



The Great Debate

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SendTrackback URL: <http://degas.fdisk.net/cgi-bin/mt/mt-tb.cgi/1635>**by Ellery Schempp, Ph.D.**

I attended tonight at Boston University The Great Debate: "Should public schools teach Intelligent Design along with Evolution?"

The Debate Participants:**Affirmative:**

- Edward H. Sisson, Esq. Partner, Arnold and Porter, Washington, D.C. Mr. Sisson advised witnesses at the Kansas evolution hearings
- Professor Bill Dembski, Ph.D. Senior Fellow, Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture
- Nick Barber, Senior, Broadcast Journalism major, Boston University College of Communication

Negative:

- Eugenie C. Scott, Ph.D. Executive Director, National Center for Science Education
- Professor James Trefil, Ph.D. Robinson Professor of Physics, George Mason University; co-author, Dictionary of Cultural Literacy

- Neil St. Clair, Sophomore, Broadcast Journalism and Political Science major, Boston University College of Communication and College of Arts and Sciences

The Tsai Center has a capacity of 525 and I was turned away for it being filled. Managed to get in late. The audience was 90% undergrads.

Here are my impressions:

(please note that quotes are approximations from hurried notes, my gist is here)

As a long-term member of NCSE and supporter of Genie Scott, and reader at Pandas Thumb and allied sites, there was little new. Scott made the usual arguments that ID is not science, that ID is “creationism lite”, that ID posits an “unlimited, unconstrained designer”, and is playing games about “who the designer is”. That the DI is only interested in teaching “evidence against evolution”, but has nothing positive to offer.

Scott said that Behe has lost faith in “intelligent design” as a phrase and is now promoting “sudden emergence theory”. First I heard of this. Scott scored good points when she said that ID cannot answer the questions of how? and when? I thought the when—the time frame for “intelligent meddling” could have been expanded.

Scott: “We know designed tools in archeology because we know that is what humans do, how they do this, and why—the purpose. But we do not know why or how the bacterium flagellum arose.” “It is an artificial dichotomy to assert that there are intelligent causes and natural causes.” “The SETI argument from ID is tiresome; sure, scientists look for patterns to distinguish a signal from noise, but this in no way shows that there is an ‘intelligent designer’.” “Labeling -isms is a rhetorical strategy—Darwinism, evolutionism—but such labels are not a substitute for a transcendent understanding.”

Dembski is a tall, lanky figure who speaks without notes and wanders on stage. He started out quote mining from John Gerhart and Marc Kirschner (GK), *The Plausibility of Life: Resolving Darwin’s Dilemma*. (Yale University Press, 2005), to the effect that “the scientific consensus of small genetic mutations accumulating to new species is an illusion, as Scott says.” “We need a radically new understanding, according to GK.” “Evolution is like a woman who goes for plastic surgery multiple times; after all the cutting and pasting… it is all the same…” I didn’t hear this last phrase clearly, so this is not a quote—the audience giggled. I was lost wondering how plastic surgery fit into the argument. Surely this was a dig against women.

Dembski: “The study of patterns in nature is best explained by intelligence… archeology and SETI show this.” “There are reliable ways of distinguishing between random/chance structures and purpose structures.” Dembski used the phrases “design detection/design inference” many times without ever once saying how to detect. The phrase “design inference” seemed to me to be hollow—because my tomato plants are wilted and have yellow-tipped leaves, I infer/deduce from previous experience that a frost hit them. Dembski uses the term to mean “there must have been a purpose, therefore ID.”

Dembski: “in any other context, the merit of ID would be recognized. It is the evolutionists that prevent this.” {not a quote, but the gist as I heard him speak}. “Evolution is a theory of processes, going from point A to point B. This theory is not working; it is not detailed; Darwin had no idea of the internal structure of a cell.”

James Trefil spoke next: "There are external tests, and it is interesting to contrast the legal position of witnesses in the courts to what IDists proclaim. The courts have set up rigorous criteria for 'expert witnesses'; they must meet the tests of recognized evidence, facts widely viewed as established and verifiable, and independent of any vested interest." Trefil contrasted this judiciary requirement to ID, saying that ideas to be "presented in school classrooms should not have a lower standard".

Trefil went on to discuss how gold nuggets form, that random accumulations of gold atoms would be ridiculously improbable, but that we understand geothermal and mineralogical processes now and understand how they form. I think his point was that previously un-understood matters have yielded to scientific investigations over the decades.

Sisson, a lawyer in the Philip Johnson mold, spoke on the "tyranny of the majority" re evolution. I thought this curious. His view was that there are these unconscionable, atheist elites, and he doesn't like them. Evolution is an elitist notion, and he emphasized "as a lay person" and quoted lines from three textbooks to the effect that "complexity is unexplainable" thus ID is right. An argument to a jury, perhaps. That Dawkins and Darwin have it all wrong, that "facilitated variation" is a brief without a proper rebuttal in a court. ID is in the court of public opinion. {I imagine him as a prosecutor—to hell with the truth, we'll get a conviction of these pervos, drugos, evos.}

Sisson said that "life is so extraordinary", but the evolutionists have "no Bible in their set of data [sic]". He went on to say that he could refute every one of the pages in a large stack on his desk, printed out from MIT's or BU's Bio 106 course, but he did not have sufficient time. The comment about "no Bible in their set of data" was especially telling.

I was particularly interested in the audience reactions. Comments were accepted from about 20 audience members, lining up to the left (affirm) and right (negative).

Some excerpts:

1. Atheism is a religion that denies a higher power. Archeology shows this.
2. We can infer design from the fact that the fundamental physical constants are tuned. {I think—the fundamental constants are such that they allow life forms and cranky consciousnesses to form—if the constants were different, we would not be here to argue the matter!}
3. Kevin: as an English major, I see many subjective interpretations of poetry and literature. Isn't ID the same?
4. Katie: evolution presents a one-sided view. ID is a good balance.
5. no name: Evolution is not random; evolution is the cumulative effect of traits kept and lost. Negative traits give way to positives. Isn't this the way in society in general?
6. no name: There may be equal theories, but the presupposition of a higher power is an argument against using taxpayer dollars to fund ID. The First Amendment, etc.
7. no name: I am confused between how ID is detected and how ID is installed. ID seems to offer no explanation of the mechanisms or the principles involved when the "designer"

chooses to act. {me, too; the audience applauded}

8. Ryan: evolutionists can't handle the truth; the pyramids, the Egyptians, therefore ID. {my mind lost contact during this}.

9. Mathers: What do IDists hope to achieve? Dembski admitted that it was "exposure". Why did DI/Dembski hire an expensive PR firm in Washington, a firm that also represents big oil firms? Isn't this a sign that ID/Dembski/Behe/DI are in league with PR perceptions rather than scientific ways of thinking? {I have no idea about the allegations.}

10. no name: In 10 years, we humans will certainly be able to create a primitive cell in the lab. What then, ID?

Overall, I think the audience of mostly undergrads was about equally divided. There was no poll.

I was disappointed that the pro-evo side did not make a strong case for what evolution does explain, and beautifully. Why mammals have a common blood structure (Types A,B,O also in chimps) based on cells, in contrast to circulating proteins (cf. hemocyanin, a copper-based porphyrin oxygen-carrier found in e.g. lobsters). How human embryos have tails until late in development. How large mammalian herbivores could only develop after the evolution of grasses. There is a wonderful story of what evolution does give us an understanding of, and the legalisms (nonsense about complexity; specified, irreducible complexity, supernatural interventions, biology as distinct from chemistry, etc.) of ID short-changes us.

I introduced myself to Dembski. He shook my hand happily. I said, "You know that I started the Supreme Court case about Bible-reading in the public schools. I oppose everything you say." He took it in good stride and mumbled.

Ellery Schempp was the primary student plaintiff in Abington School District v. Schempp, which declared mandatory bible readings in public schools unconstitutional. He is a physicist residing in Boston.

Editor's Note: This was promoted from a comment that didn't belong where it was made.

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Comment #54913

Posted by kay on November 3, 2005 5:13 AM (e)

As to why the pro-evo side didn't make those points: a lot of evolution advocates assume that the public is more informed than it actually is. Ask a humanities graduate what's the gist of the laws of thermodynamics, and you'll only get TANSTAAFL from people who

aren't ashamed to admit they read Heinlein. :)

Comment #54920

Posted by KL on November 3, 2005 7:29 AM ([e](#))

Wait: didn't the Discovery Institute just say in Dover that they were NOT for teaching this in public schools? Why is Dembski speaking for it? I'm confused...

Comment #54922

Posted by Ron Okimoto on November 3, 2005 7:53 AM ([e](#))

Wait: didn't the Discovery Institute just say in Dover that they were NOT for teaching this in public schools? Why is Dembski speaking for it? I'm confused...

Dembski is still running the scam. Out of one side of his mouth he admits that there isn't anything to teach, out of the other he has to give it lip service so that his fellowship stipend will still roll in. \$60,000 isn't small change even to a guy that wanted so much to be an expert witness at the Dover trial. Dembski is also involved in shilling the rubes in his publishing efforts. He is probably getting paid to be involved with the next Panda's replacement where they are busy switching over intelligent design to the next scam.

I wish that Dembski could have gotten to the witness stand. The contrast between Behe's incompetence and Dembski's scam artistry would have made a wonderful example of just what ID is.

Comment #54924

Posted by Bagaaz on November 3, 2005 8:12 AM ([e](#))

I wish someone would raise the point that ID is unfalsifiable. In the Kitzmiller trial Behe said that if someone grew bacteria lacking flagella in a lab and selected for some kind of flagella device and one evolved then ID would be falsified. However, in such an experiment it would be impossible to rule out a supernatural designer doing the work. ID is therefore not science.

Comment #54932

Posted by Dr. Kate on November 3, 2005 9:35 AM ([e](#))

Bagaaz wrote:

in such an experiment it would be impossible to rule out a supernatural designer doing the work. ID is therefore not science.

Thank you for the beautiful point.

ID is not science. Science is testable. Science is falsifiable. Science uses peer review, observation, and repetition to support theories about how things behave.

Science doesn't try to get a new theory accepted by taking it to court, trying to teach it to high schoolers, and asking the public what their opinion is. (Although it would be rather interesting if it did. Imagine how different the results of Katrina would be. "95% of New Orleans residents don't believe that a hurricane could cause massive flooding or levy damage. Therefore, it won't happen, and we don't have to worry about it." Wow.)

Comment #54939

Posted by theonomo on November 3, 2005 10:21 AM (e)

I was also at the debate and was able to get a seat in the front row. I am sympathetic to ID, but my impression was that the ID side lost this debate, mostly due to the incompetence of Sisson.

Here are some of my thoughts:

1) Edward Sisson, the pro-ID lawyer was absolutely terrible. He had ten minutes to make the opening statement and he spent the entire time talking about where he went to grad school, how he got involved in the theater, how he became a producer of a theater company, how they put on a show in Germnay, how he then decided to go to law school, how he made partner at a firm, how he got married, etc. etc. This was all evidently supposed to show us that his background was not that of a fundamentalist Christian. He finally said something like "and now let me turn to the science" and right at that moment the bell rang, indicating he had one minute left, and he spun around, looking bewildered and asked "what does that mean?" He then apologized for not having time to get to the science and sat down. It was an absolutely pathetic showing. He would do much the same with his closing remarks, during which he claimed that he didn't have time to go through and refute all the evidence in the various textbooks he was holding up. I was extremely disappointed in his performance. I don't know why they didn't get someone competent from the Discovery Institute. In fact, the undergraduate journalism kid who spoke for the ID side was infinitely better than Sisson. The fact that Sisson was so unprepared and so wandering in his thoughts reflected terribly on ID.

2) The debate was impossible for the ID side to win, anyway, b/c ID is not mature enough to be taught in public high schools, and even the Discovery Institue acknowledges this. So the pro-ID side was stuck defending a position they were not eager to defend, while the anti-ID side could score simple and credible points about how we should just stick to the consensus in science when it comes to what we teach in high school and leave the ID stuff for later in a person's education if they are interested in pursuing it. The pro-ID side ended up doing the best thing they could in that situation, which was to defend ID generally and not mention high schools much at all. Dembski, for instance, did not use any of his time to discuss whether ID should be taught in high school and instead explained what ID is, how we can detect intelligence in SETI, anthropology, what specified complexity is, etc. A student who spoke during the open mic time later said that he had emailed Dembski asking him what he hoped to accomplish at the debate and Dembski had simply said "exposure". I believe it. Dembski simply used this as a chance to talk about ID.

3) The anti-ID side was well-prepared and clear. Eugenie Scott spoke first and she came across as intelligent and competent. She also made points that were easy to understand. Given that each person only had 10 minutes or so to speak, it is important to get a couple simple and clear points in, and she was able to do this. She was on-target and well-prepared. The contrast with Sisson, who had just spoken before her, was tremendous. I cannot overstate her contrast with Sisson.

4) The two undergraduate kids were about equal in their performance and persuasiveness.
5) Trefil did well for the anti-ID side. He had the advantage of being clear, well-prepared,

and also chatty and likeable.

6) The open-mic comments from the students were about evenly divided in terms of persuasiveness and performance for both sides of the debate.

7) The original post in this thread didn't get Dembski right on the quote about a woman. What he said was something like this: "Evolution is like a model, a woman, who has had a lot of plastic surgery. She looks good from far away, but when you get up close she looks cut and pasted together and isn't that attractive." This got a good laugh from the audience.

8) I am still sympathetic to ID and I don't think these sorts of questions can be resolved in such a time-constrained format, but at least you should make the best case you can in the time you are given, and Sisson, who spoke twice for ID just didn't know what he was talking about, and worse, wasn't prepared anyway. He also did some purely stupid things, like admit that he hadn't read one of the books he was critiquing all the way through, admit that he doesn't have a science background, and claim that he could go through 600 pages of class notes from a BU class on Evolution, and refute Evolution page by page, but he just didn't have time to do it here tonight. He also used statements like "it's just so amazingly incredibly complex that it just *couldn't* have happened by chance" which strikes me as the kind of argument a fifth grader in favor of ID might make, but I was hoping for better. I don't know why Sisson was the main guy making the opening and closing remarks for ID when Dembski was on their panel. Dembski only got to speak once and Sisson spoke twice, which was really the wrong way for them to go about it.

On the whole a very frustrating experience for me.

Comment #54940

Posted by [David Heddle](#) on November 3, 2005 10:21 AM ([e](#))

Dr. Kate,

I cannot dispute whether Bagaaz's point is beautiful. But it is too simplistic. Without commenting on whether Behe's ID is falsifiable, I just want to point out a common error: Responses along the lines of "regardless of what happens, it is impossible to rule out a supernatural designer" are not relevant.

To falsify biological ID, if it is falsifiable, you do not have to prove that "a designer could not have designed it." That is a red herring tantamount to saying you have to disprove God. No, what you have to do is show that there is no evidence for design. If you demonstrate how a flagellum evolves--then someone could still say that God did it that way--but that wouldn't be ID they were defending, it would simply be theism.

Evolution is not immune to a similar criticism: "regardless of what happens, it is impossible to rule out evolution." My favorite example is Mars. We see water and methane. Assume abiogenesis has occurred. Evolution, being a science that can make predictions, should have something to say about what Martian life might be like, but as far as I know it is silent. Will it be single celled? Multicelled? As complex as insects? Silence. In other words, it can accommodate all eventualities.

Comment #54942

Posted by [shiva](#) on November 3, 2005 10:38 AM ([e](#))

David

Assume abiogenesis has occurred.

Evolution...should have something to say about what Martian life might be like, but as far as I know it is silent.

Scientists are expected to foresee what will happen if it is 'assumed' something else has occurred.

Comment #54943

Posted by jeffw on November 3, 2005 10:51 AM [\(e\)](#)

Assume abiogenesis has occurred. Evolution, being a science that can make predictions, should have something to say about what Martian life might be like, but as far as I know it is silent. Will it be single celled? Multicelled? As complex as insects? Silence. In other words, it can accommodate all eventualities.

You haven't specified anything about the type of abiogenesis (DNA or non-DNA?). But it doesn't matter, since the example you cite has apparently occurred only once on this planet so far. Making a prediction based on a sample size of "1" is not good science. Where evolution can make reasonable predictions, is where it has seen something happen many times, such as the evolution of the eye, for example.

Comment #54944

Posted by Bayesian Bouffant, FCD on November 3, 2005 10:51 AM [\(e\)](#)

David Heddle wrote:

Evolution is not immune to a similar criticism: "regardless of what happens, it is impossible to rule out evolution."

Have you found that pre-Cambrian rabbit fossil yet? Go away and look some more. Don't come back without it.

Comment #54945

Posted by MattDP on November 3, 2005 10:54 AM [\(e\)](#)

Heddle, your point is nonsensical right from the get go. You say you won't comment on whether ID is falsifiable then proceed to explain how to falsify it (by your rules, specifically). So either comment on falsifiability or don't, but don't say you won't and then do.

You obviously will not be satisfied until science patches every little gap of knowledge and if and when a gap is filled you will simply point to another and say, well there's still this, could be designed, prove it's not. In the meantime doing no work whatsoever yourself to prove that something IS designed. Looks designed, appears designed, leave it to the evos to prove otherwise. The very definition of a free lunch for you. And of course, complete BS.

Evolution can be easily disproven in a variety of ways; the fact that you do not seem to understand this speaks volumes.

As far as life on Mars is concerned, evolution simply says life could evolve if the right conditions exist. ID of course, says what? Well, anything it wants. The designer could presumably design life that could live on Mars, right? If not, why not? And if so, what would its nature be? Unfortunately, ID does not choose silence as often as it should and we are regularly subjected to droning nonsense like yours.

Comment #54946

Posted by [bill](#) on November 3, 2005 10:54 AM [\(e\)](#)

I don't know why they didn't get someone competent from the Discovery Institute.

Because that would be impossible.

Comment #54947

Posted by Tevildo on November 3, 2005 10:56 AM [\(e\)](#)

David Heddle wrote:

Evolution, being a science that can make predictions, should have something to say about what Martian life might be like, but as far as I know it is silent. Will it be single celled? Multicelled? As complex as insects? Silence. In other words, it can accommodate all eventualities.

Leaving aside the fact that "complex" is to ID what "kind" was to old-fashioned creation-science, evolutionary theory can make some (falsifiable) predictions about Martian life.

The simplest one is - "Martian life will show evidence of common descent from its most primitive ancestors." If we find eukaryotic life, we will also find prokaryotic life. If we find multicelled animals, we will also find single-celled animals. If we find something as "complex" as an insect (unlikely, but not absolutely impossible), we'll find examples of, or evidence for, a whole range of "simpler" animals going back to prokaryotes.

If we find an insect and no bacteria, evolution will be falsified.

Comment #54953

Posted by K.E. on November 3, 2005 11:47 AM [\(e\)](#)

Heddle said

To falsify biological **or Any** ID, if it is falsifiable, you do not have to prove that "a designer could not have designed it." That is (a red herring) tantamount to saying you have to disprove God.

David you have hit the nail on the head for once.

Your thinking is “evolving”.

Unfortunately for the promoters of natural theology/creationism their pathological desire (materialism) to find a natural/real/cast-iron creator will always result in a suspension of dis-belief that can never be answered by biology,mathematics,physics,meteorology,crash investigation.

Natural theologians/creationists want to find god in nature and use biology,mathematics,physics,meteorology,crash investigation to selectively reveal direct material evidence of god to them instead of accepting all science revelation/knowledge as simply revelation.

The old trying to find a needle in a haystack without realizing the haystack is what they are looking for. The old can't see the wood for the trees, ego limited reality.

I have a suggestion. OPEN YOUR EYES, ears and nose and (don't) tell me what you see, hear, smell. Its between your toes on the beach, its NOW.

Comment #54958

Posted by [Bob Davis](#) on November 3, 2005 12:11 PM [\(e\)](#)

Heddle said *this* and *that* too.

But more importantly, Prof. Schempp said,

The comment about “no Bible in their set of data” was especially telling.

And that's the heart of the matter after all.

Comment #54959

Posted by [John_B](#) on November 3, 2005 12:19 PM [\(e\)](#)

Why it's impossible, bill? I don't think so!

Comment #54962

Posted by [Mycroftdavis](#) on November 3, 2005 12:29 PM [\(e\)](#)

“Ask a humanities graduate what's the gist of the laws of thermodynamics, and you'll only get TANSTAAFL from people who aren't ashamed to admit they read Heinlein. :)"

Why would anyone be ashamed to admit reading Heinlein? :) Seriously, many people wise enough to consider that the brainwashing religion they were plastered with as children got to the point at which they could make such a realization due to Heinlein's influence, not to mention other science fiction writers who dared to state the blasphemous truth that other explanations exist beside the ones taught in Kansas tent meetings by comb-overed blowhards.

Comment #54964

Posted by Christopher Letzelter on November 3, 2005 12:56 PM (e)

Professor Schempp,

this is a little off-topic, but thank you for your action in Abington v Schempp. I attended public schools thirty years ago and am glad I didn't have to sit through state-imposed denominational lectures on theology.

I also wish Dembski had appeared as a witness at Kitzmiller v Dover - he would have driven the judge nuts, I think, kind of like Bonsell did with his apparent perjury.

Chris

Comment #54965

Posted by Christopher Letzelter on November 3, 2005 12:58 PM (e)

oops - I meant "denominational." A Freudian slip…

Comment #54967

Posted by sanjait on November 3, 2005 1:04 PM (e)

"other explanations exist beside the ones taught in Kansas tent meetings by comb-overed blowhards."

I think it's "combed-over" but I could be wrong.

Re Martian evolution, we don't expect to find life there like ours, since the planet is frozen. As was alluded to, if there were life there, we would expect (nay, evolutionary theory explicitly posits) that we will find a nested hierarchical pattern of descent there. As on earth, this pattern, as evidenced by comparative biology, archaeology and comparative genomics on earth, is the heart of evolution. It does make specific predictions. The "rabbits in the precambrian" test is actually not so specific, if we could find anything that didn't fit in our tree, we would be screwed. That would include higehr the appearance of higher organisms in the fossil record where they shouldn't be, or modern organisms that are entirely dissimilar to known patterns observed in the biochemistry and genetics of other modern organisms. If organisms had genes that didn't fit our "similar with modifications" scheme, comparative genomics would be on flipped on its head. Alas, these things haven't happened, and we don't expect them to happen, which is why we are dismissive of ID.

Comment #54972

Posted by David Heddle on November 3, 2005 1:15 PM (e)

Common descent? You call that a prediction? It is about as specific as my saying "on Mars, a stone will fall governed by the same laws of gravity as on earth."

The rabbit (or human) fossil in the pre-Cambrian is not a falsification test of evolution. Or, more precisely, if that is representative of the best evolution has to offer for falsifiability tests, then evolution is not falsifiable.

If you found simple organism (on earth) with a totally unique genome, would that falsify evolution or would you claim abiogenesis occurred at least twice?

Comment #54974

Posted by GT(N)T on November 3, 2005 1:23 PM (e)

"No, what you have to do is show that there is no evidence for design."

Bad logic David. Demonstrating 'no evidence' is not the same thing as falsifying. To falsify ID, ID would have to make predictions that are testable. ID hasn't done that. ID appears unable to do that. ID fails to rise to the level of science.

Comment #54975

Posted by jeffw on November 3, 2005 1:23 PM ([e](#))

The rabbit (or human) fossil in the pre-Cambrian is not a falsification test of evolution. Or, more precisely, if that is representative of the best evolution has to offer for falsifiability tests, then evolution is not falsifiable.

This is just a ridiculous statement. Not even worthy of a reply.

If you found simple organism (on earth) with a totally unique genome, would that falsify evolution or would you claim abiogenesis occurred at least twice?

If we find life on Mars (or any other planet), will you claim that "god dunnit" twice?

Comment #54977

Posted by Ginger Yellow on November 3, 2005 1:31 PM ([e](#))

theonomo: Thanks for your balanced and informative description of the debate. I had to laugh, however, when you said this: "He also used statements like "it's just so amazingly incredibly complex that it just *couldn't* have happened by chance" which strikes me as the kind of argument a fifth grader in favor of ID might make, but I was hoping for better." ID as propounded by Behe or Dembski is precisely that argument cloaked in fancy mathematics to make it sound more impressive.

Comment #54981

Posted by [David Heddle](#) on November 3, 2005 1:37 PM ([e](#))

Jeffw,

This is just a ridiculous statement. Not even worthy of a reply.

Why is it (rabbit in the pre-Cambrian is not falsification) a ridiculous statement? I have had many discussions on just this topic on PT. Some, unlike you, agreed that the pre-Cambrian rabbit was not a legitimate test and provided reasonable falsification tests for evolution (at least they sounded reasonable to me, a non-expert.)

If you think that it *is* a good test, then why not apply for an NSF grant? Clear-cut falsification tests of important theories, especially if the test is simple and elegant, are always funded. Write a grant proposal promising to search pre-Cambrian strata (or whatever the correct language is) on a search for rabbit (or human) fossils.

If we find life on Mars (or any other planet), will you claim that “god dunnit” twice?

Yes, I would. (Unless it was clearly related to life on earth, in which case I'd say it originated here.) Now what would you say if you found a simple organism (on earth) with a totally unique genome, would that falsify evolution or would you claim abiogenesis occurred at least twice?

Comment #54982

Posted by K.E. on November 3, 2005 1:48 PM ([e](#))

Yes that member (theonomo) of the ID choir wasn't happy with a couple of the conductors but maybe next time.

Trouble is the best they have are delusional pseudo scientists and hack lawyers, does the word “denial” mean anything to these people.

Comment #54983

Posted by shiva on November 3, 2005 1:50 PM ([e](#))

Dave,

The (pre)-Cambrian rabbit challenge was first made by Haldane. I will leave it to you to find out the context in which he made the statement; and also read up on his works and try to understand if that is all Haldane had to say about testing or falsifying evolutionary theory. But as for this one

Now what would you say if you found a simple organism (on earth) with a totally unique genome, would that falsify evolution or would you claim abiogenesis occurred at least twice?

I hope you understand that science isn't rhetoric while IDoC may be. If and when you find a *simple organism (on earth) with a totally unique genome* bring it over to PT and we will discuss it.

Comment #54984

Posted by jeffw on November 3, 2005 1:51 PM ([e](#))

Why is it (rabbit in the pre-Cambrian is not falsification) a ridiculous statement?

Isn't it obvious? If a rabbit or human is truly found in the pre-cambrian, and there's no good explanation for it, then something's wrong with evolution. In other words, evolution is *falsifiable*

Now what would you say if you found a simple organism (on earth) with a totally unique genome, would that falsify evolution or would you claim abiogenesis occurred at least twice?

What would you say if santa clause's house were discovered at the north pole?

Have we ever found an organism with a totally unique genome here on earth? No. If and when we do, it would present serious problems for evolution, and there would be a lot of explaining to do. But that's a pretty mute point, isn't it?

But it's much more likely that we'll find new life outside the earth somewhere. It would only strengthen the case for evolution/abiogenesis. If you believe that god dunnit twice, well good for you. No one can falsify your belief system.

Comment #54985

Posted by [David Heddle](#) on November 3, 2005 2:03 PM (e)

Jeffw,

It is true that a pre-Cambrian rabbit would falsify evolution, but that doesn't make it a good test. Just like following Al Sharpton around to see if he floats off the planet is a not good falsification test for gravity, even though it would, in fact, falsify gravity. And if the only way we could test gravity would be to watch for people floating away, we would say that gravity was not, in any real sense, falsifiable.

What does the fact that we never found an organism with a unique genome make it moot? We have never found a pre-Cambrian rabbit, but you don't seem to find that question moot.

At any rate, it is a question to probe how biologists might respond to such a find. I appreciate that you gave a honest answer.

Comment #54987

Posted by [jeffw](#) on November 3, 2005 2:16 PM (e)

It is true that a pre-Cambrian rabbit would falsify evolution, but that doesn't make it a good test. Just like following Al Sharpton around to see if he floats off the planet is a not good falsification test for gravity, even though it would, in fact, falsify gravity.

Then what would be a good falsification test for gravity, and how would it differ fundamentally from the example you just described?

What does the fact that we never found an organism with a unique genome make it moot? We have never found a pre-Cambrian rabbit, but you don't seem to find that question moot.

Yes I do. They're both moot points, because they haven't happened, and probably won't happen. If and when they do, then we can talk.

Comment #54988

Posted by [CJ O'Brien](#) on November 3, 2005 2:17 PM (e)

Heddle,

Science has its conservative side.

The putative “rabbit in the Cambrian” would sure as hell rattle some cages, and there would be intense scrutiny, you’d better believe it. Evolutionary theory wouldn’t just fold up the tent, of course. But the fact that the individuals involved now in the research would have incentive to find alternative explanations doesn’t make an entire theory unfalsifiable, does it?

The answers to the questions you’re asking, as you’re well aware, depend on so many unknown particulars of the hypothetical discovery as to be meaningless.

The fact remains that there are classes of possible empirical findings that would falsify neo-Darwinian theory, if corroborated. In short, we do not expect to find lineages (extant or in the fossil record) that are not related to an earlier lineage. In over a century of evolution-informed research across numerous fields, this expectation has been borne out. Time and time again.

You’re confusing “unfalsified” with “unfalsifiable.”

Comment #54989

Posted by Skemono on November 3, 2005 2:18 PM (e)

I’m surprised nobody’s pounced on this comment yet:

Common descent? You call that a prediction? It is about as specific as my saying “on Mars, a stone will fall governed by the same laws of gravity as on earth.”

Um, yes in fact. That’s the point. If evolution is universally true, we’d expect life to follow the same basic patterns predicted by evolution on one planet as on another. Exactly as with gravity.

Comment #54990

Posted by Doran on November 3, 2005 2:24 PM (e)

The ninth commentor’s name was “Matthew” (being myself). Just check on the August 5, 2005 posting here on the Thumb about the DI and a beltway PR firm. Its Creative Response Consulting (CRC), though I can’t immediately remember what the acronym stands for. I also had a further comment regarding the so called evidence against evolution, via bacterial flagellum and blood clotting. There already on this site has been much discussion of secretion systems as a pathway to produce flagella, and as we have seen from Behe’s “rigorous peer-reviewed book,” that a foremost expert in blood clotting found his argument to be complete garbage. To finish, I remarked that ID proponents keep coming back with the same examples when they have already been explained, and they are unwilling to realize they have been beaten again and again and again (for rhetorical effect).

As a further note, I emailed a number of Boston area biology departments about this particular event, though receiving few responses, I was happy to hear that some BU professor encouraged their students to attend.

Comment #54993

Posted by Flint on November 3, 2005 2:39 PM (e)

As I understand it, evolution (the theory) implies that we find genetic and molecular relationships among organisms to be extremely tightly constrained within certain

parameters. We're not just talking about a rabbit in the precambrian, we're talking about necessary similarities and trends in the DNA of *every cell* of *every organism* we can *or ever will* find on the planet. And if these similarities and trends were NOT the case without ANY known exception, very little if anything biologists do would make the slightest sense. Indeed, it could be justifiably said that in that case, there would be no science of biology at all. Much like there would be no grammar if every sentence followed a pattern unique to that sentence and no system of rules could be derived.

So I don't think David Heddle really understands how pervasively evolution is tested, assumed, and in fact *necessary* for life as we know it, every which way.

Comment #54996

Posted by Bayesian Bouffant, FCD on November 3, 2005 2:49 PM ([e](#))

At any rate, it is a question to probe how biologists might respond to such a find. I appreciate that you gave a honest answer.

Well, if that isn't an admission of trolling.

The rabbit (or human) fossil in the pre-Cambrian is not a falsification test of evolution.

It is true that a pre-Cambrian rabbit would falsify evolution…

Make up your minds. Elsewhere. Come back when you are able to have a coherent adult discussion.

As I have pointed out to you before (perhaps you'll be claiming the OxyContin defense), **Evolution has passed a great many tests already, so to claim it is untestable is the height of folly**. If you wish to discuss biology further, you should learn some first.

Comment #54997

Posted by CJ O'Brien on November 3, 2005 2:49 PM ([e](#))

Oh, I think he understands it just fine.
He just fervently wishes it wasn't so.

ID as Pinocchio?
I like it. It's a puppet that wishes it were real, and you can easily tell when it's lying.
Forgive. I'm just always looking for the elusive "idea that fits on a t-shirt."

Comment #55000

Posted by morbius on November 3, 2005 2:57 PM ([e](#))

Now what would you say if you found a simple organism (on earth) with a totally unique genome, would that falsify evolution or would you claim abiogenesis occurred at least twice?

Without some reason to think that the organism arose from some other organism, it would strongly imply – by definition – that abiogenesis occurred at least twice; it would have no relevance to whether all those other organisms with related genomes evolved. Duh and sheesh.

Germ theory and atomic theory are falsifiable – they *could* have been wrong. But they aren't, and nothing we can learn now could make them so. Ditto for the theory of evolution. Discoveries we make now can show that specific aspects of the explanatory theory are mistaken, but not the whole, which was been repeatedly confirmed. And of course its always possible to think up examples that don't fit the explanatory framework like distinct genomes or pre-cambrian rabbit fossils, but that doesn't invalidate the framework for everything that it does apply to. As for “if that is representative of the best evolution has to offer for falsifiability tests, then evolution is not falsifiable”, that's disparate grasping – pre-Cambrian rabbit fossils are not the best evolution has to offer; it's just what Haldane offered off the top of his head. Here's a good discussion I found from a little googling; such explanations have been given here, to Heddle, before, but to no avail since his beliefs are unfalsifiable:

This is a bit difficult, because evolution has already been so thoroughly tested that it's hard to come up with predictions – they tend to be postdictions. That is, things that would falsify it, but which we already know aren't the case.

One could take any of the lines of evidence for evolution, and reverse it: ‘if evolution were not the case, we would / would not find… do [/I] / don't find, which is hence evidence for it’. That is, not finding the evidence that we do find. For instance, if human genetics had been entirely different to that of other apes; finding some mammal species that uses uracil in place of thymine in its DNA, perhaps. Or maybe humans having retinas wired the cephalopod way. But we already know these aren't the case.

It's worth noting however that these are postdictions now, but they didn't use to be! Any of our modern knowledge in these areas could have undermined evolution.

Also, evolution is a theory of pattern, so finding a single anomaly would not necessarily falsify it. But conversely, a radically different pattern would falsify it completely.

But here's some of off-the-top-of-my-head prediction – things that might still turn up, in principle.

Undoubtedly Precambrian (ideally, though Cambrian would do) mammalian fossils. Note, plural, because this is about pattern. If mammals were generally found before there were even amphibians, it would be pretty inexplicable. Bat fossils have been found in the fine-grained Messel oil shale; perhaps some might turn up in the Burgess shale too? Note that you'd need later things found before their ancestors, not the other way round. I am flummoxed as to how ‘living fossils’ are supposed to refute evolution.

Biogeographical anomalies – apparently ‘closely-related’ and pretty immobile organisms found on different continents, something like *Orchidis prettiflowerii* subspecies *alpha* in India and *Orchidis prettiflowerii* subspecies *beta* in North America. Or species of lizard on a 4myo volcanic island in the Pacific whose nearest presumed

relatives live on islands off the west coast of Africa. Again, an odd case might have some explanation within evolution; but a large number of examples would be pretty damning. After all, evolution is the reason for the biogeographical distributions we see, but there's no reason – other than that – why prehensile-tailed monkeys, say, should only be found in the New World.

Features matched purely to their function, not to their lineage. So a bat with avian lung ventilation, not it's mammalian one; a new whale species with fishlike gills instead of lungs, and so on.

Finding any new species – and there's plenty out there to go find – whose genetics was radically different to anything else. Specifically, some 'higher' organism, which in principle should be related to something already known, that has completely different genetics to the known species.

The utter non-matching of non-coding DNA between morphologically similar species. The coding stuff should be similar perhaps, because it builds similar bodies. But the non-coding stuff – which is easily most of it – has no reason to be similar.

Observation of… oh, pick your own creationist caricature! … a dog giving birth to a cat, or something. Or marginally more plausibly, a fish egg developing into a salamander.

An earth that did turn out to be mere thousands of years old; a universe a mere million, etc.

A mechanism for making offspring that prevented mutations; the observed mechanism for descent that made accumulation of mutations impossible. (Not sure what that might look like, but it'd prevent evolution.)

And here's a couple of links on this sort of thing (though I think my list above is more comprehensive than these!)

www.talkorigins.org/indexcc/CA/CA211.html

http://atheism.about.com/library/FAQs/evo/blfaq_evo_science.htm

Hope that helps!

Cheers, DT

Comment #55001

Posted by morbius on November 3, 2005 2:59 PM (e)

The original post in this thread didn't get Dembski right on the quote about a woman. What he said was something like this: "Evolution is like a model, a woman, who has had a lot of plastic surgery. She looks good from far away, but when you get up close she looks cut and pasted together and isn't that attractive." This got a good laugh from the audience.

I guess Dembski prefers fantasy women and theories to the real thing, which does indeed

tend to be a bit messy.

Comment #55004

Posted by [David Heddle](#) on November 3, 2005 3:18 PM (e)

BB FCD,

Is it really too much for you to understand that while a pre-Cambrian rabbit would falsify evolution it is not, in fact, a falsification test? I believe most people in here understand that, but you seem to think it is some sort of glaring inconsistency.

Here is yet another example: Instability of atoms would falsify quantum mechanics. However, studying atoms to watch for their electrons to perform a death spiral into the nucleus is not a falsification test for QM. Get it?

And have I ever claimed (provide the link) that evolution is not testable?

Morbius:

Do you understand when I said "if pre-Cambrian.." I was being helpful to your cause? I wasn't grasping at all, let alone desperately. I was pointing out, in effect, that evolutionists who mention that pre-Cambrian mammals as a falsification test of evolution look downright stupid. You might as well say that only a miracle could falsify evolution. That is why I also added, in a comment earlier, that when we discussed this before, others provided more reasonable tests.

But no, in spite of the clear meaning, and in spite of the fact that I stated others had provided more reasonable tests, you assumed that I meant that I believed this was the only possible test. Try to read more carefully next time.

Be more specific about atomic theory and your belief that it could no longer be falsified. Atomic theory is based on Quantum Electrodynamics, a theory that continues to be tested. Unless you mean, simply, the theory that atoms exist. I hope not, because I have several books on atomic theory, and they go well beyond the statement that atoms exist.

Comment #55005

Posted by Jeff Guinn on November 3, 2005 3:22 PM (e)

Having followed this discussion, and others like it for some time, it seems to me debating the validity of naturalistic evolution and whether ID/Creationism deserves mention in a science class misses the fundamental point.

Which goes something like this: (my apologies in advance to the true scientists in this crowd, for I am nothing more than a reasonably well read amateur)

Science is essentially hypothetico-deductive – all hypotheses considered to be within the realm of rational inquiry carry with them consequent deductions. That is, for the theory under consideration to be scientific, it must have at least one consequence deduced from the theory, the consequence must be amenable to investigation, and the investigation must confirm all such consequences.

Does naturalistic evolution have any deductive consequences? Quite a few, as it turns out. For instance:

– The earth must be very old (Darwin, BTW, was the very first person to predict that the Earth must be at least several hundred million years old. Prevailing estimates stopped at

the 20,000 year mark.)

- All reproductively isolated populations must diverge over time.
- Inheritance must be particulate, not blended. (Darwin's prediction, contra prevailing wisdom, prior Mendel's confirmatory observations becoming widespread knowledge)
- All life shares a common ancestor (contrary to Lamarck and the Bible)

As we learned more, say, about the genome, even more deductive consequences showed up:

- Genetic relatedness must largely mirror the Linnean classification.
- Mutation rates must be consistent with the Earth's age and the appearance of fossils.

There are many more deductive consequences attending naturalistic evolution (in fact, there might very well be more for evolution than any other scientific discipline), but you get the idea.

In contrast, ID/Creationism does not have even one deductive consequence. Nada. Zilch. None.

And until it has even one, it simply isn't science. ID may be ground breaking speculation, or just tarted-up Biblical literalism, but it hardly matters which. But what it most certainly is not is science.

Which, if I were to debate this, is how I would lead off. While many polls show significant numbers of Americans don't find naturalistic evolution persuasive, Americans are much more favorable to the idea of science in general. In that light, ID simply doesn't belong.

Unless, that is, Salvadore, or Mr. Heddle, et al, can provide just one example of something that **MUST** be true in order for ID to be true.

Comment #55006

Posted by jeffw on November 3, 2005 3:26 PM ([e](#))

Heddle wrote:

Now what would you say if you found a simple organism (on earth) with a totally unique genome, would that falsify evolution or would you claim abiogenesis occurred at least twice?

Without some reason to think that the organism arose from some other organism, it would strongly imply — by definition — that abiogenesis occurred at least twice; it would have no relevance to whether all those other organisms with related genomes evolved.

Well to be fair, Heddle said "unique" genome. He didn't say it had to be based on new chemistry. It could also be an isolated organism, from which no ancestry could be established. That would be a problem for evolution.

But a genome based on a new abiogenesis chemistry would also be a serious problem. You'd have to show descent - how did it get here? That would be tough, if it's the only organism you found, and would strengthen the case for creation ("sudden appearance").

But of course, that's all just creationist wishful thinking.

Comment #55007

Posted by morbius on November 3, 2005 3:33 PM [\(e\)](#)

I wish someone would raise the point that ID is unfalsifiable. In the Kitzmiller trial Behe said that if someone grew bacteria lacking flagella in a lab and selected for some kind of flagella device and one evolved then ID would be falsified. However, in such an experiment it would be impossible to rule out a supernatural designer doing the work. ID is therefore not science.

Not only that, but Behe is lying; no matter how well the possibility of the evolution of the flagellum is demonstrated, Behe and his ilk either deny it or switch to something else, like clotting. The claim that there are IC systems is a universal that can't be falsified – showing that one system isn't IC doesn't rule out that others are. But Behe's claim is that IC systems can't evolve, which is simply *false* – it's an utterly fallacious claim, like claiming that what's true of poodles is true of dogs, and for Behe to continue to make it after this has been noted and explained many times demonstrates that he's a intellectual charlatan. Beyond that, ID doesn't go away when Behe's silly claim goes away; ID proponents switch to some *other* claim, as Dembski does with his NFL and CSI stuff – which has *also* been shown to be utterly fallacious. So does that mean ID is false? No, because God might be tinkering in yet other ways – *the involvement of an omnipotency is uneliminable*. Which gets back to your point.

Comment #55009

Posted by Ed Darrell on November 3, 2005 3:37 PM [\(e\)](#)

I'm surprised that a partner in a major law firm would take the side Mr. Sisson took. Frankly, it makes me wonder about his law firm.

Comment #55010

Posted by Bayesian Bouffant, FCD on November 3, 2005 3:38 PM [\(e\)](#)

Syntax Error: mismatched tag 'kwickxml'

Comment #55011

Posted by morbius on November 3, 2005 3:40 PM [\(e\)](#)

That would be a problem for evolution.

Uh, no, it wouldn't. Did you even read what I wrote? "it would have no relevance to whether all those other organisms with related genomes evolved". All of the effective science that we do would still function even if we found one isolated organism that didn't fit – we would need an *additional* theory to explain it – like separate abiogenesis (possibly occurring elsewhere and arriving by meteor, for instance). Did you even read what Heddle wrote? He offered "abiogenesis occurred at least twice" as an *alternative* to "falsify

evolution".

Comment #55012

Posted by Ed Darrell on November 3, 2005 3:48 PM (e)

Heddle said:

If you think that it is a good test, then why not apply for an NSF grant? Clear-cut falsification tests of important theories, especially if the test is simple and elegant, are always funded. Write a grant proposal promising to search pre-Cambrian strata (or whatever the correct language is) on a search for rabbit (or human) fossils.

Others, including Heddle, have already pointed out how this isn't necessarily a good test of evolution, or even logical.

But it does demonstrate creationist characteristics.

First, Heddle claims it's a clear-cut falsification test. Others have disputed that.

But second, Heddle claims that such tests "are always funded" by the National Science Foundation.

Muddle-headed all the way. NSF grants are tough to come by. There isn't enough money to cover all the good research ideas. Competition is very stiff. Second, there's no body of evidence or theory to suggest that such a test would be a wise way to spend NSF money, even were that money to be abundant. One would have to establish that there was a likelihood of good science coming from the experiment, regardless the results. There's not a whit of credible evidence to suggest rabbit fossils can be found out of place (which is one of the points of the example). NSF doesn't fund fishing expeditions; nor will NSF fund projects that are presented based on fraud. In fact, it's a crime to make such a proposal.

It would require bending the science beyond recognition to make the proposal Heddle proposes, and then the making of the proposal would open the proposer to criminal prosecution.

Which is why neither Heddle nor any other ID advocate is seeking NSF funding to verify any part of intelligent design, by the way.

Comment #55013

Posted by morbius on November 3, 2005 3:56 PM (e)

I was pointing out, in effect, that evolutionists who mention that pre-Cambrian mammals as a falsification test of evolution look downright stupid

If that's what you were doing, then that makes you look stupid, since the fact that some proponents of the ToE look stupid has no bearing on the ToE.

Be more specific about atomic theory and your belief that it could no longer be falsified. Atomic theory is based on Quantum Electrodynamics, a theory that continues to be tested. Unless you

mean, simply, the theory that atoms exist. I hope not, because I have several books on atomic theory, and they go well beyond the statement that atoms exist.

Dalton's Atomic Theory:

- 1) All matter is made of atoms. Atoms are indivisible and indestructible.
- 2) All atoms of a given element are identical in mass and properties
- 3) Compounds are formed by a combination of two or more different kinds of atoms.
- 4) A chemical reaction is a rearrangement of atoms.

None of that depends on QED. Of course, this theory is not exactly correct as stated, just as Darwin's is not exactly correct as he stated it.

No amount of quibbling about the terms and concepts of the philosophy of science will change the fact that ID is not science, that evolution is a fact, and that the theory of evolution consists of our best inferences to date.

Comment #55015

Posted by qetzal on November 3, 2005 3:57 PM ([e](#))

David Heddle, in #54940 wrote:

Evolution is not immune to a similar criticism: "regardless of what happens, it is impossible to rule out evolution."

David Heddle, in #54981 wrote:

Why is it (rabbit in the pre-Cambrian is not falsification) a ridiculous statement? I have had many discussions on just this topic on PT. Some, unlike you, agreed that the pre-Cambrian rabbit was not a legitimate test and provided reasonable falsification tests for evolution (at least they sounded reasonable to me, a non-expert.)

Why would someone suggest that evolution isn't falsifiable, if they had already been provided with tests that they considered reasonable?

There should be a word for someone like that. Oh wait, there is: **troll**.

Comment #55016

Posted by morbius on November 3, 2005 3:58 PM ([e](#))

In fact, it's a crime to make such a proposal.

And an intellectual crime for Heddle to make his IDiotic claim.

Comment #55018Posted by morbius on November 3, 2005 4:00 PM ([e](#))

There should be a word for someone like that. Oh wait, there is: troll.

Another word: **liar**

Comment #55020Posted by [David Heddle](#) on November 3, 2005 4:10 PM ([e](#))

Ed, I am just taking the words of others, on here, who propose it as a falsification test.

As for the NSF, while we all (presumably) agree that science is horribly underfunded, and that NSF grants are hard to come by (I am fortunate enough to have had two of them) I submit a rational doable make-or-break test of any major theory would be viewed favorably. But as you pointed out, pre-Cambrian rabbits is a horrible test, and it would not be funded. That's just one reason why the whole "pre-Cambrian mammal business" should be dropped from discussion, period.

As for any funding verifying ID—while I am not a cosmologist but I view all modern cosmology funding as funding science that can strengthen or weaken cosmological ID—even though it is not proposed as such.

getzal,

I NEVER said evolution wasn't falsifiable, I said that in circumstances such as the life on Mars question it is subject to the same type of criticism as ID: anything fits the theory. And I wasn't the one who first brought up the pre-Cambrian rabbit business, that was Bayesian Bouffant, FCD in #54944 on this thread. Gee, some of you are incapable of even a mylar thin layer of abstraction.

Comment #55021Posted by [mark](#) on November 3, 2005 4:13 PM ([e](#))

theonomo wrote:

"and now let me turn to the science" and right at that moment the bell rang, indicating he had one minute left, and he spun around, looking bewildered and asked "what does that mean?"

I think Sisson was rather eloquent here.

Comment #55022Posted by morbius on November 3, 2005 4:15 PM ([e](#))

flint wrote:

And if these similarities and trends were NOT the case without ANY known exception

This is an excessive requirement and simply isn't how science functions. For instance, finding a meteor containing an organism unrelated to any other would not falsify evolution, it would only falsify your extreme absolute statement of it.

Really, talk of falsification of ToE is just another IDiot smokescreen, a form of tu quoque fallacy. The fact is that ID is, at its core, in the most fundamental ways, unfalsifiable; it isn't science. The same simply isn't true of the ToE.

Comment #55023

Posted by jeffw on November 3, 2005 4:16 PM ([e](#))

That would be a problem for evolution.

Uh, no, it wouldn't. Did you even read what I wrote? "it would have no relevance to whether all those other organisms with related genomes evolved". All of the effective science that we do would still function even if we found one isolated organism that didn't fit — we would need an additional theory to explain it — like separate abiogenesis (possibly occurring elsewhere and arriving by meteor, for instance).

Uh, I'm afraid it would be (and yeah, I read what you wrote). Sure, the effective science that we have would still function, but we would still have a glaring inconsistency. The add-on meteor hypothesis, without any evidence for it, is nearly worthless. You are trying to make the evidence fit evolution, rather than the other way around.

Did you even read what Heddle wrote? He offered "abiogenesis occurred at least twice" as an alternative to "falsify evolution".

Of course I read it. He said "unique" genome and suggested that *we* would offer an abiogenesis explanation. He said nothing about whether the genome was based on new chemistry.

Comment #55024

Posted by morbius on November 3, 2005 4:22 PM ([e](#))

I NEVER said evolution wasn't falsifiable, I said that in circumstances such as the life on Mars question it is subject to the same type of criticism as ID: anything fits the theory.

Since the ToE isn't a theory of life on Mars, your claim is wrong and foolish.

Comment #55025

Posted by morbius on November 3, 2005 4:25 PM ([e](#))

I read what you wrote

Ok, then you did not, and still do not, comprehend it, or how science works.

He said nothing about whether the genome was based on new chemistry.

No, you irrelevantly said that; I said nothing at all about chemistry, new or otherwise.

Comment #55026

Posted by jeffw on November 3, 2005 4:27 PM ([e](#))

Morbius, just curious - how old are you?

Comment #55028

Posted by morbius on November 3, 2005 4:33 PM ([e](#))

Old enough to know what it means when someone starts asking such questions.

Comment #55029

Posted by Ginger Yellow on November 3, 2005 4:39 PM ([e](#))

"I said that in circumstances such as the life on Mars question it is subject to the same type of criticism as ID: anything fits the theory."

As has been hinted above, this is absurd. Evolution is a theory to explain the diversity of life on earth. It may or may not be true of hypothetical life elsewhere. Anything fits ID when it is applied to life on earth, let alone hypothetical life.

Comment #55031

Posted by Bulman on November 3, 2005 4:49 PM ([e](#))

While we are picking apart Heddle:

You might as well say that only a miracle could falsify evolution. That is why I also added, in a comment earlier, that when we discussed this before, others provided more reasonable tests.

A "miracle" would be positive evidence for ID/Creationism.

Can we just argue about Santa Claus now? I think the appearance of elves in the arctic would be positive evidence for Santa's Workshop being at the North Pole.

Comment #55037

Posted by H. Humbert on November 3, 2005 5:10 PM ([e](#))

Evolution can make one firm prediction about Martian life—it should appear distinctly different than life on Earth and with its own distinct evolutionary history.

Finding whale or elephant bones on Mars, I think, would be a significant blow to evolution.

What does ID have to say about the forms alien life might take?

Comment #55038

Posted by [David Heddle](#) on November 3, 2005 5:16 PM (e)

Gee Bulman, I see you really grasp the concept. You must have a Ph.D. in the philosophy of science.

H. Humbert,

I can't answer your question from a biological ID perspective, not being a biological IDer, but from a cosmological ID perspective I would say that they would be very similar to us. Carbon-based, on a rocky planet with water in all three phases, and a middle aged sun, between two arms at a stable radius in a spiral galaxy. Oh, they would be in the same general time that we are too—that is they wouldn't be from much earlier in the universe.

Comment #55039

Posted by [morbius](#) on November 3, 2005 5:21 PM (e)

As has been hinted above, this is absurd.

This can't be stressed enough. What would we say of someone who wrote

Physics, being a science that can make predictions, should have something to say about what Martian life might be like, but as far as I know it is silent. Will it be single celled? Multicelled? As complex as insects? Silence. In other words, it can accommodate all eventualities.

That they were stupid? Confused? An intellectually dishonest troll?

Comment #55046

Posted by [David Heddle](#) on November 3, 2005 5:37 PM (e)

Ginger Yellow,

Hypothetically, what if were discovered that three billion years ago a meteor struck earth and the resulting debris transported microbes to Mars. (A not implausible scenario, I might add.) Given three billion years of free reign on the planet, does evolution have *anything* to say about what that life would be like, beyond the obvious, that it would exhibit clear evidence of common descent? Or would you still say that evolution says nothing about life on Mars, even if the life originated on earth?

Comment #55048

Posted by [Bulman](#) on November 3, 2005 5:43 PM (e)

GSA Meeting on ID/Creation

Point #3: Don Wise…

…He also noted that we should take our cues from politics. We live in an age of sound bites and using words like “incompetent design” can be more effective than trying to explain in scientific detail why it’s bad science. Wise encourages geologists to take lessons from politics; (1) don’t be defensive (2) keep your points simple and easy to remember (3) use humor to make your points (4) aim your points at the voters.

Q: Gentle reminder or sad commentary?

A: False dichotomy, it’s a rhetorical question.

Comment #55054

Posted by qetzal on November 3, 2005 6:08 PM ([e](#))

David Heddle, in #54940 wrote:

Evolution is not immune to a similar criticism: “regardless of what happens, it is impossible to rule out evolution.”

David Heddle, in #55020 wrote:

I NEVER said evolution wasn’t falsifiable, I said that in circumstances such as the life on Mars question it is subject to the same type of criticism as ID: anything fits the theory.

Ah - the [Raymond Luxury-Yacht](#) defense. It’s spelt “regardless of what happens,” but it’s pronounced “in certain circumstances.” You’ve [run rings ‘round me logically](#).

Comment #55058

Posted by Reed A. Cartwright on November 3, 2005 6:12 PM ([e](#))

The comments have gotten away from begin about the stuff that happened at BU. Please go to our forum, linked to on the main page, if you want to participate in a long back and forth about ID. If the topic drift continues, I may close the thread.

Comment #55060

Posted by David Heddle on November 3, 2005 6:18 PM ([e](#))

qetzal,

You are quote mining. I can do it too:

It would be very difficult to explain why the universe should have begun in just this way, except as an act of a God who intended to create beings like us. – Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History Of Time*

See! Hawking supports ID!!

That's the level you stoop to. Any reasonable person who read my comments would see that I was referring to that fact that at times evolution appears to be all-accomodating. And that I wasn't making a definitive statement about evolution not being falsifiable. Especially given that I commented (#54981 on this thread) that people on here, have provided me, in the past, with reasonable tests of falsification.

But hey, if quote mining rocks your boat, have a blast.

Comment #55062

Posted by David Heddle on November 3, 2005 6:20 PM ([e](#))

Reed,

sorry, our comments came together—feel free to delete my last (and this) comment. (I realize you don't need my permission.)

Comment #55063

Posted by morbius on November 3, 2005 6:25 PM ([e](#))

See! Hawking supports ID!!

No he doesn't, even if that quote weren't out of context. Many scientists believe that metaphysical statement, but it has no bearing on ID – which is a naysay of evolution, not your irrelevant so-called "cosmological ID".

Comment #55078

Posted by Ginger Yellow on November 3, 2005 7:26 PM ([e](#))

Apologies to Reed, but: "Hypothetically, what if were discovered that three billion years ago a meteor struck earth and the resulting debris transported microbes to Mars. (A not implausible scenario, I might add.) Given three billion years of free reign on the planet, does evolution have anything to say about what that life would be like, beyond the obvious, that it would exhibit clear evidence of common descent? Or would you still say that evolution says nothing about life on Mars, even if the life originated on earth?"

If the premise is taken as a given, then of course evolution would have something to say, since the Martian biodiversity should have been governed by the same processes. I'm not a biologist but here's a few that make sense to me. Provided the organisms were fossilisable (or whatever the word is) you would expect the fossil record to exhibit the same pattern of nested trees and incremental changes in morphology that we see on earth. You would also expect the genetic variation from earthlings to be broadly similar to the variation found on earth between bacteria (or whatever organisms might have split off around 3bn years ago) and other organisms. You would expect any organisms in similar ecological niches on earth (should any exist) to share some specialist characteristics with the Martians - as for example

we find marsupial equivalents of most broad conventional mammalian types.

Comment #55079

Posted by 'Rev Dr' Lenny Flank on November 3, 2005 7:28 PM (e)

I cannot dispute whether Bagaaz's point is beautiful. But it is too simplistic.

Speaking of simplistic, Heddle, would you mind telling me, please, why your religious opinions are any more authoritative than mine, my next door neighbor's, my car mechanic's, or the kid who delivers my pizzas?

Comment #55082

Posted by 'Rev Dr' Lenny Flank on November 3, 2005 7:46 PM (e)

ID is not mature enough to be taught in public high schools, and even the Discovery Institute acknowledges this.

Baloney. BS. Poppycock. Balderdash.

From the Wedge Document, written in 1998-99:

Phase II. Publicity & Opinion-making

* Teacher Training Program

Phase III. Cultural Confrontation & Renewal

* Potential Legal Action for Teacher Training

Phase III... We will also pursue possible legal assistance in response to resistance to the integration of design theory into public school science curricula.

FIVE YEAR OBJECTIVES ...

6. Ten states begin to rectify ideological imbalance in their science curricula & include design theory

ACTVITIES ...

(3) Teacher training

A portion of the conversation from the American Enterprise Institute forum on October 21, 2005, between Mark Ryland of the Discovery Institute and Richard Thompson of the

Thomas More Law Center:

MODERATOR (Jon Entine): I am curious about the Discovery Institute's involvement in the Dover case, where originally they were slated three people, affiliated with the institute were slated to give depositions, and then obviously pulled out. There was some kind of dispute about legal strategy, perhaps. And I want you to address that, because I think there is some belief, at least expressed in various newspaper articles, that there was a concern by the Discovery Institute that if this issue is decided on science, that intelligent design would be ruled as religion and therefore would fall under the Establishment Cause and therefore would be banned from being taught in science classes.

So, for fear of that almost inevitability happening, the Discovery Institute repositioned itself for tactical reasons, to be against, for teaching the controversy perhaps in nonscientific settings. I just wanted you to respond.

MARK RYLAND (DI): Sure, I'd be happy to respond. Let me back up first and say: The Discovery Institute never set out to have a school board, schools, get into this issue. We've never encouraged people to do it, we've never promoted it. We have, unfortunately, gotten sucked into it, because we have a lot of expertise in the issue, that people are interested in.

When asked for our opinion, we always tell people: don't teach intelligent design. There's no curriculum developed for it, you're teachers are likely to be hostile towards it, I mean there's just all these good reasons why you should not to go down that path. If you want to do anything, you should teach the evidence for and against Darwin's theory. Teach it dialectically.

And despite all the hoopla you've heard today, there is a great deal of – many, many problems with Darwin's theory, in particular the power of NS and RV to do the astounding things that are attributed to them. The new demonology, as one philosopher calls it, the selfish gene can do anything.

So that's the background. And what's happened in the foreground was, when it came to the Dover school district, we advised them not to institute the policy they advised. In fact, I personally went and met with them, and actually Richard was there the same day, and they didn't listen to me, that's fine, they can do what they want, I have no power and control over them. But from the start we just disagreed that this was a good place, a good time and place to have this battle – which is risky, in the sense that there's a potential for rulings that this is somehow unconstitutional.

That's basically from an institutional perspective what I can say and what I know. Now, individuals associated with the Discovery Institute were then, had got involved in, the possibility of becoming expert witnesses in the case. And I don't, as far as I know there was no institutional decision made one way or the other, but I think it was the case that those individuals felt they had somewhat different legal interests being – it was often because they were both expert witnesses, but usually fact witnesses as well, about things like the history of the intelligent design movement. So they wanted to have

their own lawyers involved with depositions, and I believe there was an argument, a disagreement about that. I think that was the reason why they decided not to participate.

MODERATOR: Ken, I wanted –

RICHARD THOMPSON (TMLC): I, I think I should respond…

Mod: You can respond, and then I wanted – that's fine.

RICHARD THOMPSON (TMLC): …just because [something] the Thomas More Law Center. First of all, Stephen Meyer, who is he, he is you're, is he the president?

MARK RYLAND (DI): He is the Director of the Center for Science and Culture.

RICHARD THOMPSON (TMLC): Okay, and David DeWolf is a Fellow of the Discovery Institute.

MARK RYLAND (DI): Right.

RICHARD THOMPSON (TMLC): They wrote a book, titled "Intelligent Design in Public School Science Curricula." The conclusion of that book was that, um:

"Moreover, as the previous discussion demonstrates, school boards have the authority to permit, and even encourage, teaching about design theory as an alternative to Darwinian evolution – and this includes the use of textbooks such as Of Pandas and People that present evidence for the theory of intelligent design." …and I could go further. But, you had Discovery Institute people actually encouraging the teaching of intelligent design in public school systems. Now, whether they wanted the school boards to teach intelligent design or mention it, certainly when you start putting it in writing, that writing does have consequences.

In fact, several of the members, including Steve Meyer, agreed to be expert witnesses, also prepared expert witness reports, then all at once decided that they weren't going to become expert witnesses, at a time after the closure of the time we could add new expert witnesses. So it did have a strategic impact on the way we could present the case, cause they backed out, when the court no longer allowed us to add new expert witnesses, which we could have done.

Now, Stephen Meyer, you know, wanted his attorney there, we said because he was an officer of the Discovery Institute, he certainly could have his attorney there. But the other experts wanted to have attorneys, that they were going to consult with, as objections were made, and not with us. And no other expert that was in the Dover case, and I'm talking about the plaintiffs, had any attorney representing them.

So that caused us some concern about exactly where was the heart of the Discovery Institute. Was it really something of a tactical decision, was it this strategy that they've been using, in I guess Ohio and other places, where they've pushed school boards to go in with intelligent design, and as soon as there's a controversy, they back off with a compromise. And I think what was victimized by this strategy was the Dover school board, because we could not present the expert

testimony we thought we could present

When DI claims that it never wanted ID taught in schools because it is “too immature as a theory”, they are flat out lying to us. And you are simply repeating their flat-out lie. The fact is that DI wanted intelligent design ‘theory’ taught in schools, as a primary portion of its program, right up until the Ohio legislators asked them point-blank what this scientific theory WAS — and they were quite unable to come up with one. THAT’S when DI did its about-face and began stammering about “gee, we don’t really want ID taught after all” and “heck, we only want to teach the CONTROVERSY”.

They are liars. Deliberate, bare, bald-faced liars. With malicious deceptive intent.

And Thompson was right — DI led the rubes by the nose all along, and then abandoned them to their fate as soon as the going got too tough for Dembski et al. Like every other con artist in history, they skipped town as soon as the scam was uncovered.

Comment #55100

Posted by Osmo on November 3, 2005 9:09 PM [\(e\)](#)

David Heddle -

The mistake you are making is addressed by Ed Brayton (that wascally nonscientist) here:

http://www.stcynic.com/blog/archives/2005/09/blogging_the_dover_trial.php

He’s missing a crucial distinction by conflating Behe’s argument for ID with ID itself. The notion that an intelligent designer was involved is not in any way falsifiable. There is no conceivable set of data that could falsify that proposition. But specific arguments that purport to point to such a designer can be falsified, and it’s important to distinguish here between facts and theories. Behe’s argument offers both factual claims and a theoretical or explanatory claim. It goes like this:

Factual claim: Some biochemical systems are irreducibly complex, meaning that if you took out any single component of the system, the system would fail to function.

Factual claim: Irreducibly complex systems could not have evolved step by step because the intermediate or precursor systems would not have been functional.

Explanatory claim: Therefore, when we find an irreducibly complex system, we know that it must have been designed from scratch and came into existence all in one step.

Only the explanatory claim is an explicit statement in support of ID, but one can still falsify the argument if one shows that either of the two factual claims it is based upon is false. For instance, when we look at Behe’s example of the blood clotting cascade, we can falsify it simply by looking at the first factual claim. Is the blood clotting cascade irreducibly complex? The answer is no. There are animals who lack one of the components of the system, yet their blood clots just fine. Dolphins, for example, lack Hageman factor (or Factor 12). By Behe’s definition of irreducible complexity, this should be impossible. The fact that it’s not shows that this is not, in fact, an irreducibly complex system.

Likewise on the bacterial flagellum, Behe’s favorite example of irreducible complexity, the fact that one subset of the system works well for another function shows that the second factual claim in Behe’s argument is not necessarily true. We have lots of examples in molecular biology of components for one system being adapted or co-opted for use in a different system. Even Behe would admit as much. Lots of examples, for instance, of a given gene duplication resulting in the production of two proteins, one of which is then coopted for a different function in a system it was not originally involved with inside the

organism. So when we see that the flagellum includes a subset that functions well in a different type of system, we can reasonably infer that perhaps it was coopted in exactly the same way. Add this to the fact that we in fact have multiple different types of flagella at work in the bacterial world, suggesting that rather than being irreducibly complex there are multiple different ways to get to the same result, and you have good reason to think that Behe's second example fails because the second factual claim may well not be true.

So Miller is in fact correct when he says that ID is not falsifiable, while specific arguments for ID have been falsified.

It's a fairly simple explanation of what is going wrong with your thinking. You rely on the same confusion that Ed was replying to on a habitual basis, so hopefully this will clear up your posts a bit in the future.

P.S. So help me God if you try to respond to Ed by discussing the "theory-ladeness" of facts or the oversimplification of his use of "fact" and "theory" I'm going to reach through my computer screen and punch you.

Comment #55116

Posted by Pete Dunkelberg on November 3, 2005 11:40 PM ([e](#))

I'm coming in late on this and haven't read every comment, but in reply to some of the earlier ones It must be said again that if you start with a bacterium with nothing like a flagellum and get something very much like flagella as we know them in just two or ten years, that isn't evolution. That's a miracle.

And those who want to teach ID must solve the problem of There is no ID (scientifically) to teach. There is nothing in it that can be put in a science lesson plan and not be promptly exposed as fake science. Why do you think the DI wants to change the definition of science, as if it were up to them?

Comment #55122

Posted by another observer on November 4, 2005 12:35 AM ([e](#))

How was "the comment about "no Bible in their set of data" ... especially telling"? What he meant by saying that was that the ID people were making an argument only from the very data that the anti-ID people were using, so that, in other words, the ID people were not using a Bible to make their case. It was his was of saying that ID is not in fact a religion, but you seem to have twisted it around to suggest that he was complaining that the Bible is being ignored.

Comment #55124

Posted by Ellery on November 4, 2005 12:44 AM ([e](#))

I am glad to see PandasThumb friends are here in Boston. Thanks to Doran (Matthew), Theonomo, for enlargements/corrections to my post. Thanks to Christopher Letzelter for kind remarks—but surely "demoninational" is the right word—religion has always imagined demons, and faith-denominations warn us against them, according to some text-belief.

Applause to Morbius; your description of Dalton's understanding of atoms is first class. I think you will enjoy this website: <http://www.re-discovery.org/>

Thanks to the Mods—Chris Reed and Dave Thomas—giving me ‘guest contributor’ status. The PandasThumb community are great for informed comment on science and society and concern for ‘separation of church and state’ values.

Comment #55125

Posted by K.E. on November 4, 2005 12:50 AM ([e](#))

Thats a new one.. another observer
ID is not a religion AND as we all know, not a sciece.
Gee what is it then ?
[insert any Fundamentalist] apologetics ?

I'm confused.

Comment #55129

Posted by another observer on November 4, 2005 1:52 AM ([e](#))

K.E., you *are* confused, indeed. My point is not whether ID is a science or a religion or whatever (surely there are other possibilities, though). My point is that the original poster reporting on the debate did not understand the debator's point when he said “there is no bible in their data”.

Comment #55136

Posted by [Doran](#) on November 4, 2005 3:41 AM ([e](#))

As a clarification on my “exposure” comment during the Audience commentary time. First see my blog for a short entry on it. The longer question which I had posed to Bill Dembski in the afore-mentioned email was, that since the DI does not advocate officially teaching Intelligent Design in science classrooms, what did he wish to accomplish in a session titled, “Should public schools teach Intelligent Design along with Evolution?” The one word answer was a bit galling in its lack of etiquette, but also in its obvious message. He knows that regardless of whether he does well or poorly, makes a sensible case or absolutely bombs, merely showing up is a WIN. This is why scientists boycotted the Kansas hearings and why so many professionals are frustrated that ten minutes of creationist garbage would sometimes take hours of explanation to properly untangled for a lay audience.

I could not help but imagine Intelligent Design and its associated attitudes towards science as a virus, that is fatal, not physically but intellectually. ID proponents like Dembski are the carriers, spreading the infection to any they come across, and those with weaker “immune systems” succumb to the disease. There are two things one should do to overcome this virus, isolate it and inoculate the population against it. The first is to continue the boycotting of these “debates” (I have learned my lesson) and the second consists of improving science education in this country so that students have the tool set to see through this garbage for what it is.

GO STROS!

Oh and does anyone have an recommendations for a graduating senior whose interested in this area of pro-science activism?

Comment #55138

Posted by ellery on November 4, 2005 3:51 AM ([e](#))

to 'another observer'

Not so. Sisson was very clear that his world outlook requires a "book" where everything is black and white. He clearly desired the Bible. But he is ignorant of its internal contradictions. Science is very democratic, in the sense that any good evidence or idea can be evaluated on its merits.

Supernatural "authority" is merely one claim to truth, and historically not much reliable.

There are so many claims to know the "one true god". In choosing between 1000 or more organized faith beliefs, there is less than 1 chance in 1000 that I could get it right. Priests obviously have their own agendas.

No writer in biblical times had the slightest clue about geology or sex, and the claim that they knew about "morality" 2000 years ago is absurd on its face. Sisson would tell us that some book written 2000 years ago contains all the truth of human relationships, geopolitical relations, science, disease, life and death, and priests/pastors are our best guide in our lives. It is noteworthy that among the thousands of priests supported by the believers, not a one has made any worthwhile contribution to medicine or tax law or science/world understanding or morality. Sisson is not only ignorant about biology, but dangerously stupid about heresy and "morality".

His passing acquaintance with truth seems rather accidental.

Comment #55139

Posted by Registered User on November 4, 2005 3:53 AM ([e](#))

P.S. So help me God if you try to respond to Ed by discussing the "theory-ladeness" of facts or the oversimplification of his use of "fact" and "theory" I'm going to reach through my computer screen and punch you.

How about if we get Lenny's pizza delivery boy to simply drop a flaming bag of doggy doo-doo on Heddle's front porch?

Comment #55142

Posted by ellery on November 4, 2005 4:01 AM ([e](#))

to Doran

does anyone have any recommendations for a graduating senior who's interested in this area of pro-science activism?>>

I have a number of connections and suggestions. Email me via the moderators to connect.

Comment #55145

Posted by morbius on November 4, 2005 5:31 AM ([e](#))

How was "the comment about "no Bible in their set of data" ... especially telling"? What he meant by saying that was that the ID people were making an argument only from the very data that the anti-ID people were using, so that, in other words, the ID people

were not using a Bible to make their case.

Uh, no, unless you think “evolutionist” is another term for “the ID people”. He was complaining that the ToE doesn’t take the Bible into account.

Comment #55151

Posted by [David Heddle](#) on November 4, 2005 6:58 AM (e)

Osmo

I more-or-less agree with Ed, but he gives only one example of what I was talking about. If you view ID as: “a designer did it!” then it can never be falsified. If you view ID as: “this fact is evidence of a designer” then that is open to falsification. If you demonstrate how a flagellum evolved, then you have indeed falsified the claim that its mere existence is evidence for design.

As for punching me through the screen: bring it on, dough-boy!

Ellery,

I thought your post, in terms of writing, was fairly awful. You said things like “[Dembski] started out quote-mining” while providing no evidence. And while admitting you didn’t hear him clearly, you nevertheless assert, regarding his plastic surgery comment, “Surely this was a dig against women.”

All this I excused, however, assuming that you merely posted your notes that you took on the fly.

But I can see from your comments that you are just not a particularly clear thinker.

You wrote, in #55138:

[A]nd the claim that they [writers in biblical times] knew about “morality” 2000 years ago is absurd on its face.

Why is it absurd? I bet that among the most diehard atheists in here, there are some (I hear it all the time, actually) who say: Jesus’ moral teachings (which they know from biblical writers, even as they deny the deity of Jesus or the sacredness of the text) are good teachings, and worthy to emulate. Are you saying that these atheists are following an absurd model?

You wrote:

It is noteworthy that among the thousands of priests supported by the believers, not a one has made any worthwhile contribution to medicine or tax law or science/world understanding or morality.

You should know better that to make absolute statements that need only one counter example to refute, e.g., [Georges Lemaître](#)

Morbius:

In comment #55063 you bothered to tell everyone the obvious: that Hawking is not an IDer. You pulled my quote from comment #55060 and essentially accused me of quote mining.

Hats off to you, Morbius, for you have elevated quote-mining to a new level. You quote mined my post, which was *about* quote mining, took a quote that I provided as an *example* of quote mining, then commented as if I had used the quote to make an entirely different point. Kudos!

Comment #55155

Posted by morbius on November 4, 2005 7:55 AM ([e](#))

you bothered to tell everyone the obvious: that Hawking is not an IDer.

You are apparently a cretin. What I said was, in effect, that the quote that you offered as suggesting that Hawking is an IDer does no such thing; it was not about Hawking, it was about the implication of the quote.

Comment #55159

Posted by 'Rev Dr' Lenny Flank on November 4, 2005 8:16 AM ([e](#))

Hey Haddle, are you going to answer my question, or aren't you:

Why is your religious opinion any more authoritative than anyone else's? Why should anyone pay any more attention to your religious opinions than they should to mine, my next door neighbor's, my car mechanic's, my veterinarian's, or the kid who delivers my pizzas?

Please be as specific as possible.

Comment #55172

Posted by Bayesian Bouffant, FCD on November 4, 2005 9:45 AM ([e](#))

Any reasonable person who read my comments would see that I was referring to that fact that at times evolution appears to be all-accomodating.

Is that a "fact"? Maybe if you redefine "fact" in the way that Behe would redefine "science" and "theory", so that anything could be a "fact" regardless of its truth or merit.

Any reasonable and educated person would see that evolution in fact is able to accomodate everything that has been observed, and has already passed numerous tests; i.e. there are numerous things evolution could not reasonably accomodate which in fact have not been observed. To ask now for a falsification test is [to ignore several centuries of accumulated evidence](#) and to ask for an artificially clear playing field.

As for the fossil rabbit business, I can only presume that you consider the odds of success to be low. This despite the facts that

Rabbit and rabbit ancestors fossils have been found

PreCambrian sedimentary deposits exist

PreCambrian sedimentary deposits contain fossils

Since you have already admitted that you are trolling (#54985), I will waste no more time

on you.

Comment #55187

Posted by qetzal on November 4, 2005 11:19 AM (e)

Ellery Schempp wrote:

I was disappointed that the pro-evo side did not make a strong case for what evolution does explain, and beautifully.

With due respect to Dr. Schempp, I think this misses the mark. The more important distinction between evolution and ID is predictive power. That is, utility.

ID can clearly explain even more than evolution, simply by saying “That’s how the Designer wanted it.” The reason we as scientists aren’t satisfied with such answers is they don’t allow us to make any useful predictions.

We value the theory of evolution, and science in general, because it allows us to predict future observations. It’s *useful*. That’s why evolutionary explanations are beautiful. I believe this deserved much more emphasis in the Boston debate.

You won’t score points with a lay audience by saying that ID = creationism = religion. That’s a critical point to make in a courtroom when arguing why ID *can’t* be taught in public schools: it violates the 1st Amendment. But that won’t convince an American lay audience that ID *shouldn’t* be taught in public schools. The unfortunate truth is that a large segment of Americans think it should be (or even is) constitutional to include Christianity in public schools.

It’s also not enough to simply argue that ID isn’t science. That invites charges of elitism, a la Sisson. Many Americans are very distrustful of academic “elites” trying to tell them what is and isn’t right. Also, many Americans don’t really understand what science is. If you tell them that evolution is science and ID isn’t, they won’t understand why, and won’t necessarily believe you.

Yet most Americans have a very positive view of science in general. I believe that’s because they see that science is useful. They know that science leads to new medicines and new technologies that make life better.

I think that’s the key to convincing lay audiences why ID *shouldn’t* be taught in public science classes. They need to understand that the theory of evolution, like any other science, is valued because it explains things in a way that allows us to predict the world around us. It allows us to understand how bacteria become resistant to antibiotics, and predict ways to prevent that. It allows us to understand the DNA of different organisms, and predict how it will be similar or different in any given situation. It allows us to understand how new diseases arise, and predict how they can be controlled.

In contrast, ID makes few if any predictions. What’s more, in the rare cases where ID has (arguably) made predictions, they’ve been proven wrong.

Thus, the reason ID shouldn’t be taught in public school science classes is that it hasn’t proven its utility. It hasn’t shown that it can make useful predictions about the world around us. It’s not about fairness or balance or what’s right in some absolute sense. It’s about usefulness. Some will argue that evolution is a deeply flawed theory, but the fact remains that it’s made many, many useful predictions that have proved true, and it continues to do so. Until ID (or any other theory) can say the same, it shouldn’t be taught in public school.

Of course, virtually all biologists agree that ID will never be able to do so, but that's not even worth arguing in such a debate. If the goal is to persuade the audience, they need to see that ID isn't being excluded arbitrarily. ID could (hypothetically) earn a place in public science classes. It just needs to show that it's useful by making correct scientific predictions.

I think this approach would work well with American lay audiences because it aligns evolution with what they value about science in general, and shows that ID doesn't measure up to that. It also appeals to the American sense of fair play, by showing that there's a clear and reasonable criterion for being taught in science class, and that ID has a (hypothetical) chance to be included if it "plays fair" and earns that right.

Of course, this will certainly not convince everyone. One could reasonably argue that most audience members wouldn't be persuaded no matter what they heard. In that case, there's either no reason to debate, or the people in the auditorium aren't the true target audience.

Comment #55207

Posted by qetzal on November 4, 2005 1:24 PM ([e](#))

David Heddle wrote:

qetzal,

You are quote mining.

[snip]

Any reasonable person who read my comments would see that I was referring to that fact that at times evolution appears to be all-accomodating.

Very well, let's look at the complete passage in question:

David Heddle, in #54940 wrote:

Evolution is not immune to a similar criticism: "regardless of what happens, it is impossible to rule out evolution." My favorite example is Mars. We see water and methane. Assume abiogenesis has occurred. Evolution, being a science that can make predictions, should have something to say about what Martian life might be like, but as far as I know it is silent. Will it be single celled? Multicelled? As complex as insects? Silence. In other words, it can accommodate all eventualities.

Does this say that evolution appears to be all-accommodating *at times*? No. It says evolution is susceptible to the criticism that "*regardless of what happens*" it cannot be ruled out. Mars is cited as an example, not a qualifier.

If you really meant that evolution is all-accommodating *at times*, that's what you should have said. It's true, of course, but it's also trivial and uninformative. It's also not "similar" to Bagaaaz's criticism of ID in any substantive sense.

Any reasonable person who was repeatedly challenged on the evident meaning of their comment (e.g. #54944, 54945, 54947, 54967) would have responded by clarifying their true meaning. A troll would respond by arguing over a point he neither meant nor believed. A quick glance at your response (#54972) is adequate to categorize you.

Comment #55209

Posted by Osmo on November 4, 2005 1:51 PM ([e](#))

David Heddle -

Ok, so let's examine this in a little bit more detail. ID as an explanatory theory is unfalsifiable. It's simply untestable. However, IDists make arguments where they say "science lacks a satisfactory account of X;... therefore ID"

Most scientists/philosophers will respond to that by pointing out that the ID explanation is not meaningfully testable/falsifiable. Then here comes fellows like your self who say, "ID is too testable." Well, you're wrong, but in a subtle way.

ID qua the theory is untestable, which is why those people are asserting. ID as a shorthand label for the entirety of an IDist argument might be falsifiable. In this case, by showing there is a satisfactory account of X in terms of natural processes would show their argument wrong. It isn't ID as theory that's been falsified, it's the premise in the argument leading to its invocation that has been shown wrong.

So when someone says "ID is unfalsifiable" here, you would do well to understand what they are referring to, and not miss the point by showing that specific kinds of ID arguments rest on premises that are theoretically falsifiable. They're asserting that the ID explanation in an ID argument - the supposed theory - is unfalsifiable. They're correct, as far as that goes.

Comment #55217

Posted by another observer on November 4, 2005 2:47 PM ([e](#))

In reply to my point about what Sisson meant by saying "there is no Bible in their data", ellery wrote:

"Not so. Sisson was very clear that his world outlook requires a "book" where everything is black and white. He clearly desired the Bible. But he is ignorant of its internal contradictions. Science is very democratic, in the sense that any good evidence or idea can be evaluated on its merits."

And morbius wrote:

"Uh, no, unless you think "evolutionist" is another term for "the ID people". He was complaining that the ToE doesn't take the Bible into account."

They are both quite mistaken. Here is the full context, at 1 hour 55 minutes, of that remark by Sisson:

"ID can be taught and should be taught as a logical inference on the agreed set of data that the other side brings forth. There is no Bible in their set of data. You dont need it."

"And if you are constructing the argument from entirely from the data that they acknowledge is appropriate for the discussion of origins, then you ensure that the religious hypothesis... is not presented"

Comment #55234

Posted by Randy on November 4, 2005 4:25 PM ([e](#))

ellery wrote:

It is noteworthy that among the thousands of priests supported by the believers, not a one has made any worthwhile contribution to medicine…

Whoa! That's a mighty broad brush! How about this guy: [Fr. Kevin T. Fitzgerald](#)? The brother of a former co-worker and an incredible person. Two doctorates, one in molecular genetics, and now teaches at Georgetown. Think he buys into the ID baloney? Of course, he is a Jesuit…

Apologize for going afield but a portion of the debate is fueled by intemperate statements.

Comment #55236

Posted by Randy on November 4, 2005 4:36 PM ([e](#))

Oh yeah, and there was this Augustinian monk named Gregor Mendel…

Comment #55245

Posted by guthrie on November 4, 2005 5:40 PM ([e](#))

Much as I do think the statement about priests was a little intemperate, I think that judging by the context, his point was that these priests have not made discoveries or done useful work based upon the Bible or any received religious truth. They may have been religiously inspired to examine the world, to understand God's handiwork better, but they didn't look inside the Bible to find out how different genes were passed on.

Comment #55308

Posted by John on November 5, 2005 4:43 AM ([e](#))

OK, I think that I need a point cleared up.

According to [Dr. Ellory](#), Mr Sisson said:

but the evolutionists have “no Bible in their set of data [sic]”

According to [another observer](#), he said:

ID can be taught and should be taught as a logical inference on the agreed set of data that the other side brings forth. There is no Bible in their set of data. You don't need it.

Which is actually right? Is there an official transcript anywhere that I could check?

Comment #55335

Posted by theonomo on November 5, 2005 10:53 AM ([e](#))

The second quote, given by “another observer” is correct.

Comment #55339

Posted by K.E. on November 5, 2005 11:10 AM ([e](#))

Mr Sisson said

But the evolutionists have “no Bible in their set of data [sic]”

ID can be taught and should be taught as a logical inference on the agreed set of data that the other side brings forth. There is no Bible in their set of data. You dont need it.

I don't think it matters who said what here it personifies the ID argument.

2 points.

1. WTF is an evolutionist ?

He means of course Atheists. What about all the Scientists who see all of nature including evolution as evidence for God's existence and presumably any creative activity of man as “God's work and what she finds as Gods Revelation”? Is it a basic lack of science knowledge by this lawyer? No wonder there is so many Lawyer jokes and vice versa.

2. A simple test of this bit of “glib” is to take out the bible and ask what other supernatural/unreal explanation is there? Behe's ace spaliens ? Dembski's numerology? Heddles contrarian rabbit hopping in and out of holes of convenience? Science Fiction? The infinite dreams of the Hindu gods? (A great story if you want look it up) or a cold hard nothing?

ID requires the Bible or ID would not exist

Anyone who even hints that is not the case are Born Again Fundamentalist Liars

Comment #55362

Posted by another observer on November 5, 2005 2:56 PM ([e](#))

John, can you say why you need this point about what Sisson said cleared up?

Comment #55368

Posted by Tevildo on November 5, 2005 4:36 PM ([e](#))

ID requires the Bible or ID would not exist

I see your point, but remember that Wells is a Moonie rather than a Christian. “ID requires theism” would be better, but less rhetorically effective.

Comment #55371

Posted by 'Rev Dr' Lenny Flank on November 5, 2005 5:23 PM ([e](#))

I see your point, but remember that Wells is a Moonie rather than a Christian.

Moon considers himself a Christian.

Indeed, since he claims to be the Son of God and the younger brother of Christ, he claims to be the ONLY true Christian.

Comment #55375

Posted by Arden Chatfield on November 5, 2005 6:23 PM [\(e\)](#)

Thats a new one.. another observer
ID is not a religion AND as we all know, not a science.
Gee what is it then ?
[insert any Fundamentalist] apologetics ?

I' m confused.

“Sociopolitical agenda”?

Comment #55506

Posted by evopeach on November 7, 2005 10:50 AM [\(e\)](#)

I have been reading, studying and listening to the evolutionist claims and agruments for three decades and have yet to hear a single, clearly stated and defensible definition of the genreal theory that meets the criteria of your own definition of science.

1) Experimentally demonstrable and repeatable by multiple scientists.

Note the general theory will include common decent, speciation, abiogenesis, first replicator from amino acids.

When these criteria are satisfied and the demonstration of these few basic necessities are satisfied and published in a few peer reviewd journals be sure to let me know.

Until then I will as always consider your position purely mythological and driven by deep philosophical committments to naturalism and the desire to keep the money flowing into your pockets.

Evopeach

Comment #55507

Posted by Rilke's Granddaughter on November 7, 2005 11:17 AM [\(e\)](#)

I have been reading, studying and listening to the evolutionist claims and agruments for three decades and have yet to hear a single, clearly stated and defensible definition of the genreal theory that meets the criteria of your own definition of science.

Clearly then, you haven't been reading anything other than creationist propaganda.

- 1) Experimentally demonstrable and repeatable by multiple scientists.

In its simplest form, the ToE explains the current biodiversity of the planet via variant replication and morphological selection. That biodiversity produced in such a fashion should produce observable results, such as a close correspondence between genotypic and morphological trees; time-wise fossil variations consonant with both the development and elimination of species.

Variant replication? Demonstrated by thousands of experiments. Consult PubMed, for example.

Morphological selection? Demonstrated by thousands of experiments. Consult PubMed, for example.

Correspondence between genotypic and morphological trees? Demonstrated by thousands of experiments. Consult PubMed.

Time-wise fossil variations? Demonstrated by thousands of researchers and paleontologists.

Case closed.

Note the general theory will include common decent, speciation, abiogenesis, first replicator from amino acids.

The Theory of Evolution does not address abiogenesis, nor is there any necessity for the first replication to be developed from amino acids. You are misinformed (which confirms my suspicion that your years of research haven't included any actual science.)

When these criteria are satisfied and the demonstration of these few basic necessities are satisfied and published in a few peer reviewed journals be sure to let me know.

Consider yourself informed.

Until then I will as always consider your position purely mythological and driven by deep philosophical commitments to naturalism and the desire to keep the money flowing into your pockets.

If you think the sciences pay well, then you're a fool as well as scientifically illiterate. But you are entitled to continue to stick your fingers in your ears and scream "no, no, no" as long as you like.

No one is going to pay the slightest bit of attention.

Comment #55508

Posted by Flint on November 7, 2005 11:32 AM ([e](#))

No one is going to pay the slightest bit of attention.

Well, YOU paid attention, at least enough to provide some actual evidence (which, as you understand perfectly well, disqualifies your response, which will be ignored).

And as the Bush administration's budgeting decisions illustrate, someone IS paying attention to anti-science fanatics. Pretty damn sobering to have to seriously question whether the United States will ever again be able to catch up to South Korea (!) scientifically, should the day ever come when we elect a non-idiot.

Comment #55511

Posted by Rilke's Granddaughter on November 7, 2005 12:32 PM ([e](#))

Syntax Error: mismatched tag 'quote'

Comment #55512

Posted by Rilke's Granddaughter on November 7, 2005 12:35 PM ([e](#))

Flint wrote:

Well, YOU paid attention, at least enough to provide some actual evidence (which, as you understand perfectly well, disqualifies your response, which will be ignored).

My bad. Can I claim I was actually speaking to the lurkers? Not that most of the folks who read PT are likely to be confused by evopeach's ignorance, but still….

Flint wrote:

And as the Bush administration's budgeting decisions illustrate, someone IS paying attention to anti-science fanatics. Pretty damn sobering to have to seriously question whether the United States will ever again be able to catch up to South Korea (!) scientifically, should the day ever come when we elect a non-idiot.

It's one of the reasons I'm not in favor of democracies; they guarantee that the country is run by the mediocre - or the popular (which is usually the same thing). Much better are monarchies, where chance alone occasionally throws up a decent ruler.

Comment #55524

Posted by Flint on November 7, 2005 2:09 PM ([e](#))

RGD:

Depends on whether you consider mediocre to be superior or inferior to corrupt. We can have some reasonable hope that steps will be taken in only three years to correct some of the admittedly considerable damage that has been done. If Bush were a bad king, though, a little history shows this has long term problems - he would live only until someone a bit

more vicious replaced him in a hostile takeover. And so on ad infinitum. And that same history shows that often enough GOOD kings are even more vulnerable, since they alienate the vested interests with the most influence (read: guns).

On the other hand, it's entirely possible (and has happened numerous times) that someone popular might also be capable and intelligent. That's part of being elected by the mediocre (that's us): we elect capable people by mistake because we ARE pretty dumb. And when we do, the capable people have much less need to watch their backs while scratching the backs of others.

Comment #55615

Posted by 'Rev Dr' Lenny Flank on November 7, 2005 7:30 PM (e)

Nobody cares what you think, Evopeach. (shrug)

Comment #55626

Posted by morbius on November 7, 2005 7:57 PM (e)

I don't think it matters who said what here it personifies the ID argument.

Well, actually, it matters quite a bit whether what Dr. Schemmp said Sisson said is what he really said, or the opposite. Much to my chagrin, I ass-u-me-d that Dr. Schemmp's report was accurate. No doubt there are IDiots who make such arguments, but we shouldn't follow their tactics and misquote or misrepresent people.

2 points.

1. WTF is an evolutionist ?
He means of course Atheists.

Apparently, "evolutionist" is *Dr. Schemmp's* term, when Sisson actually referred to proponents of ID. And many people on both sides refer to proponents of the ToE as "evolutionists". You are making unwarranted inferences from something that someone didn't even say, after declaring that it doesn't matter whether he did or not. That sort of thing doesn't help our side.

2. A simple test of this bit of "glib" is to take out the bible and ask what other supernatural/unreal explanation is there?

Indeed there is no other explanation, or at least none is offered. But beyond that, Sisson's statement is false on several levels; you can't even infer that the ToE fails as an explanation, let alone go so much further and infer "intelligence" or "design" – not without committing a host of fallacies.

Comment #55628

Posted by morbius on November 7, 2005 8:05 PM (e)

Oops – s/Schemmp/Schempp/g

Comment #55708

Posted by another observer on November 8, 2005 1:46 AM ([e](#))

morbius wrote:

Well, actually, it matters quite a bit whether what Dr. Schemmp said Sisson said is what he really said, or the opposite. Much to my chagrin, I ass-u-me-d that Dr. Schemmp's report was accurate.

Schempp's report was accurate in that he got the words of the quote correct, but he completely misunderstood (or at least misrepresented) what Sisson was actually saying (and quite clearly saying) when he uttered those words, as I demonstrated by providing the full context.

morbius wrote:

Apparently, "evolutionist" is Dr. Schemmp's term, when Sisson actually referred to proponents of ID. And many people on both sides refer to proponents of the ToE as "evolutionists". You are making unwarranted inferences from something that someone didn't even say, after declaring that it doesn't matter whether he did or not. That sort of thing doesn't help our side.

No kidding. This has been all along a totally egregious distortion of what Sisson was saying. And the term "evolutionist" was indeed Schemmps. I don't think Sisson used this term, but of course he was not referring to proponents of ID as you suggest. He was referring to "the other side" in the debate, the negative side, the side that advocated that ID not be taught in the schools alongside evolution. (Note that this is not all proponents of the ToE – some of them do want ID discussed). His point was that the affirmative side should be able to take only the data allowed in by the negative side, and make their point fully from that data alone.

It would be nice to see Schempp come forward to admit his misrepresentation of Sisson and explain how it happened.

Comment #55712

Posted by k.e. on November 8, 2005 2:05 AM ([e](#))

Sisson and all ID proponents regardless of which "side" of the they are on want the Bible in science classes pure and simple.

How hard is it understand that in this "game" you don't put fish in the Tour de France.

Comment #55723

Posted by [Salvador T. Cordova](#) on November 8, 2005 4:05 AM ([e](#))

Regarding one of the debate participants, James Trefil a physics professor at George Mason University, has made some interesting remarks in his book, *Are We Alone*:

If I were a religious man, I would say that everything we have

learned about life in the past twenty years shows that we are unique, and therefore special, in God's sight.

Trefil also had praise for one of the most mischievous IDists at his university. In an autographed copy of his book, *The Dark Side of the Universe* he wrote to his student:

To Salvador Cordova: It's been great having you in class.

Trefil wrote a chapter in that book, entitled, "Five Reasons Why Galaxies Can't Exist." (ah yes a lovely title for YEC evidences, though he is obviously not a YEC).

Trefil also mentions his friend, Dave Raup, a paleontologist in that book. Trefil wrote of Raup:

Dave has been described as the most brilliant paleontologist in the world, an evaluation that, after a period as his collaborator, I think is well deserved. . . . He loves to question things that everyone else accepts without question, a trait that I suspect has a lot to do with his success as a scientist

Raup, by the way, was at the now infamous Pajaro Dunes conference with Phil Johnson and the ID leadership.

Salvador

Comment #55725

Posted by morbius on November 8, 2005 4:18 AM (e)

In an autographed copy of his book, *The Dark Side of the Universe* he wrote to his student:

To Salvador Cordova: It's been great having you in class.

I have a tablet engraved by God that says

Salvador Cordova was my biggest mistake.

Comment #55744

Posted by 'Rev Dr' Lenny Flank on November 8, 2005 7:59 AM (e)

Hi Sal. Welcome back.

Hey Sal, the last dozen or so times you were here, you ran away without answering four simple questions I've asked of you. So I'll ask again. And again and again and again, every time you show up here, until you either answer or run away. I want every lurker who comes in here to see that you are nothing but an evasive dishonest coward.

(1) what is the scientific theory of creation (or intelligent design) and how can we test it using the scientific method?

I do *NOT* want you to respond with a long laundry list of (mostly inaccurate) criticisms of evolutionary biology. They are completely irrelevant to a scientific theory of creation or intelligent design. I want to see the scientific alternative that you are proposing—the one you want taught in public school science classes, the one that creationists and intelligent design “theorists” testified under oath in Arkansas, Louisiana, Kansas and elsewhere is SCIENCE and is NOT based on religious doctrine. Let’s assume for the purposes of this discussion that evolutionary biology is indeed absolutely completely totally irretrievable unalterably irrevocably 100% dead wrong. Fine. Show me your scientific alternative. Show me how your scientific theory explains things better than evolutionary biology does. Let’s see this superior “science” of yours.

Any testable scientific theory of creation should be able to provide answers to several questions: (1) how did life begin, (3) how did the current diversity of life appear, and (3) what mechanisms were used in these processes and where can we see these mechanisms today.

Any testable scientific theory of intelligent design should be able to give testable answers to other questions: (1) what exactly did the Intelligent Designer(s) do, (2) what mechanisms did the Designer(s) use to do whatever it is you think it did, (3) where can we see these mechanisms in action today, and (4) what objective criteria can we use to determine what entities are “intelligently designed” and what entities aren’t (please illustrate this by pointing to something that you think IS designed, something you think is NOT designed, and explain how to tell the difference).

If your, uh, “scientific theory” isn’t able to answer any of these questions yet, then please feel free to tell me how you propose to scientifically answer them. What experiments or tests can we perform, in principle, to answer these questions.

Also, since one of the criteria of “science” is falsifiability, I’d like you to tell me how your scientific theory, whatever it is, can be falsified. What experimental results or observations would conclusively prove that creation/intelligent design did not happen.

Another part of the scientific method is direct testing. One does not establish “B” simply by demonstrating that “A” did not happen. I want you to demonstrate “B” directly. So don’t give me any “there are only two choices, evolution or creation, and evolution is wrong so creation must be right” baloney. I will repeat that I do NOT want a big long laundry list of “why evolution is wrong”. I don’t care why evolution is wrong. I want to know what your alternative is, and how it explains data better than evolution does.

I’d also like to know two specific things about this “alternative scientific theory”: How old does “intelligent design/creationism theory” determine the universe to be. Is it millions of years old, or thousands of years old. And does ‘intelligent design/creationism theory’ determine that humans have descended from apelike primates, or does it determine that they have not.

I look forward to seeing your “scientific theories”. Unless of course you don’t HAVE any and are just lying to us when you claim to.

(2) According to this scientific theory of intelligent design, how old is the earth, and did humans descend from apelike primates or did they not?

(3)

What, precisely, about “evolution” is any more “materialistic” than, say, weather forecasting or accident investigation or medicine. Please be as specific as possible.

I have never, in all my life, ever heard any weather forecaster mention “god” or “divine will” or any “supernatural” anything, at all. Ever. Does this mean, in your view, that weather forecasting is atheistic (oops, I mean, “materialistic” and “naturalistic” — we don’t want any judges to think ID’s railing against “materialism” has any RELIGIOUS purpose, do we)?

I have yet, in all my 44 years of living, to ever hear any accident investigator declare solemnly at the scene of an airplane crash, “We can’t explain how it happened, so an Unknown Intelligent Being must have dunnit.” I have never yet heard an accident investigator say that “this crash has no materialistic causes — it must have been the Will of Allah”. Does this mean, in your view, that accident investigation is atheistic (oops, sorry, I meant to say “materialistic” and “naturalistic” — we don’t want any judges to know that it is “atheism” we are actually waging a religious crusade against, do we)?

How about medicine. When you get sick, do you ask your doctor to abandon his “materialistic biases” and to investigate possible “supernatural” or “non-materialistic” causes for your disease? Or do you ask your doctor to cure your naturalistic materialistic diseases by using naturalistic materialistic antibiotics to kill your naturalistic materialistic germs?

Since it seems to me as if weather forecasting, accident investigation, and medicine are every bit, in every sense, just as utterly completely totally absolutely one-thousand-percent “materialistic” as evolutionary biology is, why, specifically, is it just evolutionary biology that gets your panties all in a bunch? Why aren’t you and your fellow Wedge-ites out there fighting the good fight against godless materialistic naturalistic weather forecasting, or medicine, or accident investigation?

Or does that all come LATER, as part of, uh, “renewing our culture” . . . ?

(4) The most militant of the Ayatollah-wanna-be’s are the members of the “Reconstructionist” movement. The Reconstructionists were founded by Rouas J. Rushdoony, a militant fundamentalist who was instrumental in getting Henry Morris’s book *The Genesis Flood* published in 1961. According to Rushdoony’s view, the United States should be directly transformed into a theocracy in which the fundamentalists would rule directly according to the will of God. “There can be no separation of Church and State,” Rushdoony declares. (cited in Marty and Appleby 1991, p. 51) “Christians,” a Reconstructionist pamphlet declares, “are called upon by God to exercise dominion.” (cited in Marty and Appleby 1991, p. 50) The Reconstructionists propose doing away with the US Constitution and laws, and instead ruling directly according to the laws of God as set out in the Bible—they advocate a return to judicial punishment for religious crimes such as blasphemy or violating the Sabbath, as well as a return to such Biblically-approved punishments as stoning.

According to Rushdoony, the Second Coming of Christ can only happen after the “Godly” have taken over the earth and constructed the Kingdom of Heaven here: “The dominion that Adam first received and then lost by his Fall will be restored to redeemed Man. God’s People will then have a long reign over the entire earth, after which, when all enemies have been put under Christ’s feet, the end shall come.” (cited in Diamond, 1989, p. 139)

"Christian Reconstructionism," another pamphlet says, "is a call to the Church to awaken to its Biblical responsibility to subdue the earth for the glory of God ... Christian Reconstructionism therefore looks for and works for the rebuilding of the institutions of society according to a Biblical blueprint." (cited in Diamond 1989, p. 136) In the Reconstructionist view, evolution is one of the "enemies" which must be "put under Christ's feet" if the godly are to subdue the earth for the glory of God.

In effect, the Reconstructionists are the "Christian" equivalent of the Taliban.

While some members of both the fundamentalist and creationist movements view the Reconstructionists as somewhat kooky, many of them have had nice things to say about Rushdoony and his followers. ICR has had close ties with Reconstructionists. Rushdoony was one of the financial backers for Henry Morris's first book, "The Genesis Flood", and Morris's son John was a co-signer of several documents produced by the Coalition On Revival, a reconstructionist coalition founded in 1984. ICR star debater Duane Gish was a member of COR's Steering Committee, as was Richard Bliss, who served as ICR's "curriculum director" until his death. Gish and Bliss were both co-signers of the COR documents "A Manifesto for the Christian Church" (COR, July 1986), and the "Forty-Two Articles of the Essentials of a Christian Worldview" (COR, 1989), which declares, "We affirm that the laws of man must be based upon the laws of God. We deny that the laws of man have any inherent authority of their own or that their ultimate authority is rightly derived from or created by man." ("Forty-Two Essentials, 1989, p. 8). P>The Discovery Institute, the chief cheerleader for "intelligent design theory", is particularly cozy with the Reconstructionists. The single biggest source of money for the Discovery Institute is Howard Ahmanson, a California savings-and-loan bigwig. Ahmanson's gift of \$1.5 million was the original seed money to organize the Center for Renewal of Science and Culture, the arm of the Discovery Institute which focuses on promoting "intelligent design theory" (other branches of Discovery Institute are focused on areas like urban transportation, Social Security "reform", and (anti) environmentalist organizing).

Ahmanson is a Christian Reconstructionist who was long associated with Rushdooney, and who sat with him on the board of directors of the Chalcedon Foundation – a major Reconstructionist think-tank – for over 20 years, and donated over \$700,000 to the Reconstructionists. Just as Rushdooney was a prime moving force behind Morris's first book, "The Genesis Flood", intelligent design "theorist" Phillip Johnson dedicated his book "Defeating Darwinism" to "Howard and Roberta" – Ahmanson and his wife. Ahmanson was quoted in newspaper accounts as saying, "My purpose is total integration of Biblical law into our lives."

Ahmanson has given several million dollars over the past few years to anti-evolution groups (including Discovery Institute), as well as anti-gay groups, "Christian" political candidates, and funding efforts to split the Episcopalian Church over its willingness to ordain gay ministers and to other groups which oppose the minimum wage. He was also a major funder of the recent "recall" effort in California which led to the election of Terminator Arnie. Ahmanson is also a major funder of the effort for computerized voting, and he and several other prominent Reconstructionists have close ties with Diebold, the company that manufactures the computerized voting machines used. There has been some criticism of Diebold because it refuses to make the source code of its voting machine software available for scrutiny, and its software does not allow anyone to track voting after it is done (no way to confirm accuracy of the machine).

Some of Ahmanson's donations are channeled through the Fieldstead Foundation, which is a subspecies of the Ahmanson foundation ("Fieldstead" is Ahmanson's middle name). The Fieldstead Foundation funds many of the travelling and speaking expenses of the DI's shining stars.

Ahmanson's gift of \$1.5 million was the original seed money to organize the Center for Science and Culture, the arm of the Discovery Institute which focuses on promoting

“intelligent design theory”. By his own reckoning, Ahmanson gives more of his money to the DI than to any other politically active group – only a museum trust in his wife’s hometown in Iowa and a Bible college in New Jersey get more. In 2004, he reportedly gave the Center another \$2.8 million. Howard Ahmanson, Jr sits on the Board Directors of Discovery Institute.

Since then, as his views have become more widely known, Ahmanson has tried to backpeddle and present a kinder, gentler image of himself. However, his views are still so extremist that politicians have returned campaign contributions from Ahmanson once they learned who he was.

So it’s no wonder that the Discovery Institute is reluctant to talk about the funding source for its Intelligent Design campaign. Apparently, they are not very anxious to have the public know that most of its money comes from just one whacko billionaire who has long advocated a political program that is very similar to that of the Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran.

Do you repudiate the extremist views of the primary funder of the Center for (the Renewal of) Science and Culture, Howard Ahmanson, and if so, why do you keep taking his money anyway? And if you, unlike most other IDers, are not sucking at Ahmanson’s teats, I’d still like to know if you repudiate his extremist views.

Oh, and your latest round of blithering about “anti-God” and “anti-religion” prompts yet another question, Sal (whcih, of course, you also will not answer).

(5) Sal, you must KNOW that your ID heroes are in court right now trying to argue that creationism/ID is SCIENCE and has NO RELIGIOUS PURPOSE OR AIM. You must KNOW that if the courts rule that creationism/ID is NOT science and IS nothing but religious doctrine, then your ID crap will never see the inside of a science classroom. So you must KNOW that every time you blither to us that creationism/ID is all about God and faith and the Bible and all that, you are UNDERMINING YOUR OWN HEROES by demonstrating, right here in public, that your heroes are just lying under oath when they claim that creationism/ID has NO religious purpose or aims.

So why the heck do you do it ANYWAY? Why the heck are you in here yammering about religion when your own leaders are trying so desperately to argue that ID/creationism is NOT about religion? Are you really THAT stupid? Really and truly?

Why are you in here arguing that ID/creationism is all about God and the Bible, while Discovery Institute and other creationists are currently in Kansas and Dover arguing that ID/creationism is NOT all about God and the Bible?

Why are you **undercutting your own side**?????????

I really truly want to know.

Comment #55752

Posted by k.e. on November 8, 2005 9:33 AM ([e](#))

Sal

“the only man in the universe who makes more sense than *The Hunting of the Snark*”

When you have finished with Lenny’s questions I would like to know if Dave Raup would approve of you doing the same for him that you did for Dembski ?

Do you know trafficking in delusion is a moral crime?

Finally a wise man once said:

*A hundred hearings cannot surpass one seeing,
But after you see the teacher, that one glance cannot surpass a hundred hearings*

Comment #55774

Posted by [Salvador T. Cordova](#) on November 8, 2005 11:54 AM (e)

Lenny complains:

Hey Sal, the last dozen or so times you were here, you ran away without answering four simple questions I've asked of you.

Hiya Lenny!

It's true I don't answer your questions. So let me not answer your questions again to your dissatisfaction again. I invite you to repeat them each time I visit and post and thereby spam up PT beyond recognition. How does that sound?

Lenny wrote:

The single biggest source of money for the Discovery Institute is Howard Ahmanson, a California savings-and-loan bigwig. Ahmanson's gift of \$1.5 million was the original seed money to organize the Center for Renewal of Science and Culture,

Howie's a swell guy. I had lunch with him, Rick Santorum, Tom Petri at [Discovery Day](#). Those names should sound familiar, they were mentioned in *Creationism's Trojan Horse*.

Sal

Comment #55776

Posted by Rilke's Granddaughter on November 8, 2005 12:00 PM (e)

Lenny, you must remember that Sal is here to gratify his ego, and for no other reason. To expect anything from him other than grandstanding is like expecting cleanliness from a slug.

Comment #55777

Posted by Rilke's Granddaughter on November 8, 2005 12:03 PM (e)

Syntax Error: mismatched tag 'quote'

Comment #55782

Posted by roger tang on November 8, 2005 12:38 PM (e)

It's true I don't answer your questions. So let me not answer your questions again to your dissatisfaction again. I invite you to repeat them each time I visit and post and thereby spam up PT beyond recognition. How does that sound?

Typical of someone who's unable to defend their position and knows it.

Comment #55791

Posted by Anton Mates on November 8, 2005 2:04 PM (e)

A simple test of this bit of "glib" is to take out the bible and ask what other supernatural/unreal explanation is there? Behe's ace spaliens? Dembski's numerology? Heddles contrarian rabbit hopping in and out of holes of convenience? Science Fiction? The infinite dreams of the Hindu gods? (A great story if you want look it up) or a cold hard nothing?

Those are all potential supernatural/unreal explanations, though. If you're going to object to ID on scientific grounds, you needn't target the Bible—any other supernatural explanation is probably held by some IDer somewhere, and is equally useless.

And incidentally, it's possible to invoke the "aliens" option and have it be halfway scientific, provided you make some actual testable claims about said aliens. Not saying anyone ever *does*, but you could.

(If you're going to object to the ID *movement* on social/political/religious/legal grounds, of course, it's perfectly legit to observe that most of their support comes from conservative Christians.)

Lenny, you must remember that Sal is here to gratify his ego, and for no other reason. To expect anything from him other than grandstanding is like expecting cleanliness from a slug.

Unfair! Slugs are basically self-washing!

Comment #55793

Posted by jeffw on November 8, 2005 2:13 PM (e)

Hiya Lenny!

It's true I don't answer your questions. So let me not answer your questions again to your dissatisfaction again. I invite you to repeat them each time I visit and post and thereby spam up PT beyond recognition. How does that sound?

It sounds great! We need to make newbies aware of charletons, scumbags, and wipers of other people's bottoms (like you). And reminding the regulars doesn't hurt either. At least Lenny is actually doing something useful. You on the other hand, appear to have no "purpose" (you like that word, don't ya?), other than fellating bill. And you do it *so* well! I'm sure he's very pleased!

Comment #55834

Posted by [Engineer-Poet, FCD, ΔΠΓ](#) on November 8, 2005 6:59 PM (e)

Hey, Salvador, as long as you're ignoring other people, let me get in line. After all, the questions I asked you [back in May](#) are still unanswered. Here, I'll give them to you again:

Salvador T. Cordova wrote:

The convergence was placed there to confound naturalistic interpretations.

In other words, Salvador, you are claiming that the designer designs to deceive?

That the designer is a liar?

I just want that clarified. Yes or no will do.

Comment #55869

Posted by 'Rev Dr' Lenny Flank on November 8, 2005 8:09 PM (e)

Syntax Error: mismatched tag 'kwickxml'

Comment #55872

Posted by 'Rev Dr' Lenny Flank on November 8, 2005 8:11 PM (e)

It's true I don't answer your questions. So let me not answer your questions again to your dissatisfaction again. I invite you to repeat them each time I visit and post and thereby spam up PT beyond recognition. How does that sound?

Let me repeat myself, since Sal was apparently too stupid to catch it the first dozen times:

Hey Sal, the last dozen or so times you were here, you ran away without answering four simple questions I've asked of you. So I'll ask again. And again and again and again and again, every time you show up here, until you either answer or run away. I want every lurker who comes in here to see that you are nothing but an evasive dishonest coward.

Comment #55876

Posted by 'Rev Dr' Lenny Flank on November 8, 2005 8:15 PM (e)

Lenny, you must remember that Sal is here to gratify his ego, and for no other reason. To expect anything from him other than grandstanding is like expecting cleanliness from a slug.

Oh, I know. As I've said before, my questions make their point whether Sal (or Nelson, or

Piipo, or Dembski, or ...) answers them or not.

I don't expect his cooperation. But then, I don't *need* it. (shrug)

Comment #55917

Posted by [Engineer-Poet, FCD, ΔΠΓ](#) on November 8, 2005 9:50 PM ([e](#))

Running away only shows his double bankruptcy: intellectual and theological.

This is now on record, for anyone to find. The more believers find it, and find out what they have been supporting, the more will turn away from the liars, from ID, and from fundamentalism.

Comment #56432

Posted by Brian Spitzer on November 10, 2005 11:43 PM ([e](#))

Until then I will as always consider your position purely mythological and driven by... the desire to keep the money flowing into your pockets.

Evopeach

I knew there was some reason why I'm at work at 10:45pm revising tomorrow's lecture on prokaryotes. It's all that money that flows into my pockets.

-B

Comment #56435

Posted by [Sir_Toejam](#) on November 11, 2005 12:01 AM ([e](#))

Sal pooped:

I had lunch with him, Rick Santorum, Tom Petri at Discovery Day

hmm was that upstanding supporter of xianity and moral decency Tom Delay invited as well?

you know, that wonderfull congressman who was recently indicted on about a dozen major ethics violations?

the dishonesty exhibited by you and yours makes me physically ill, Slaveador.

Comment #56448

Posted by [k.e.](#) on November 11, 2005 1:23 AM ([e](#))

Lunch ?

I'll bet they fantasized about it being the last supper
what a bunch of pathetic losers.

More like a meeting of the the Peoples Freedom for Industrial Deception Party. More comical than the meeting in the (Roman) Sewers in the "Life of Brian" did Dembski have a bad back?

Comical