we'll turn to look at Johnson's overall project and see what lessons we can draw from it.

Evaluation

Johnson calls his basic strategy for addressing the issue of evolution, the "wedge." He wants to drive a wedge into the "log" of scientific materialism so as to separate the facts of scientific investigation from the naturalistic philosophy which dominates science.

One of the criticisms of Johnson's work is that he wants to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Theistic evolutionists, for example, say that one needn't accept a materialistic theory of evolution to recognize the gradual development of life on our planet. Indeed, Johnson seems to be fighting two battles: the first against those who insist upon doing science in a thoroughgoing naturalistic framework; the second against macroevolution of any sort.

I noted earlier that Johnson argues against separating the so-called *fact* of evolution from the *mechanism* of evolution. He insists that before we can know *that* evolution happened, we need to know *how* it happened. This certainly isn't a universal logical principle. I don't need to know precisely how a camera and film produce pictures to know that they do. Nonetheless,

Johnson is correct in pressing for conclusive fossil evidence for gradual change or for a plausible explanation for sudden macromutations.

Johnson's challenge to the scientific community boils down to this question: "What should we do if empirical evidence and materialist philosophy are going in different directions?" [\(10\)](#) In other words, Are you willing to abandon a theory of purposeless processes if the evidence weighs against such a theory? When scientists are willing to do this, then science will be free to discover—as far as it's able—what nature is really like apart from personal prejudices.

It's evident that Johnson has struck a nerve in the scientific community. He's debated well-known scientists and has spoken at prestigious universities across America and overseas. He has not allowed opponents to pin him down on a particular theory of creation and then to dismiss him with the usual "religion vs. science" argument.

Johnson notes that Marx, Freud, and Darwin were three of the most influential men in this century. Marxism and Freudianism have both passed into history. Says Johnson, "I am convinced that Darwin is next on the block. His fall will be by far the mightiest of the three." [\(11\)](#)

But this will only happen, he says, if we "step off the reservation" [\(12\)](#) and do the work necessary to prove our case. We must encourage our young people to take up the challenge of thinking for themselves on this matter and not be intimidated by those who wish to maintain the status quo. This will involve a risk, but as Johnson says: "We will never know how great the opportunity was if we are afraid to take the risk." [\(13\)](#)

This book is valuable for any Christian who wants to learn how to think critically, whether the reader is scientifically-minded or not. Here we find a model for turning the tables on

those who want to keep us on the defensive. If we have to give an answer for what we believe, it's only fair that our critics should do the same. *Defeating Darwinism* is an example of how to get them to do it.

Notes

1. Phillip E. Johnson, *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsityPress, 1997), 38.
2. Ibid., 54.
3. Ibid., 35.
4. Ibid., 33.
5. Ibid., 45.
6. Ibid., 10.
7. Ibid., 77.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 81.
10. Ibid., 114.
11. Ibid., 113.
12. Ibid., chap. 8.
13. Ibid., 118.