COMMENTARY

This is the first of a series of occasional pieces that address current issues in biology. In this case the topic is Intelligent Design. Books about evolution roll off the presses at a rate that defies comprehensive reading. Along with important new mainstream evolutionary studies such as Sergey Gavrilets’ *Fitness Landscapes and the Origin of Species* there is the genre of fundamentalist creationist, anti-evolutionist literature that dresses up the dusty notion of Intelligent Design in quasi-scientific clothing as a tactic to get creation into the science classroom. A recent manifestation of this genre is *Darwinism, Design, and Public Education*. We have asked Dr Barbara Forrest, whose book *Creationism’s Trojan Horse* (Oxford University Press, 2004) written in collaboration with Paul Gross, exposes contemporary creationist tactics, to write a commentary on the latest manifestation of Intelligent Design, which appears below as an extended book review.

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BOOK REVIEW


Recycling substitutes for novelty in this intelligent design creationist offering. *DDPE* is not a new book but rather an anthology consisting largely of warmed-over essays from a 1998 issue of Michigan State University Press’s journal, *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*. Neither of the book’s editors is a scientist. John Angus Campbell, who also serves on the journal’s editorial board, is a rhetorician. Stephen C. Meyer is a philosopher who serves as director of the Center for Science and Culture (CSC), the creationist subsidiary of the Discovery Institute, a conservative think tank in Seattle. Campbell is a longtime CSC fellow. Although a Discovery Institute–owned website (www.darwinanddesign.com) falsely advertises *DDPE* as a “peer-reviewed science book,” it was published as part of MSU Press’s Rhetoric and Public Affairs Series. Despite a Discovery Institute press release announcing that the book “features new scientific arguments for design based on evidence in paleontology and comparative anatomy,” it offers no new scientific arguments and cannot be reviewed as a science book since intelligent design (ID) science is nonexistent.

But this is old news. Everything ID proponents have offered as “science,” starting with Michael Behe’s *Darwin’s Black Box* (1996), has been thoroughly evaluated, and discredited, by many qualified scientists and philosophers of science. Such critiques are available on the Internet and in recent books. What most needs criticism is the agenda this book serves; that is not as widely understood as it should be.

Despite ID proponents’ constant demand for “balance” between evolution and ID in public schools, the book’s editors make no pretense at balance. Comparing the publication of *DDPE* to Darwin’s “uphill battle to distinguish his own position in the public mind,” Campbell justifies the lopsided presence of creationists in this volume by asserting that “novelty requires time and repetition to sink in.” They do, however, make a pretense of offering scientific expertise. Nineteen of the twenty-seven essays are by ID creationists and their supporters, not one of whom is a working evolutionary biologist. Among the eight pro-evolution essays, only four are by scientists. Of those, only two are by evolutionary biologists. There is a preponderance of humanities scholars; some, like rhetorician John Angus Campbell, are ID proponents while others are pro-evolution.

Despite the pro-evolution essays, however, *DDPE* is designed to showcase the creationist essays, which are themselves a study in intellectual dishonesty. This book is another element of the “Wedge Strategy,” a public relations program being executed by the Discovery Institute creationists, who call themselves “the Wedge.” The term reflects their intent to “wedge” into the public mind a distinction between science and the naturalistic methodology that makes science successful. They want to convince the public and politicians (which includes educational policymakers) that “theistic science” is a real possibility, that ID’s supernatural “intelligent designer” is a fundamental principle of scientific explanation.

Campbell announces that *DDPE* will offer most readers “a first encounter with an alternative to the established paradigm of Darwinian evolution” by qualified authors who believe that Darwinism is false and wish to see it replaced”—thus revealing the creationist agenda that guides the book. The intended audience is science teachers, many of whom are underprepared for teaching evolution and all of whom are so busy educating the young and dealing with the problems attendant upon that task that they cannot be expected to do the research that would reveal how misleading this book is. A hefty tome, it will undoubtedly impress educational policymakers who either harbor ID sympathies or are in no position to recognize the book’s deceitfulness. It also hands ammunition to ID supporters who will try to persuade school boards that the inclusion of essays by a few reputable, pro-evolution scientists and scholars proves that ID’s challenge to evolution is serious enough to compel recognition of it as a worthy scientific alternative. Although the book obviously was not published for scientists, scientists—as researchers, educators, parents, and citizens—should be deeply concerned about how it will be used, so it is from this perspective that I comment.

After Campbell’s introduction, *DDPE* is organized into four sections of essays followed by five appendices. Campbell states that the book addresses the question, “Should public school science teachers be free to teach the controversies over biological origins?” His introduction sets the tone for the discussion of this question with three false assertions: “ID is a science, a philosophy, and a movement for educational reform.” As science, Campbell says, ID is “an argument against the orthodox Darwinian claim that mindless forces—such as variation, inheritance, natural selection, and time—can account for the principal features of the biological world.” As a philosophy, it is a “critique of the prevailing philosophy of science that limits explanation to purely physical or material causes.” As educational reform, “ID is a public movement to make Darwinism—its evidence, philosophic presuppositions, and rhetorical tactics—a matter of informed, broad, and spirited public discussion.”