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Three Position Papers on Intelligent Design in the Public Schools

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A Brief Position Paper on

Intelligent Design

The Intelligent Design (ID) movement has arisen on the political agenda of recent years to take the place of Creation Science in battles between school boards, parents, and the scientific community. The promulgators of Intelligent Design sincerely hope that judges will sympathize with the non-religious vocabulary of this new movement and allow it to stand as a positive alternative to evolutionary naturalism's position on origins.

The evolutionary community has viewed ID as "creationism masquerading in a cheap tuxedo" and argues that the removal of "god words" from the position does not change the fact that ID is essentially a negative response to evolution and has nothing positive of scientific value to offer.

The evolutionary science community makes a critical and important point here. To argue that a system has irreducible complexity and therefore requires a creator or designer's information input, is to appeal to a process that is *not* subject to the methodology of science. The ID movement has legitimate concerns. It addresses a serious weakness in evolutionary thinking. Yet its approach is not appropriate to a science classroom. Such ideas need voicing in philosophy classrooms or religious instruction classes, but not in classrooms where the process and products of the scientific method are being taught.

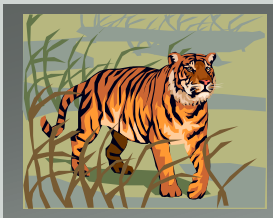
For a science educator, the science classroom is a place where multiple scientific models of origins should be discussed. However, only one model has emerged whose details are susceptible to scientific research. That model is the evolutionary process. Since no other alternatives are available, evolution is the only model appropriately discussed in a science class.

But models have good points and bad points. Just because evolutionary theory is the only available scientific model for origins does not mean that it ought to be accepted as an adequate explanation of origins. The last thirty years of molecular research into the cell argues cogently that evolution's model of origins is less adequate now than it was 50 years ago. Workers in the field of modern biology are much more vocal concerning the limitations of evolutionary theory than are many high school instructors or high school text book authors.

What the modern high school science classroom needs is an "explain and critique" approach to evolutionary theory: outlining how the evolutionary process works and then evaluating its explanatory power, given existing levels of life's diversity. University students preparing to teach in such classrooms need to understand the major criticisms of evolutionary theory and prepare to document these to their classes. Text book writers need to support these young instructors in their efforts to present a balanced critical approach to the evolutionary model.

Even on questions as important as origins, the scientific community must be willing to profess ignorance if the current evolutionary paradigm is inadequate. Honest ignorance in the face of young questioning minds is better for science than continued appeal to a simplistic model that cannot adequately explain the molecular origins of highly complex systems of life.

Intelligent design is properly criticized by the scientific community because it is essentially a para-scientific model with one huge positive assertion that is totally untestable by science. We need to return the science classroom to science. If we do, evolution (as a scientific model of origins) will die a proper death.



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The evolutionary community views ID as essentially a negative response to evolution that has nothing positive of scientific value to offer. Rather a miracle—a "Designer thing"-- is offered, with no way to subject His creative act to the scientific method.

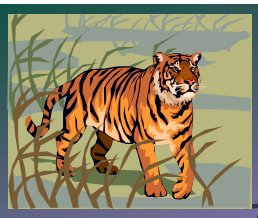
In separating the creation act from the realm of science, the evolutionary science community has experienced a critical oversight. They have assumed by contrast, that life's history as they teach it **is** adequately subject to the scientific method. Yet many aspects of their story, dealing with the remote past are not. They are, strictly speaking, unrepeatable. How life originated, how great adaptations like the insect wing originated, how human consciousness originated—these events are plausibly conjectured for the student on the assumption of the complete constancy of natural law.

So, the creationist's presupposition (a Designer has worked outside natural law) is worn on his sleeve. The evolutionist's presupposition (natural law cannot change), is worn under his shirt. To exclude God from the origins issues sounds as if we are saying, "I have no religion". But to hold, prior to doing one's science, a belief that natural law is immutable, is a faith statement, albeit simpler, of the same metaphysical quality as the belief that a God is there to alter it. If these assertions about God or His absence are equally extra-scientific in nature, then in this debate about origins, no one comes to the table as a pure scientist. Everyone brings presuppositions. If this is true, then presuppositions about the origin of life forms—although not strictly products of science--must be recognized and understood even in the science classroom.

History and recent debate have shown that these fundamental and contrasting presuppositions are held forcefully by their respective adherents. Battle lines are rarely crossed. It is thus ludicrous to expect that any given teacher would fairly present real science from any other presuppositional base than his own. Therefore, in any given school system or public educational setting, each teacher must have the freedom to present the origin of life as seen from his own perspective. No school board or state legislature has the right to dictate what a scholar-teacher must present his students. The teacher must speak honestly from his own point of view.

In a free society, parents must then be given the right, legally **and** financially, to subject their children to the teacher of their choice. Many Christian parents will want their children educated in a private setting. Others will want freedom to place their child in a particular section of a public school class, taught by an educator who shares their perspective. The schools must adjust to these desires and try, as much as possible, to accommodate the philosophical diversity of their parent constituencies. Public school officials will also feel the keen desire to hire new faculty in accord with their own origins philosophy. As a result, individual school districts will vary in their posture on the question of origins influencing where parents (without the means to a private education for their children) will want to send their children for education.

In a free society, intelligent design must be given the same opportunity to flourish as atheistic naturalism.



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The evolutionary community has viewed ID as "creationism masquerading in a cheap tuxedo" and argues that the removal of "god words" from the position does not change the fact that ID is essentially a religious answer to what they consider a "scientific" question. That which is positively offered is essentially a miracle that lies outside the realm of experimental science. How do you analyze how God made the nudibranch?

Many citizens who affirm a theistic driving force for origins understand that in the public square they must not be allowed to force their Christian or Hindu or Mormon view of a Creator upon those who do not share their religious heritage. As such Intelligent Design represents a unique opportunity to move to the very edge of science and step into the realm of philosophy without entering the confines of someone else's religion.

Creationists further assert that philosophical naturalists are doing the same thing with evolutionary theory: pushing it to the very edge of science and then stepping into the realm of philosophy (atheistic naturalism) without entering the confines of a specific form of naturalism like Buddhism, or pantheistic naturalism.

Students are young and impressionable. As a result they need to receive a fair and well-balanced presentation of both perspectives on origins: the design perspective and the non-design perspective. They need to be confronted first with the data of science that can in any way relate to origins. They must then be taught that everyone: their parents, their older friends, their religious leaders, and especially that scientists all go to the edge of experimental science and then one step beyond to the position that living things must have originated either with or without a Designer.

As the student begins to appreciate that there is no neutrality on this subject, it is hoped that they will return to the observations of science and will each in their own minds ask, "When I step beyond science to a philosophical position on this issue, which direction does the data appear to point in—at least to me!?"

School boards must therefore put aside philosophical prejudice and require their faculty to do the same. Teachers must favorably and fairly introduce their students to the two contrasting departure points from the data of science. Students must be allowed to form their own schooled opinion on where the biological and geological data are taking them, with the help of objective and caring instructors.

If this venture is taken carefully, then students will learn more than scientific facts. They will learn the valuable lesson that no one does pure science—that personal beliefs and presuppositions enter every facet on our lives, and it is the responsibility of the individual free citizen to evaluate science's facts and then press on toward the most rational conclusion. In such a setting, if the Romans 1:20 apologetic is true, the intelligent design position will flourish within our public school systems.