

Intelligent Design in the Classroom

A struggle is occurring for the rule of America's science classrooms. Proponents of intelligent design are demanding equal time in high school biology classes for their theory, while evolutionists do not want any part of it in the class. Does intelligent design have a reasonable alternative to evolution? As with anything in science, there must be good evidence to overturn an existing theory. By examining what the problems are with evolution for supporters of intelligent design, what the intelligent design theory actually entails, and the critique of this theory by evolutionists, enough should be known to determine if intelligent design should be taught in classrooms.

Intelligent design supporters have several problems with the process of evolution's explanation of the origins of life. While many supporters may concede that microevolution, or evolution on a small scale within a species, does occur, they do not feel these small random changes in genetic information caused the great diversity of life on our present planet, which they call macroevolution (Johnson, 61). To an evolutionist, there is no distinction between micro and macroevolution, as they are the same process. Intelligent design supporters make the distinction because microevolution can be scientifically observed, while no case of macroevolution has been (Johnson, 60). An example of macroevolution would be the development of new species and new organs. Organisms and their complex parts are described as irreducibly complex parts by intelligent design supporters. The famous example of this is the eye. Proponents of intelligent design state that the random mutations of evolution could not create the eye, because there are no viable intermediates. If one part of the eye is missing, it does not work, nor does the part on its own work (Young, 23). Chance also could not have created

the wing. While evolutionists believe the ancestors of birds are dinosaurs, the intelligent design supporters see large gaps in the evolutionary process (Johnson, 65). No orderly series of intermediate organisms can be made for the evolution of the wing. Instead, the wing seems to pop up in the fossil record already made in its form today. Phillip E. Johnson, one of the leaders of the intelligent design movement, says, "...the consistent pattern in the fossil record of sudden appearance followed by stasis tends to prove that there is something wrong with Darwinism, not that there is something wrong with the fossil record" (66). Such gaps take a certain amount of faith, certainly not more than belief in an intelligent designer.

Another issue intelligent design supporters have with evolution has to do with its naturalistic approach. Naturalism excludes any supernatural methods as means of explanation for biology. Johnson's description of it is "everything is conclusively presumed to have happened through purely material mechanisms that are in principle accessible to scientific investigation, whether they have yet been discovered or not" (61). While this seems to work for most scientists and has provided countless information on body systems and other processes of life, the ID supporters point out that they do not have all the answers. The areas lacking substantial evidence are still supported with theories founded in naturalism, which to the ID supporters means a certain amount of faith in the standing system is being used. Johnson says, "faith in naturalism is no more 'scientific' (i.e. empirically based) than any other kind of faith" (63). Because of science divorce from any theology, it will never be able to answer all questions, such as those of ethics or purpose in life. This also means that there is no room for any deity in evolution, because by accepting evolution no other alternative to completely natural means of

origins is possible. This leads to the point of origins of evolution in materialism, which is more of a cultural complaint than an actual scientific reason against evolution, as when Johnson lumps Darwin with Marx and Freud, whose followers have in his opinion all but disappeared (449).

What intelligent design offers is a dualistic explanation for how irreducibly complex structures came about. The eye and wing can be explained by describing their structures as having been created by some thing with an intended design. This explains why there are sudden developments of organisms and parts followed by static periods in the fossil record. There are no troubles over how small changes brought about dynamic changes, because everything was created as it appears. This does not mean that organisms within a species are unable to adjust to the environment as needed, such as the pepper moths that changed colors from white to black with industrial pollution (Johnson, 60). The complex organisms show the same signs of meaning and intelligence as human artifacts (Dembski, 643). While scientists may not understand the meaning of the design, they are still able to recognize that it is a design (Dembski, 151). This also makes sense considering how unlikely it is to create very complex structures like those found in organisms through chance. In addition, intelligent design incorporates a metaphysical element to the origins of life, which supporters feel is needed. William Dembski believes if science continues to cling to naturalism and reductionism, it will eventually come to a point where it cannot continue. Thus, reinserting dualism into science will liberate it (Dembski, 150). All of these points will help develop science and not hinder it while keeping any deity out of the picture. Intelligent design supports finding indicators of intelligent design, not the designer (Davis, 7).

The evolutionist's response to this is quite strong, which makes sense since evolution is a fundamental part of modern biology. The claim of irreducible complex structures existing is heavily refuted by evolutionists. The example of the wing has a detailed development according to Alan D. Gishlick. The key idea that if a part is taken out that the whole will not function is not necessarily true in the case of the eye, as one does not necessarily have to have a lens or cones to see (Young, 24). Eyesight is certainly reduced in these cases, but one is not blind. Also, it is understood amongst evolutionists that the separate parts of complex parts have often evolved to a level of codependence that requires the other parts, while in previous history this may not have been the case. Parts can also change their functions. An example of this is the mammalian ear bones being derived from reptile jaw bones that may have started as gill supports (Young, 22). The ear was not a sudden development; it came about "because mammals did not need unhinging jaws, [so] the jaw bones gradually changed their shape and their function until they became the bones of the inner ear" (Young, 22). Intelligent design supporters may point to the appendix as something that was deemed worthless by evolutionists even though it functions as a part of the immune system (Pennock, 653). Evolutionists see this as an organ that used to be used to digest cellulose in man's herbivorous ancestor that found a new function (Pennock, 653). The gaps in the fossil record are understandable when the rarity of such formations is considered. It takes very special conditions for a dead organism to be preserved not to mention a level of durability, which is why typically only bones and starchy plant matter is preserved. The fossils that are made then need to be brought to the surface through geologic forces. It's reasonable then to assume that not

all of the previous species that existed on earth have been found. Thus, irreducibly complex structures can be reduced with the proper understanding of evolution.

Another claim of intelligent design that evolution defends is the strength of mutations as a driving force for evolution. Intelligent design focuses only on the single nucleotide mutations according to Philip Kitcher (265). Mutations can involve a number of changes, including duplication of genes. Any mutation can be subtle or dynamic depending on its results. A single nucleotide mutation causes sickle-cell anemia, which is a dramatic change in the shape of a typically rounded blood cell to a crescent shape, reducing its ability to transport oxygen. Two known mutations in fruit flies are a shriveled wing and leg-antennae. These gene mutations do not have gradual intermediates like intelligent design supporters expect of evolution. They are drastic changes that if the environment favored them, could easily lead to a new species. This is also how bacteria become drug resistant, and even insects have demonstrated increasing resistance to certain pest controls. However, these would be cases of microevolution if one is making the distinction, which most evolutionists do not. In addition to this division, evolutionists do not acknowledge the statement that intelligent design is separate from a theology.

The evolutionists feel that intelligent design is still tied in Christian roots despite statements otherwise. Robert T. Pennock states that supporters of intelligent design will say it is devoid of religion, yet amongst themselves or with creationists it is understood that the “designer” in intelligent design is the Christian God. He says, “As one put it with a wink and a grin when introducing another [intelligent design creationist] to a campus Christian group, intelligent design is the ‘politically correct way to talk about God.’” (Pennock, 663). In the course offered at Trinity International University as well as two

other schools on intelligent design the syllabus developed by Dembski states that its objective is “to ‘examine intelligent design as a cultural and intellectual movement and show how Christian theology and apologetics stand to benefit from it” (Pennock, 651). By not being neutral, it might be hard for outside parties to give credibility to research done with intelligent design as its foundation. Even if intelligent design was neutral, it would be difficult to see an atheist or Buddhist supporting it, since they don’t believe in a higher power. Therefore, intelligent design cannot escape its connection with religion, specifically Christianity.

Evolutionists also question whether intelligent design can be applied to science. As previously stated, Dembski believes intelligent design and a dualistic approach will free science and allow it to research new areas. If research is geared towards looking for intelligent design, though, it can be difficult to see how that helps science. It may not hinder the inspection of parts and functioning of biological processes, but certainly it too will hit a roadblock and the intelligent design will simply be an excuse. Evolution allows a bridge from past to present to future. Intelligent design isolates them. The future may be slightly different from the present with microevolution considered, but no new species can develop. Humanity will not become extinct. No scientist could ask how things came about, since the blanket answer of a designer would suffice for everything. Also, Mark Perakh and Matt Young state that, “looking for the footprints of the deity is not necessarily unscientific. What is unscientific is to decide ahead of time on the answer and search for God with the determination to come up with a positive result” (185). Such bias when entering a scientific study is unacceptable. It hinders true research and application because the desired results will not occur when the experiment is run several times,

resulting in wasted effort and time. In addition, most of the data used to support intelligent design is not considered sound by the scientific community (191). In the words of Robert Pennock, “it is all too easy to *read in* design (purposeful in intention) to a random design (pattern), as in Rorschach ink blots” (654). The dualistic approach has been dropped from science for similar reasons. The supernatural is not incorporated into science “because no *evidence* for such superhuman intelligent design has been demonstrated. Until such evidence is unearthed, the supernatural will not become a part of genuine science” (Perakh, 191). Perakh and Young feel that intelligent design’s theory does not have any “explanatory power” because it does not cover the design or designer in detail. They argue, “to simply state that an event is due to intelligent design explains nothing because the term *designer* has no defined meaning in the theory and the modes of the designer’s activities remain mysterious and unexplained” (Perakh, 193). If intelligent design is inapplicable to biological studies, there is no reason to have it taught in high school class rooms where students learn the basics of biology.

Considering all of the arguments, it seems impractical to include intelligent design in public school biology courses. If students learn an alternative unaccepted by the science community it will impair their chances of having a higher education in biology. It is certainly a poor choice to teach students that it is alright to assume the answer to one’s research ahead of time. The concept of irreducible complexity was soundly refuted by evolutionists and the fossil record is not a perfect list of all extinct organisms. If the spontaneous development and stasis trend is proved to be connected to some evolution alternative with sound evidence, it may be accepted by the science community. Also, until there is evidence of metaphysical activities and entities, science will not be dualistic,

which also allows for scientists of any faith to present and analyze credible research, besides simply being immeasurable. For intelligent design to be taken seriously and be taught in classes supporters of the theory will have to find solid evidence to reinforce their position that will hold up to the scrutiny of the scientific community. Perhaps if less time was spent on the politics of the issue such data could be found. It appears that the intelligent design supporters are not waging a scientific war, but more of a political one to change our culture. Demski says, “intelligent design promises to be one of the great upcoming cultural convulsions” in his syllabus for an intelligent design course (Pennock, 650). The “cultural convulsions” will not occur without sound scientific evidence, thus it is the correct decision of the public school systems to leave intelligent design out of biology classes.

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