

Yet another evolutionist attack on Intelligent Design

A review of
Creationism's Trojan Horse
by Barbara Forrest and
Paul R. Gross
Oxford University Press,
New York, 2004

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‘Creationism!’ has become the nearly Pavlovian response of evolutionists to Intelligent Design (ID). One does not have to read much further than the title of Forrest and Gross’s book to see that it will argue that ID simply tries to put a scientific façade on creationism to sneak it perniciously past the scientific community and into the schools. There is nothing new in this accusation, and indeed, nothing new in the book that has not been presented as an argument against ID and been shot down by creationists and ID theorists alike.

The book criticizes the ‘Wedge’, a strategy put forward by the Discovery Institute to further their progress in science and the public arena.

Creationism masquerading as science?

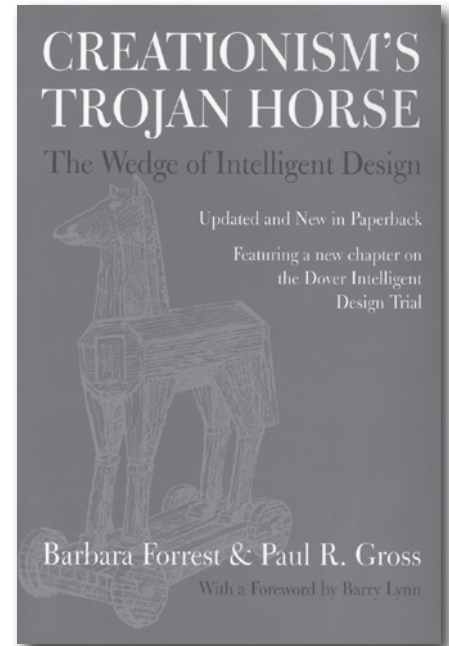
The authors of this book equate ID with creationism, and while they are not mutually exclusive, they are not identical. Most in the ID community accept the evolutionary timeframe of millions of years, and some are even theistic evolutionists, differing from mainstream evolutionists only in believing that God directed the evolution of the various species. ID need not be grounded in the biblical text as most forms of creationism claim to be; the authors quote Philip Johnson recommending that those doing scientific research in ID areas:

“... put the Biblical issues to one side. The last thing we should want to do, or seem to want to do, is to threaten the freedom of scientific inquiry. ... We can wait until we have a better scientific theory ... before we need to worry about whether and to what extent that theory is consistent with the Bible” (pp. 37–38).

The implication is that ID’s scientific model need not be biblical; though their scientific research may end up corroborating biblical teaching, this is not the goal of most ID researchers.

But this does not deter Forrest and Gross from calling ID researchers “fanatics” and their theory “a new variant of the old (anti)scientific creationism—a no-holds-barred commitment to particular, parochial beliefs about the history and fabric of the world and the place of humanity in it” (p. 16). This sort of name-calling commences very early in the book, and the reader is wearied of it by the end; every page is filled with innuendo and mud-slinging.

Not only is ID false and motivated by religious fanaticism in the eyes of the authors, but it threatens scientific progress in that it constitutes “a threat to the integrity of education and in the end to the ability of the public to judge scientific and technological claims” (p. 9). The acceptance of ID will, they argue, lead to the inability of the layperson to differentiate between scientific and unscientific claims, leading to an inability to manage “such urgent policy problems as environmental preservation and improvement, energy resources, management and support of scientific research” and about every other issue that is in any way dependent on science. The authors stop just short of saying that ID is unpatriotic.



The first few chapters are dedicated to tracing the history of the Discovery Institute and its attempts to bring ID into the scientific mainstream. Other than being littered with the sort of abusive *ad hominem* that one comes to expect from evolutionists talking about ID, there is no real problem with this part of the book. However, like other parts of the book that are primarily descriptive, one could easily visualize a similarly conspiratorial spin on evolutionist lobbying and public relations.

Peer review as a test of scientific validity

One of the primary attacks evolutionists use against ID is that its proponents do not publish in peer-reviewed scientific journals. The authors assert that “acceptance into secular academia is impossible without a sound scientific research program, buttressed by peer-reviewed publication of new results in the worldwide scientific literature” (p. 38). They assert that it would not be hard for ID researchers to get their findings published “provided that they meet the minimum standards of objectivity and technical competence” (p. 39). But peer review, while important, is not flawless, and the bias of the

reviewers for secular journals prevents otherwise-worthy research from being published. And when the supernatural is excluded from science *by definition*, those who propose a supernatural origin for the universe will be branded as unscientific, however rigorously their research conforms to any other requirements.¹

The authors attack Paul Chien and Michael Behe, both ID researchers, for not having published their claims in peer-reviewed journals, but the bias is so strong against ID that their claims would be laughed out of secular scientific circles. They even record an example of this; in 1999, the Discovery Institute played a part in organizing the International Symposium on the Origins of Animal Body Plans and Their Fossil Records, and many evolutionists attended, not knowing about the link to ID. As soon as one of the evolutionists at the conference recognized ‘creationist arguments’ and the names of known ID researchers, he became alarmed at the presence of non-evolutionists. They accused the ID researchers of subterfuge and refused to have their papers published alongside ‘creationist’ papers, and were so biased against any non-evolutionary explanations that the scientific merit was not even considered (pp. 58–60). So it is extraordinary that the authors expect ID researchers to become published in evolutionary journals which are clearly too biased to look past the abstract of a paper that proposes a non-naturalistic origin of first life or more complex life-forms.

Jonathan Wells

Not content only to label ID proponents closet creationists, the authors also accuse them of being conspiracy theorists; Jonathan Wells is called ‘CRSC’s full-time conspiracy theorist’ for claiming there is a systematic attempt to exclude ID from the scientific discussion (p. 87), although this is well documented in Dr Jerry Bergman’s book *Slaughter of the Dissidents*.² They quote from a 2002 sermon³ which understandably simplified some scientific concepts for a lay audience, and accused it of being

misleading and error-ridden. But as will be shown later, the authors seem to object only to misleading simplification when it comes to ID arguments, and are fine with evolutionist deception.

In response to Wells’ point that a mutation for a fundamentally different body plan would have to occur early in development precisely when the organism is least tolerant of such mutations, the authors argue that such mutations do in fact occur (p. 93). This would be fascinating if the authors had actually given any sort of example or source which describes such a mutation; such unsubstantiated claims are common in the book.

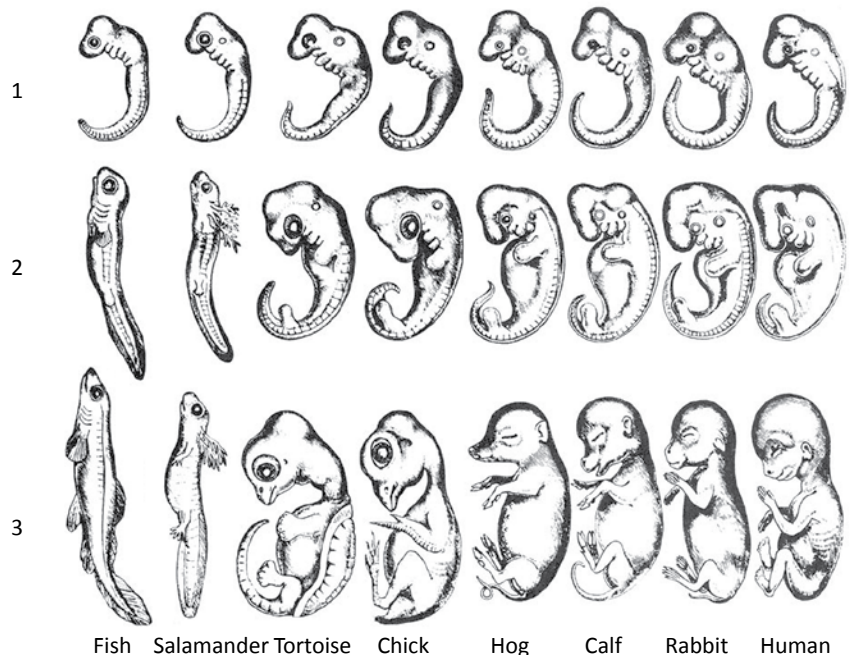
Icons of evolution

The authors argue that Wells, in his *Icons of Evolution*, has slandered perfectly good evidence for evolution in each case. Eugenie Scott is cited as saying that if Wells was attacking atomic theory rather than evolution (and the latter is “as basic to biology as atoms are to physics” in Scott’s view), no one would give any credence to the claims that the evidence for it is “erroneous, misleading, and even fraudulent.”⁴

According to the authors, Miller and Urey showed that “abiotic synthesis of the molecular building blocks of life is possible”; and they argue that this is the case even with an atmosphere that more closely resembles what we now think the early Earth’s atmosphere was like, certain amino acids are produced, albeit in lower quantities (p. 102). They ignore the fact that the amino acids produced are too dilute, contaminated and racemic to build anything much, let alone biological informational polymers.⁵

The discovery of the inaccuracy of Haeckel’s embryo illustrations is seen as a prime example of the self-correcting nature of science, and the inclusion of Haeckel’s embryos in textbooks today is fine because the general principle is sound (pp. 104–105). But even the authors say they should no longer appear in textbooks:

“There is no particular reason why Haeckel’s old drawings should still show up in a textbook. They are not needed. They prove nothing. But they are easy to reprint, the point they are supposed to make is roughly correct, they cost nothing, and the authors and publishers of textbooks are not often as



The authors argue that Haeckel’s forged embryo drawings are a prime example of the self-correcting nature of science, but say they should no longer be used in textbooks.

scrupulous as those of the primary scientific literature *must be*” (p. 105).

The authors admit that the peppered moth photos were staged, but only to show the way that camouflage helps moths of the proper color (pp. 107–109). The problem with this is that moths do not rest on the tree trunks in the daytime, but hide under the leaves. And even if this were not the case, the moths would not be an example of evolution even by the most generous definition, since the melanic moths existed all along; they only became more common when pollution discoloured the tree trunks.⁶

In the case of each icon, the authors give a strawman version of the ID argument against the evolutionist’s evidence, and proceed to knock it down, liberally adding *ad hominem* attacks against ID and creationists in the process. There is nothing in this part that creationist writings haven’t answered adequately already; indeed, if they were really trying to give a strong reply to creationists, one would expect them to take these creationist responses into account.

William Dembski

The authors are only slightly less hostile towards William Dembski. They grudgingly acknowledge that “... the method of technical argumentation employed by Dembski cannot be described ... as rabble-rousing, or as trifling. In mathematical inquiry ... Dembski’s style can appear straightforward, using available methods of scholarship in his fields. He has been very well educated and is competent in their use” (p. 117).

They acknowledge that he responds in detail to critics of his theory (p. 124). This does not mean that they *respect* his writing, however; they say that his writings are characterized by a “unique mixture of evangelical Christian fervor, abstract philosophical-mathematical argument, and brash self-confidence” (p. 119).

They specifically attack his arguments involving very small probabilities for various evolutionary

scenarios. They claim that he misuses probability arguments, because even though evolution involves low probabilities, improbable things happen all the time. They use the example of a zygote with a specific set of 23 pairs of chromosomes, and argue that every time the zygote will have one of the possible sets, although all of them are equally improbable. But this is equivocation, and a faulty description of Dembski’s argument. Improbability is *not* the only criterion for design; “what is needed to eliminate chance is that the event in question conform to a *pattern*.”⁷ And not just any pattern, but a specified pattern that rules out chance.

Preying on the ignorant?

Another common accusation in the book is that since ID cannot hold its own in scientific discussions, ID proponents simply bypass the process altogether, and go straight to the uneducated and credulous public with their publications. “Wedge books are aimed first and foremost at that portion of their audience who are, unfortunately, uneducated about the way science works and about the current state of evolutionary science, that is, those who will actually believe that ‘Darwinism’ has failed” (p. 114). The authors accuse the ID proponents of going directly to the public, bypassing peer review, because they know that their ideas will never pass peer review. The authors over and over again insult the intelligence of the average person in nearly every way possible.

Everything but science?

The authors document large grants from private foundations ID research has received and how the money was used. The conspiratorial tone of the section highlights the religious motivations of some of the foundations. They argue that the ID movement is not about actual science, but about gaining political power and public respectability which would lead to public research funds and access to public schools. That is, in contrast to evolutionists, who have access to

public research funds and use their groups to impose their agendas on public schools.

In Chapter 7, the authors reprint a poll commissioned by the Discovery Institute (DI) and argue that it is an inaccurate representation of mainstream views on teaching origins. The clear implication is that DI *purposely* designed the poll to give a misleading impression of the views of Americans on the subject (pp. 181–184). They mock ID academic conferences and apply the same conspiratorial tone to their description of the topics discussed.

Religious motivation

ID proponents are accused of being creationists hiding behind junk science who are motivated by their religion, not scientific inquiry. Of course, first author Barbara Forrest’s membership of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association (NOSHA) makes her the epitome of scientific objectivity. Everyone is biased, so to be biased toward religion is a bad thing only to people who see a grand conspiracy theory. They make a big deal of DI’s benefactors and allies being religious creationists, and DI’s occasional statements indicating the religious motivation behind their work.

The Wedge’s progress

The authors dedicate part of the last chapter and the afterword to a survey of the Wedge’s goals and how far they have progressed toward reaching them. They lament any real progress, and celebrate any obstacles, such as court cases which have blocked ID from public schools. This includes the case for which Forrest served as an expert witness against ID.

Conclusion

With all the scrutiny of the ID proponents’ credentials, one might expect both authors to have scientific degrees. But Barbara Forrest is not a scientist, but a philosophy professor, which makes the authors’ complaints hypocritical; to be consistent, if only scientists are allowed to promote ID,

then only scientists should be allowed to *attack* it.

At 350 pages, with nearly 100 additional pages of notes, *Creationism's Trojan Horse* is a weighty book, though if pretentious wordiness and *ad hominem* attacks were excluded to leave only the substance of the book, it would be considerably lighter. If it were further pared down to eliminate the arguments to which creationists and ID proponents have responded, it would be much lighter still. Yet that hasn't stopped well-known atheistic evolutionists such as Richard Dawkins and Eugenie Scott from praising it. But it should not be surprising—it reflects the vacuity of their own case.

Throughout, events are reported with an air of conspiracy which academically respectable scholars should not adopt. It would be easy to write a book about evolution in the public schools and in the courthouse with a similar conspiratorial style, interpreting every action as being solely for the money or public prestige a victory would afford.

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The Fall and the inspiration for science

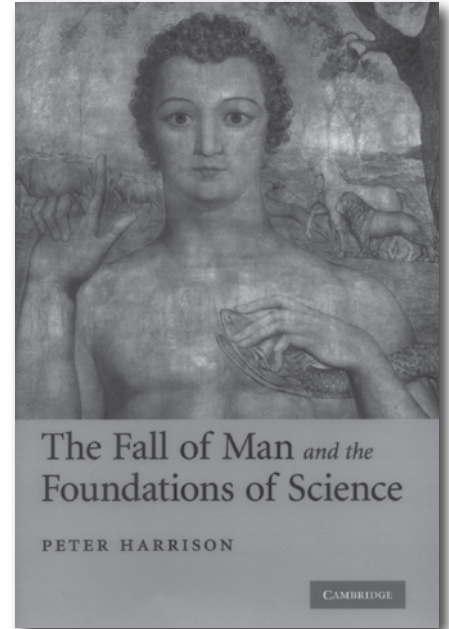
A review of
The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science
by Peter Harrison
Cambridge University Press,
Cambridge, 2007

Lael Weinberger

For too long, the history of science and religion has languished, either dominated by caricatures or else ignored completely. Peter Harrison, historian of science at Oxford University, is a leader in reanalyzing the neglected contributions of religion—and especially, the Reformation—to science. Harrison's earlier work, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge 1998) advanced the arresting thesis that the straightforward reading of the Bible promoted by the Reformation legitimized the study of nature and was thus essential to the emergence of modern science.¹ Now, in *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*, Harrison's thesis is that the way people viewed the Fall impacted the way they viewed science. More specifically, he argues that the Augustinian emphasis on the depraved and fallen nature of man, revived by the Protestant Reformation, was instrumental in spurring on the scientific revolution.

Augustine versus Aquinas

Harrison starts by reviewing the various interpretations of the Fall and its effects that were offered from the Patristic era through the Middle Ages. There were essentially two major schools of thought that emerged, positions that came to be associated with Augustine and Aquinas, respectively. On the one hand, Augustine represented a strong view of the Fall's effects. He believed that the



Fall and the curse of God corrupted all aspects of the world. Man was spiritually fallen and lost fellowship with God. Man was mentally fallen and did not have the clearness of mind that God gave in the ‘very good’ creation. Man was physically fallen and subject to degeneration in a way that was not present before the Fall. Finally, the natural world itself was fallen and subject to degeneration in contrast to its good order and condition before the Fall. As a result, Harrison explains, “Adam’s offspring” was entirely dependent on “divine grace, not merely for their salvation (healing), but also for knowledge (illumination)” (p. 39). Augustinian epistemology thus emphasized the dependence of man on God for all knowledge.

On the other hand, Aquinas offered a more minimal estimate of the Fall's effects. Aquinas believed that the fall corrupted man's spiritual and moral faculties, but left his reason intact. Aquinas distinguished between ‘natural gifts’ and ‘supernatural gifts’. The supernatural gifts were lost at the fall, the natural gifts were unaffected.