

EVOLUCION

# SMASHING ICONS:

## The Rise of 'Intelligent Design'

By Jan Hester



Jonathan Wells

**W**hen Charles Darwin visited the Galapagos Islands in 1835, he entered a pristine natural environment whose unique chemistry apparently gave rise to numerous colorful and diverse species, many found nowhere else on earth. The myriad creatures found on this small island now face a critical threat to their existence. An oil spill near San Cristobal Island took place on January 16, and its encroachment on the Galapagos means almost certain ecological tragedy; at least some species will probably not survive this instance of humans' invasive toxicity—the dirty, if necessary, commercial habits of this planet's most advanced species.

What's more, Charles Darwin's vaunted theory of evolution inspired by that distinctively lush crucible of life is also threatened with extinction—but not by chemical pollutants. Instead, a crack in the Darwinian edifice has been found and has widened to the point of empirical emergency,

while all of its textbook icons are crumbling before the eyes of a shocked, but largely quiet scientific establishment.

*The Icons of Evolution* is the title of a book by Jonathan Wells, an embryologist who has made a careful study of the many images and concepts that affix Darwin's theory as the fundamental paradigm about why and how we got here. The origin and development of life on planet Earth has been dutifully illustrated in thousands of textbooks, with charts and pictures of the "monkey-tô-man" variety, all illustrating the once-trusted theory of evolution, organic life evolving, and adapting, from a single ancestor. Those "icons," Wells asserts, are little more than mock-ups representing worldviews that have little if any evidential backing.

With an entire revision of accepted science in the offing, should Wells' academic detective work bear fruit, the question of extraterrestrial influences in the making of earthly life rightly gets shoved to the back

burner. Readers of this magazine can hash over that puzzle endlessly, but the real impact won't be felt until we straighten out the reasons why these scientific misrepresentations have been allowed to stand so long unchallenged.

The answer isn't simple, though it would seem the central controversy stems from a more commonly known standoff between evolutionists and creationists. One side staunchly defends descent with modification, the idea that Earth's species arose naturally from a common ancestor and developed those attributes and characteristics promising best chances of survival under prevailing conditions, while the other side glosses over this kind of science in favor of divine intervention. What Wells and others argue is a happy medium which, despite subtle implications of a god-like creator, merely suggests the reality of life being designed by something, or someone, without making any conclusions as to the nature of that creator. In contrast, creationists rely on theological dogma that very pointedly describes the nature of the creator and His relationship to His creation.

When Darwin stepped in, says Oxford zoology Professor Richard Dawkins, he "made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist." But at the expense of true science, claims Wells and his colleagues, if the icons we have fol-

lowed so religiously (if you'll pardon the expression) aren't rigorously exposed and remedied.

While disinclined to choose any single example that has done the most damage overall, Wells points to one that nearly any educated person will recognize. The infamous ape-to-human sequence resonates loudly in our evolution-stoked brains, and "has persuaded many people that we are nothing more than animals because our ancestors were apes," he says. "But drawings of apes morphing into humans are fantasies, stories that exist independently of any scientific evidence. The meager fossil evidence is interpreted to fit whatever version of the story is currently fashionable.

"Take the slouched figure of the Neanderthals. Experts are now convinced that Neanderthals did not stoop over as they walked, but looked pretty much like us. Yet Neanderthals are still frequently portrayed as hairy, ape-like sub-humans, because that fits the story."

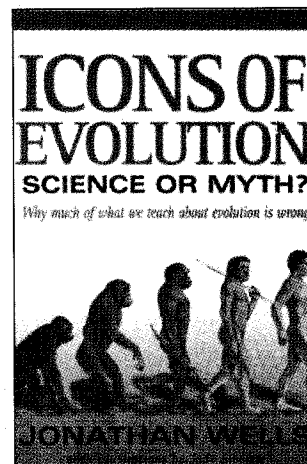
Some of the consequent assumptions we rely on to shape our understanding of biological life are therefore flawed, and, it would seem, give us little more rational

standing than Neanderthals when it comes to questions of human origins. It may not offer alternative conclusions, as yet, but something called the Intelligent Design Hypothesis (ID) may be likened to an opened door. It looks as if there is a Grand Designer. Little changes until we step through that door and see what's going on behind it. Darwinism keeps that door shut and locked; there's not even the opportunity to open it and walk in.

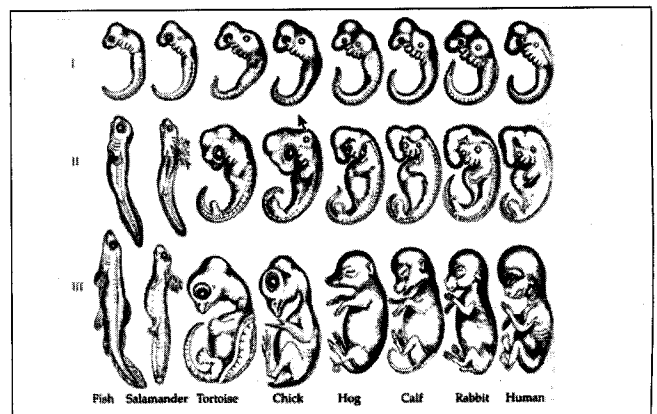
While Darwinists may admit that many biological features appear to be designed, they couch their admission by calling it an illusion, for after all, design implies a supernatural designer. Whether you call it God, gods, or advanced ETs, the idea is anathema to pure science. "But a definition of 'science' cannot possibly limit the nature of reality," Wells comments. "Even if an intelligent designer is beyond the reach of Darwinian science, such a designer may nevertheless be real."

Just what constitutes evidence of intelligent design? The obvious elegance of biological systems as a whole is insufficient unless some

*Story continues on page 74*



*The peppered moth resting on a tree trunk was a totally artificial premise that supposedly depicted the power of natural selection to change a creature's physical characteristics. The moths rarely alight on trunks.*



*Embryo drawings by 19th century German zoologist Ernst Haeckel illustrated his 'biogenetic law' that the development of an organism's embryo replays the evolutionary history of that organism's species. Not mere misrepresentations; the drawings were faked.*

EVOLUTION

# THE ID QUESTION

An Incendiary  
Mathematical Construct

by Fred Heeren

**W**hat exactly is intelligent design, and why do the very words incite such fury among biologists? What would be your decision if you were one of the 10 experts reviewing the ID case to decide whether it has a place in the academic world?

That's just what happened at Baylor University's Michael Polanyi Center after biologist Bill Dembski argued a mathematical concept for intelligent design. We'll get back to that part of the story later.

Let's answer the question, "What Is Intelligent Design?" ID depends upon a concept known as specified complexity. Say you're out raking leaves in the back yard. If you were to find little piles of leaves, equally spaced apart in a long line, the arrangement would be an example of specificity, but it could be explained by what fell out of a rolling barrel. Each time the barrel made a revolution, another clump fell out, each spaced apart by about the same distance. The pattern is specified, but not complex. When you come across a pile of a thousand leaves in no particular pattern, that's complex, and it may take billions of overturned barrels to produce another pattern just like it. But it's not specified. But when you come

across a thousand leaves arranged in an order to produce meaningful words, sentences, paragraphs, and a whole story, that's specified complexity. Specified complexity creates information and meaning. Wherever we find specified complexity, the only places where we can identify the cause behind it are ones where an intelligent agent was involved in the design.

Mathematician Bill Dembski puts it this way: "Specified complexity powerfully extends the usual mathematical theory of information, known as Shannon information. Shannon's theory dealt only with complexity, which can be due to random processes as well as to intelligent design. The addition of specification to complexity, however, is like a vise that grabs only things due to intelligence. Indeed, all the empirical evidence confirms that the only known cause of specified complexity is intelligence."

Thus, when Dembski observes this specified complexity in DNA messages and protein coding, he infers intelligent design. These patterns give real information in the form of meaningful instructions, precisely analogous to language with words, sentences, punctuation marks, and grammatical rules. The old "scientific creationism" based itself upon two tenets: a supernatural agent created all things, and the Bible gives us an accurate account of what happened. In contrast, according to Dembski, intelligent design is built upon three very different tenets: (1) Specified complexity is well defined and empirically detectable. (2) Undirected natural causes are incapable of explaining specified complexity. (3) Intelligent causation best explains specified complexity.

Some might argue that in the case of biological evolution, natural causes do eventually produce the specified complexity we see in living things. Natural selection culls through countless mutations over time, eventually producing specified complexity. As the need for survival helps organisms evolve, new information is created and they ratchet their way up into new forms. The problem with this scenario is that, though natural selection does a marvelous job of picking the fittest, scientists now know about the limited choices it has to pick. Mutations don't produce information. The need for an intelligent designer remains, wherever we see new information appear.

Biologist Peter Medawar demonstrated that natural laws cannot create new information and called this principle the law of conservation of information. Dembski borrows and expands upon the concept. As Michael Polanyi pointed out long before, natural selection and mutation, the two mechanisms of neo-Darwinism, are inadequate for the task of producing new anatomies or functions in evolving animals. If the creation of new information is such a problem, you ask, then why isn't this common knowledge in our institutions of higher learning? And if intelligent design is such an obvious answer, why haven't we heard more about this before? For one thing, no one's ever gotten far enough along to test it before. But William Dembski is getting close.

Bruce Gordon says that design theory, as a scientific strategy, involves two goals: (1) to mathematically characterize designed structures (using stochastic processes theory, probability theory, complexity theory, etc.) to detect intelligent design, and (2) to go into nature and see whether the mathe-

## Disguised Creationism?

Since the 1980s, critics have charged that the intelligent design concept is really just "a disguised form of creationism." According to Eugenie Scott, Executive Director of the National Center for Science Education: "They're really saying God does it, but they're not as honest as the Biblical creationists. The intelligence is really spelled in three letters: G-O-D."

Dembski says that intelligent design points not to a creator, but to a designer. "If you examine a piece of furniture," he explains, "you can identify that it is designed, but you can't identify who or what is responsible for the wood in the first place. Intelligent design just gets you to an intelligent cause that works with pre-existing materials, but not the source of those materials."

Neuroscientist Lewis Barker, who left Baylor in protest over the administration's "religious" policies, buys none of this: "I see it as a form of stealth creationism, a very old argument wrapped in new clothes." Later, however, he adds: "The whole notion of using mathematics . . . is something new."

Also novel is the respect many intelligent design proponents have earned in the academic community. "They're real academics, not cranks," admits *Skeptical Magazine* publisher Michael Shermer. "They have real degrees and tenure." William Dembski has doctorates in mathematics and philosophy, and has done postdoctoral work in mathematics at MIT, in physics at the University of Chicago, and in computer science at Princeton University. Even Lewis Barker says, "He seems to be a very bright guy."

Eugenie Scott argues that intelligent design proponents don't have a scholarly position because they never submit their work for peer review. But each time she brings up the kind of scholarly evaluation that's lacking, such as the reviewed publications or academic conferences, she stops short when she recalls the work of William Dembski.

Regarding conferences, Scott remembers Dembski's "The Nature of Nature" conference (last year at Baylor) and grudgingly admits, "They actually did invite some scientists there." The slate of speakers included two Nobel prize-winning scientists and several members from the National Academy of Sciences. The list was weighted toward prominent biologists, physicists, and philosophers who were critical of intelligent design.

And when Scott ticks off a list of non-peer-reviewed design literature, she hesitates when she recalls that "Dembski's book, *The Design Inference*, was written as part of a Cambridge University philosophy of science series." Published as Dembski's doc-

toral dissertation in philosophy, it became Cambridge's best-selling philosophical monograph in recent years. After surviving a review of 70 scholars, and then the standard dissertation defense at the University of Illinois, *The Design Inference* finally underwent corrections and refereed scrutiny for two years at Cambridge University Press.

The great irony is that just as Dembski is proposing to test his theory with the help of molecular biologists, the very scientists who are challenging intelligent design to pass scientific tests are using every means they can to tear down his research center before the first tests can even begin.

## Birth of a Think Tank

The brief story of Dembski's Michael Polanyi Center starts with its home: Baylor University, the world's largest Baptist institution, located in Waco, Texas. For years, Baylor had a reputation among conservatives for going the way of many once-Christian colleges that have neglected their heritage. Baptists were especially disappointed with those departments that taught their children within a specifically materialistic framework.

All that began to change when Robert Sloan became president of Baylor University in 1995. Sloan, a New Testament scholar with a doctorate in theology from the University of Basel, proposed to return the school to its mission of integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment. To foster this goal, he oversaw the establishment of the university's Institute for Faith and Learning, which explores opportunities for profitable engagement between faith and academic pursuits like art, history, business, and even science.

Sloan resisted the urging of fundamentalists to "throw the evolutionists out" of the biology department, vowing never to bar anyone at Baylor from teaching evolution. He rejects the notion of a "creation science" (six-day creation a few thousand years ago). But he also believes that "the academic world has become far too compartmentalized."

"Baylor ought to be the kind of place where a student can ask a question and not just get the runaround," says Sloan. "He shouldn't have to go to the theology department and be told, 'Oh, that's a scientific question. Don't ask me that.' And then the student goes to the science department and they tell him, 'That's a religious question. Don't ask me that.'"

So far, this doesn't sound too different from many other universities nationwide that have recently set up centers to revisit the relationship between science and religion. But matters took a fateful turn in the fall of 1998 when President Sloan read an article by William Dembski and was wowed by his work and



**MICRO-DESIGNED Proponents of Intelligent Design consider the inner workings of bacteria flagellum as persuasive evidence. With over 40 integrated parts, the flagellum, an organ of locomotion**

**(hugely enlarged here) exhibits irreducible complexity—you take one part out and the whole mechanism collapses. Darwinian thought is completely unable to account for its origins.**

credentials. Others in the administration were also impressed. Michael Beaty, Director of the Institute for Faith and Learning, says that Dembski's work "seems to fit right in with the Institute. Bill was fruitfully dialoging with religion and science."

When Beaty sounded him out about his interest in joining the institute as a research fellow, he learned that Dembski was seeking a home for a research center to test the theory of intelligent design. The administration received his ideas with enthusiasm. His research would pursue not only intelligent design, but also a broad range of topics having to do with the foundations of the natural and social sciences. Thus was born the Michael Polanyi Center, which Dembski named for an eminent physical chemist who taught that biology is not reducible to chemistry and physics, or even natural selection.

"This was an opportunity to reaffirm that Baylor is a university where controversial issues can be discussed," says Donald Schmeltekopf, Baylor's Provost. "We decided to go ahead and give it a chance, believing the university would be a richer and more compelling place, knowing that there would be those who would have objections." His pleasant expression disappears, and he adds: "We didn't anticipate the amount of objection."

### **Controversy**

After Dembski brought on board Bruce Gordon (Ph.D. in the history and philosophy of physics) as associate director of the Polanyi Center, the duo made a good first impression on the faculty they met. Gordon led a colloquium reading group, using two books about interactions between science and faith. Discussion with participating faculty was cordial.

"The controversy began after our website debuted in mid-January," explains Gordon. "That's what drew more faculty attention to the center." Though the Polanyi Center's site looked innocuous enough, other groups with evolutionist-bashing agendas began linking their websites to the Center. These groups, including one called "The Creationism Connection," looked to Dembski as a hero for their cause.

"We have no control over who decides to link to our site," said Gordon when accused of his association with such groups. "We don't endorse a connection to those sites at all. They didn't ask our permission. But we can't spend our time policing the Internet."

Biology faculty members flashed back to a long history of attacks by such groups, who had questioned the professors' faith and integrity. "For years, personal attacks were made on biology faculty," says Gordon, sounding as personally offended as the biologists. "Creationists were sneaking into classes with tape recorders."

Reaction built quickly. One professor who had pre-

viously been friendly at the reading group wrote Gordon an insulting letter. An e-mail frenzy began between faculty in all departments, calling special attention to the creationist websites that claimed the Polanyi Center as their own.

News spread to other universities, and soon newspapers in Waco and Houston were filled with reactions from a handful of vocal Baylor professors who were appalled that such a monstrosity as the Polanyi Center should be found on their campus.

By this time, plans were well underway for a large Polanyi conference called "The Nature of Nature." Most Baylor biologists decided to boycott the event. Even so, the April conference drew 350 scholars from around the world, whose views varied wildly on the conference's central question: "Is the universe self-contained or does it require something beyond itself to explain its existence and internal function?"

By all accounts, the conference itself was an outstanding success, drawing attention to Baylor as a place that could attract world-class scholars for dialog on the big questions. In spite of one out-of-state professor's campaign to convince all speakers to cancel, the conference brought together such luminaries as Nobelist/physicist Steven Weinberg, Nobelist/biochemist Christian de Duve, big-bang cosmologist Alan Guth, paleontologist Simon Conway Morris, and philosopher Alvin Plantinga.

The conference also focused the Baylor faculty's anger more intensely on the Michael Polanyi Center. A few days after it ended, the faculty senate met and voted to recommend that the administration dissolve the Center immediately. The faculty claimed that President Sloan had no right to set up such a center and choose its head without their involvement.

"I am concerned as a science professor because something involving the sciences occurred without us knowing about it," said Baylor geology professor Joe Yelderman. He added that he and his colleagues did not want to be associated with pseudo-scientific "creation science" and feared for their reputations.

"It's rather ironic that people in the scientific community, whose rights had to be protected in the face of ideological pressure, now appear to be suppressing others," said President Sloan. "People have always asked questions about the relationship of religious views and the natural phenomena we see in the world. I think it just borders on McCarthyism to call that 'creation science.'"

Administration spokesman Larry Brumley noted an obvious correlation between long-time critics of Sloan and those who were most vocal on this issue. Since Sloan took office, certain faculty members continually accused him of emphasizing religion over academics or of taking the school rightward on the political spectrum.

Sloan actually began his administration with an interesting mix of policies: he threatened to expel a student if she posed for *Playboy* but also allowed the school to sponsor its first dance.

"True science welcomes investigation and does not

censure it," said a columnist for the *Waco Tribune Herald*, adding that the Baylor biologists feared a challenge to their own worldview.

The day after the faculty senate vote, President Sloan addressed the faculty, telling them that he would not close down the Polanyi Center merely because they demanded it. The procedure he had used in setting up the center was no different from the one he and previous administrators had used to establish other centers.

Michael Beaty, Director of the Institute for Faith and Learning, notes that they had used the same procedure for setting up the Center for American Jewish Studies, without criticism. Recognizing that the faculty's real objections were not about procedure, Sloan repeated to the faculty an earlier announced plan to form an independent peer review committee to evaluate William Dembski's work and the work of the Polanyi Center. He said that he sympathized with the science faculty over their concern for their reputations, but that the bigger issue is academic freedom. He didn't like the idea of snuffing out a project without giving it a chance to have its work reviewed by peers.

"Academic programs need to be held accountable," said Dembski. "I would go further than that and say that I value objective peer review. I always learn more from my critics than from the people who think I'm wonderful."

Initially, Baylor spokesman Larry Brumley insisted that the committee wouldn't be asked whether the Center should be dissolved. "It's not a committee to look at whether we should reconsider having the Polanyi Center," Brumley said. "They're looking at how we can better communicate its purpose and address the concerns of faculty members."

What apparently happened, however, is that the faculty members who had been assigned the task of appointing committee members succeeded too well in finding people critical of intelligent design. The first round of picks put wary biologists in the majority. Worse, those appointments did not include a single person capable of understanding the mathematical arguments made in Dembski's *The Design Inference*. This was rectified when one statistician was later added to the team.

William Cooper, head of the 10-member review committee, says he sees the Polanyi Center as extremely divisive, doubtlessly connected to the old scientific creationists. Faculty members sent him mounds of material about Dembski and his putative connections with young Earth creationists, but Cooper took it as his task to distribute to committee members only that material which will shed more light than heat on the matter.

And what, exactly, is the matter? Aside from associations, why should it matter to one scientist how another scientist wants to conduct his research? The controversy, of course, is over more than procedure and associations; it's over the very nature of scientific inquiry. Perhaps it's even about the nature of personal



inquiry, and how each of us decides what to believe about life's big questions.

Lingering anger in the biology department is an understandable result after years of persecution by wild-eyed creationists. But the personal outrage against the very idea of Dembski's work runs even deeper than that. The resentment becomes obvious to any outsider who dares to roam the halls of the Baylor biology department and ask professors for their take on the dispute.

### ***Before Congress***

On May 10, a month after Baylor's big Polanyi conference, a number of members of Congress attended a three-hour briefing on intelligent design. William Dembski had been invited to join other ID scientists in the presentation, but the Baylor administration ordered him not to participate. President Sloan wanted to keep Baylor from all appearance of mixing of academics with the politics.

But some Baylor biologists became so concerned about how far the intelligent design message was spreading that eight of them drafted a long letter to Congressman Mark Souder, an Education Committee member, who had co-hosted the meeting. Their letter was intended to let the Congressman know that the ID proponents had duped him, and that ID research is not legitimate science. Their attempt to embarrass the ID people was turned around on them when Congressman Souder responded with his own presentation to the House of Representatives, including the reading of their letter into the congressional records.

Using their letter as Exhibit A, he told the House that these scientists were practicing "viewpoint discrimination in science and science education," and that "ideological bias has no place in science."

### **You Know You're An Extremist If . . .**

When it comes to questions about origin, you spend more time thinking about how to support your position than about what's true.

You spend hours every day on your "opponents'" websites, stirring up trouble for them.

You only read material that supports your own viewpoint.

When you read the other side, you do so only to find arguments against it.

You believe the Earth is 7,000 years old, and you think you know that from the geologic record.

You prefer not to think about difficult ideas like God, so instead of seeking truth, you seek forms of science and religion that avoid God. Your first step in deciding whether something is true is to make sure that it fits your favorite philosophy.

You're not sure what "intelligent design" is, but you know you're against it.

-FH

Having their civil duty rewarded with insult, the most vocal Baylor biologists stopped making public statements, to reporters or anyone else, lest their words be twisted again.

Referring to the letter's frequent use of the phrase "materialistic science" as their noble cause, the congressman told his colleagues, "One senses here not a defense of science but rather an effort to protect, by political means, a privileged philosophical viewpoint against a serious challenge. As the Congress, it might be wise for us to question whether the legitimate authority of science over scientific matters is being misused by persons who wish to identify science with a philosophy they prefer." A preferred philosophy? Could an outsider, even a Congressman from Indiana, get an objective fix on the real source of the conflict?

### ***Philosophizing Science***

There is a method used in science today that goes beyond the scientific method. It's based on a philosophy called naturalism, defined by Funk & Wagnalls as "the doctrine that all phenomena are derived from natural causes and can be explained by scientific laws without reference to a plan or purpose." It's the "without plan or purpose" part that nixes intelligent design from the get-go.

When this philosophy is applied to your life, it's called atheism. When it's applied to science, it's called methodological naturalism. You can believe in God and still use methodological naturalism in your science, of course. You just have to pretend He's not there.

But is science supposed to have a particular philosophy attached to it? This is the point that divides. According to peer review committee chair William Cooper, "This is what has created all the hullabaloo."

Biology professor Richard Duhrkopf got his picture in the papers last spring when he accused the Polanyi Center of trying to "change the philosophy of science." The philosophy of science? Many of us laymen didn't know that science had a particular philosophy hitched to it. We thought that science was supposed to be about gaining as much knowledge of the world as possible, or maybe about applying the scientific method to observations and measurements.

Methodological naturalism proposes that scientists be provisional atheists in their work, no matter what contrary evidence they find. Intelligent design proponents are not proposing that scientists be provisional theists. Intelligent design proponents are asking that science be purified of all philosophical biases. At least, no philosophical bias should be promoted as scientific. Scientists are welcome to hold to personal philosophies and even have them running in the background, as guiding principles, if they think that helps them do their work. But the question arises: Is there anything inherently scientific about unilaterally requiring all scientists to hold to one philosophical viewpoint?

Bruce Gordon and others would like to find as much common ground as possible between design theory and mainstream science. So might not intelli-



gent design theorists also use methodological naturalism, at least up to a point? William Dembski talks about using an explanatory filter, in which all possibilities of chance and law are eliminated before settling on design. Mightn't Dembski already be applying methodological naturalism, at least while he is going through the process of eliminating chance and law?

Trying his best to find a polite compromise, Bruce Gordon says: "I think there's a little bit of latitude in the concept of methodological naturalism that makes it something that can be worked with, from a design perspective, providing you're willing to allow that purpose might be inherent in nature, and that it might be detectable."

Ah, there's the rub. Like modern science, Funk and Wagnalls won't allow purpose into its definition of naturalism. For this reason, when Dembski is asked what he does with methodological naturalism, he says, "I jettison it." No compromise. To keep its balance, the Polanyi Center sorely needs the yin and yang of Gordon and Dembski.

"Methodological naturalism is science," declares neuroscientist Lewis Barker. "It's what we use to understand the world. Intelligent design is an attack on science." No wonder many biologists don't like to see ID people coming. Who likes having their hard-won territory attacked?

"The rule of methodological naturalism is very strong and very important to science," insists Eugenie Scott. "It's something that's grown on us over the last 150 years." Berkeley law professor Phillip Johnson thinks it's overgrown. At the Congressional briefing, he said that Americans must choose between two definitions of science in our culture: (1) science is unbiased, empirical testing that follows the evidence wherever it leads, or (2) science is applied materialist philosophy which, like Marxism or Freudianism, is willing to impose its authority.

"We have more freedom than a state university has," says Baylor President Robert Sloan. "Baylor should be unafraid to ask questions. People are inescapably curious and inescapably religious. It's natural to ask: Are there any traces of the hand of God at work here?" Maybe people could mix their science with their big questions a few centuries ago, but aren't we too sophisticated now?

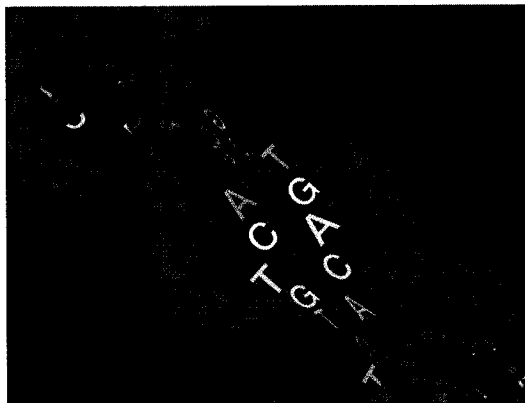
### ***Being Methodologically Correct***

"The twentieth century was the high point of methodological correctness," says Sloan. "We all know that life is more than sociology or history or anthropology. Unfortunately, people have forgotten that the methodological brackets we apply are purely

artificial, intended to be temporary."

Let's think about this. The intelligent design that Dembski hopes to detect could belong either to a Biblical God or to an earlier race of Martians who planted us here (like in the movie "Mission to Mars"). But if ID could detect an intelligence in either case, we must wonder how methodological naturalism would apply to one situation and not the other in any practical way.

What about the "Mission to Mars" possibility, Dr. Shermer? Michael Shermer didn't see the movie, but he didn't have to think long about the scientific possibilities of Martians creating us. "That's a legitimate hypothesis," he said. "That's testable, that's explainable. But 'a miracle happened,' that's different." So in such a case, Shermer agrees that design is testable, as long as the designer isn't God. Interesting.



***Geneticists are just beginning to unravel the secrets of DNA.***

Accordingly, we can envision an investigator detecting evidence for intelligent design, and then at the moment of detection, if the designer turns out to be God, the scientist gets zapped into a parallel universe where all memory of his investigation in the first universe is erased. On the other hand, if the designer turns out to be an advanced biological being from Epsilon Eridani, the scientist is allowed to proceed with his science.

The end result of Shermer's logic is sheer mysticism. By this reasoning, scientists who study natural events that point to natural causes may proceed unimpeded, while those who study natural events that point to a supernatural cause will have it mystically hidden from them.

"In their defense," says President Sloan, "you must sympathize with those with the kind of training that puts them in a methodological straight jacket. It's human nature to fear change. But now, the challenge is to be open to new paradigms. The university ought to be a place where we can finally ask these questions."

Last September 8 and 9, the peer review committee finally met and even brought in Dembski and Gordon for 45 minutes of grilling. One challenged Dembski's right to question the adequacy of neo-Darwinism. It surely would have been a more amiable meeting had they grilled Gordon alone. But being the yang member of the team, Dembski answered in ways that showed none of the hoped-for contrition. He made no new friends.

What will be the fate of Dembski, Gordon, and their Michael Polanyi Center? The possibilities include: (1) the dissolution of the present Polanyi Center, perhaps with an attempt to re-staff it with scholars more to the faculty's liking; (2) the clipping of Dembski's wings, taking away his ability to raise money to run programs; and (3) giving the Center a year-or-longer trial, to see if Dembski's research can

bring in any scientific results in that time.

As this issue goes to press, the committee is getting set to announce its recommendation to President Sloan. How binding will their decision be? "We will take it very seriously," says Provost Schmeltekopf. But Sloan emphasizes: "The final decision will lie with me."

### Who's Extreme?

Who's the villain in this story? The villain, as all the players know, is the extremist, and that's always the other guy. Is Bill Dembski an extremist? He's certainly accused of it. Coming up with an objective assessment of the truly extreme positions may seem as difficult as the math Dembski uses to identify intelligent design. But when we lay out the positions, it's not too difficult to see which ones fall way off in the valleys on each side of the bell curve.

What's the bottom-line truth about how we got here? At the one end, there's the possibility that the universe brought itself into existence and designed itself for life and consciousness without a God. At the other, there's the possibility that a Biblical God created everything in six days within the last 10,000 years.

These, certainly, are extremes. But in between, there is a range of possibilities that credit our existence to everything from Platonic demiurges, to a deistic God who set up initial conditions, to a fully involved God overseeing evolution, to a fully involved God overseeing progressive creations.

All those in-between possibilities fall within the purview of intelligent design. It would be difficult to characterize that middle range as extreme. But if any of those possibilities is true, strict adherence to methodological naturalism will guarantee that we will never learn the truth.

The idea that life here was seeded from another place may seem pretty far out. But Francis Crick, winner of a Nobel Prize for his co-discovery of DNA's structure, is one of a number of scientists who have seriously promoted the "panspermia" hypothesis, the idea that life was sent here in the form of seeds from another civilization far away. The reason for such an idea? Crick wrote that "the probability of life originating at random is so utterly minuscule as to make it absurd."

Other leading scientists had come to the panspermia conclusion for the same reasons. In their book,

## UPDATE: The Research Center That Never Was

The committee came back with a report that aims to dilute the research into intelligent design, deeming it "too restrictive," and suggesting that more "room should be made for a variety of approaches and topics." Much of the specific planning for research is left in the hands of a faculty advisory committee, to be appointed.

Baylor spokesman Larry Brumley had insisted that the review committee was not tasked with reconsidering whether or not to have the Michael Polanyi Center. Though it was mainly composed of scholars who were in no way favorably disposed toward the concept of intelligent design, the administration had assured Dembski that the purpose of the committee was merely to look at how to promote better communication between the center and the faculty.

Nevertheless, the report's writers ultimately neutralized the problem by studiously avoiding the word "center." Except to direct that the name Michael Polanyi Center be dropped, the committee didn't even mention a center, giving the impression that no center ever existed. When they couldn't use the passive voice they referred to the center as "the science and religion component of the Institute" for Faith and Learning."

Does the committee's report affirm that the investigation of intelligent design has a legitimate place at

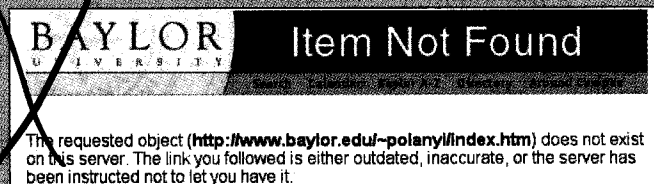
the academic discussion table? Answer: Yes.

Does President Sloan accept the committee's recommendations? Answer: Yes, completely.

It was this last answer that warmed the heart of William Dembski when he received a preview of the report on October 16. Though he greeted the rest of the report with mixed feelings, Dembski chose to focus on the positive. But his next move baffled many people on both sides of the intelligent design issue. To some, it was as if Dembski had chosen just the moment before the noose was to be loosened from around his neck to dig his heels into his horse's flanks and hang himself.

The day after the committee's report became public, Dembski released a statement of his own, saying: "The report marks the triumph of intelligent design as a legitimate form of academic inquiry. This is a great day for academic freedom."

Dembski proceeded to thank President Sloan and Baylor University for making such freedom possible, and he thanked the peer review committee "for its unqualified affirmation of my own work on intelligent design." While it was true that the committee had affirmed the *legitimacy* of intelligent design investigation, the committee had not affirmed the *correctness* of intelligent design theory. One could take Dembski's statement either way, but he obviously wanted to make



# BIOLOGIA

*Evolution from Space*, astrophysicists Fred Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe stated: "The theory that life was assembled by an intelligence . . . is so obvious that one wonders why it is not widely accepted as being self-evident. The reasons are psychological rather than scientific."

If God guided evolution, or God created life's diversity over millions of years in more direct ways, or some other intelligent beings brought life here (as Crick and Hoyle believe), how would we ever find out? When Lewis Barker faces this question, he takes a long time to gather his thoughts. "That's a very good question," he finally says, and then explains that he doesn't spend much time thinking about such things. He puts science and faith into two widely separated compartments. When he thinks about his faith, he now thinks about a deistic-type prime mover with a hands-off policy. "I'm a two-realm person," he declares. "I've selected religious views that have allowed me to pursue my science independently of my faith."

Late last year, the biology department invited the world's most prominent paleontologist, Steven Jay

Gould, to lecture at Baylor. Gould's book, *Rocks of Ages*, had been used as a discussion starter by the Polanyi Center's reading group. The book advises that we put religious and scientific thoughts in separate compartments, called "non-overlapping magisteria." The scientific compartment is for facts; religion is for values and make-believe.

For some, then, like atheist Steven Weinberg, all religion becomes "the theory of fairies." Sounds a bit extreme, but maybe this way of thinking looks more moderate to those who have been prepped by today's politically correct philosophy of science.

One thing you have to say for Dembski's intelligent design theory: it makes the ultimate questions real, putting them into our own world. Rejecting the possibility of intelligent design has its own advantages, of course. Like Gould's neat compartmentalization, methodological naturalism is not only a method for doing science, but a method for keeping the deepest human concerns a safe distance from our personal lives. **UFO**

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the most of his situation.

He went even further and took a parting shot that, according to President Sloan, started another "firestorm" on his campus: "My work on intelligent design will continue unabated," he said. "Dogmatic opponents of design who demanded the Center be shut down have met their Waterloo. Baylor University is to be commended for remaining strong in the face of intolerant assaults on freedom of thought and expression."

After hearing this, the faculty decided they had been personally insulted and pressured President Sloan to make Dembski retract his remarks. Sloan called Dembski onto the carpet, but Dembski refused to recant. To do so, he said, would be tantamount to accepting the censorship and vilification of him that had been a constant theme since his arrival at Baylor. Sloan officially dismissed him as director of the center if there was still a center.

## Politics or Research?

According to his own co-worker, Bruce Gordon, the only other staff member at what was once the Polanyi Center, Dembski's statement "completely undermined his ability to relate to the faculty and to the committees that were mandated by the review committee's report. So," according to Gordon, "an essential function of the director of the center was one that he could no longer perform. . . . That function being the building of bridges to the faculty and working with them to define the parameters of the new work," said Gordon. But Dembski looked at his first function as the carrying out of his research plans, not the building of bridges or asking opposing faculty for help in defining the parameters of

his "new" work. He wanted to do his old work, as originally defined when he was brought on campus.

Was this center about doing politics or about doing research? To Dembski, it looked as though the committee's report would now allow for research and academic freedom to be sacrificed in the name of "dialog" and "discussion."

"It grieves me that he took these actions," said Gordon. "And it grieves me that there was not another way to resolve this, given the fact that he would not retract his remarks." Gordon has replaced Dembski as director of the new center (or program, or whatever remains of what was once the Polanyi Center). The position is temporary, until someone else can be found. "This is not a position that I am happy to occupy," he says.

But given Dembski's very different nature, in combination with the continued harassment by the faculty, this outcome seems unavoidable. "I was looking at explosions with the administration one way or the other," says Dembski. "If it wasn't this, it would be over the December *Spectator* article, or the book I'm editing, or other things I'm writing, because of the names associated."

Who even remembers that the original task of the review committee was to make recommendations about improving communications between faculty and the research center? Amazing, when you think about it: A report whose subject was a research center never mentions a center in all of its recommendations for it. Thus, apparently, the Michael Polanyi Center has become the research center that never was. The name has been removed from the registers. **UFO**



## Smashing ICONS:

continued from page 41

specifics are recognized. And lately, a few outspoken scientists, Wells among them, have laid out indicators found on a molecular level. Biochemical systems found throughout nature evidence a complexity and sophistication that have "paralyzed science's attempt to explain their origins," writes Michael Behe in *Darwin's Black Box*, the seminal work on Intelligent Design Theory. "No one at all can give a detailed account of how the cilium, or vision, or blood clotting, or any complex biochemical process might have developed in a Darwinian fashion."

Another key and graphic example: bacteria flagellum. This microscopic creature exhibits a whip-like tail with a machine-like internal structure found on many single-celled bacteria. With over 40 integrated parts, the flagellum exhibits irreducible complexity—you take one part out and the whole mechanism collapses. ID-ers claim systems like this can't be built in a step-by-step process that selects at each step for functionality—Darwinism—because nothing works until all parts are present and assembled correctly (i.e., designed). "It even acts like a designed system, so why not suggest that is?" asks one ID proponent.

A modest proposal on its face, perhaps, but smashing icons can be dangerous business, particularly when a whole empirical system is toppled in the process. "The fact is that we have a conflict between two fundamentally opposed worldviews," Wells says. "According to one (paraphrasing Carl Sagan), the physical cosmos is all there is, all there ever was, and all there ever will be. According to the other (paraphrasing Hamlet), there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Sagan's philosophy." **UFO**

Jan Hester is a contributing editor for *UFO Magazine*.

in the universe has begun. Scientists have been searching for now NASA has made it a made it into 10 goals of its Astrobiologists first want to becomes organized from matter Earth, and how life evolved mism and ecosystem levels, evolved with Earth. Project y's most wide-ranging NASA secrets of ET life. nts to discover life elsewhere planetary conditions make life t once existed on other plan- a matter of determining how re of life on other worlds, oiter's moon, Europa. extrasolar planets, with ideabar). One of the first l was 51 Pegasi, the first nd a star similar to our sun. rbit every 3.5 Earth days, at ion miles—less than 1/20th the sun.

New Zealand and Japanese

## Confirm ET Life

with Australian and U.S. part- Australia's Mount Stromlo, dis- Planet. Located about 30,000 the planet cannot be seen to planetary scientists, there ng whether it has water or at may support life. e that will prove the exis- life, NASA believes, is to be

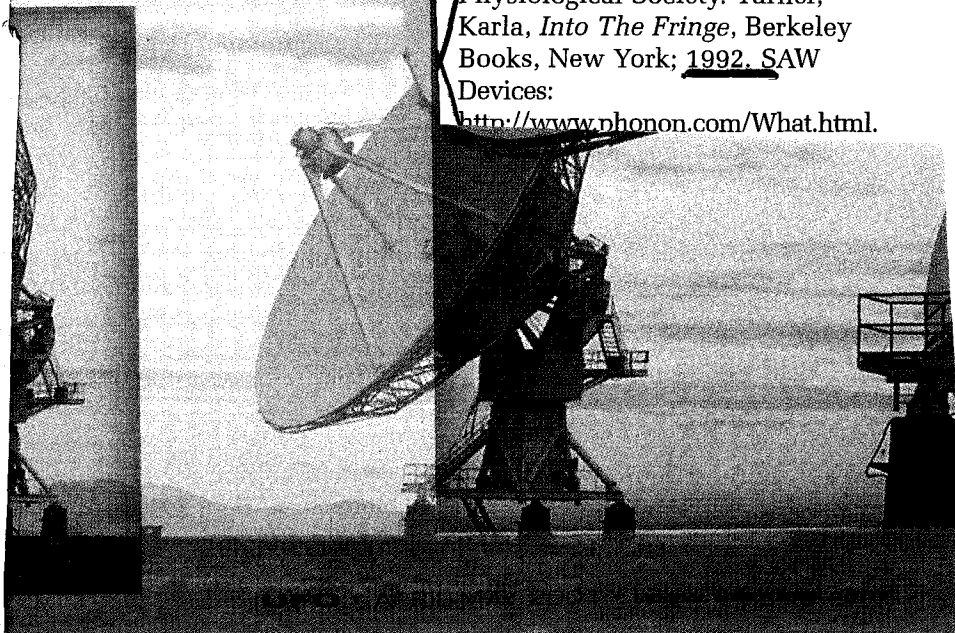
By William F. Hamilton

*Lou Ashby is an investigator and a freelance writer in Missouri. She can be reached at LouAshby@Compuserve.com. All of Dr. Elkin's reports, along with maps, photographs, notebooks and tape transcriptions, are contained in the personal archives of A.P. Eikin, maintained at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, online at [www.usyd.edu.au](http://www.usyd.edu.au).*

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May 29th 2001

Mr. William Dembski , Ph. D.  
Doctor in Mathematics and Philosophy  
Baylor University  
Michael Polanyi Center  
Waco , Texas , U.S.A.

Dear Dr. Dembski ,

Intelligent design ? . ( *Ufo Magazine* ,  
April-May 2001 , pages 40-51 ) . Of course . But  
always disguised , under wraps , veiled .

Why such a sempiternal absence of proof  
concerning intentional shaping out a course in nature? .  
Never a damned evidence about purposeful drawing up  
plans in the scheme of things . . . . . Why such efficient  
camouflage and masquerading in regard to goal-oriented  
intervention of clever agents in biology , genetics ,  
astronomy , cosmology ? .

Obvious . Because of a deliberate and  
cryptic , hidden , concealed working out of  
imperceivable intelligent executives in world affairs .

In this regard , I am sending you  
enclosed a paper dealing with the reasons of the  
intangibility of aimful organization of natural  
phenomena , entitled "The principle of cosmic  
elusiveness" .

Best wishes and regards

IGNACIO