

BOOK REVIEW

Creationism's Trojan Horse, The Wedge of Intelligent Design. Barbara Forrest and Paul R. Gross. 2004. Oxford University Press, Oxford, NY. 401 p. \$40.00 hardcover (ISBN: 0-19-515742-7).

Given the troubling and recent encroachments of religion into science classrooms, this book deserves high praise for its timeliness and serious treatment of an increasingly important topic. It is for anyone with an interest in preserving the nature of science as an endeavor free from supernatural explanations. Although the deep convictions of the authors, Forrest and Gross, are apparent, they have taken a scholarly approach to the subject.

In particular, I would recommend this book for science educators and concerned parents or anyone who may encounter the controversy of Intelligent Design (ID) masquerading as science in their local schools. It should be required reading for all school board members. Likewise, legislators would benefit from this book as well as any lawyers involved in litigation concerning ID. There is some legal analysis in the text including statements from Professor Dennis Hirsch of the Capital University School of Law in Columbus, OH.

One focus of the text is to chronicle the history of the ID movement and the narrative is augmented with copious, formal citation of the authors' sources. The abundant citations do not in any way detract from the prose, but are available to anyone who wishes to confirm the information or to use the book as a scholarly source for debating the issue. In this sense, the book's utility is further extended by the inclusion of 66 pages of notes and bibliography. There is also a 19-page index for quick reference.

Intelligent Design (ID) is the notion that human biology is too complex to have arisen by evolutionary processes, and thus there must have been a "Designer" to provide the blueprint for life. The identity of the designer is never defined, although it would need to possess sufficient intellect to accomplish the task. Theoretically, it could be an alien spacefarer from Alpha Centauri, but it is generally implied that it is the Christian God. This is never acknowledged publicly (wink, wink) since to do so would jeopardize the argument that ID is not religion. As a religious premise it could not legally be taught in public schools.

The origin of the current ID movement is traced to the Center for Renewal of Science and Culture (CRSC), which is part of the Discovery Institute, a conservative Christian think tank. The book's title alludes to the "Wedge," an explicit CRSC agenda for driving a wedge between science and naturalism. Naturalism is the principle that science is based on observable laws of nature. The alternative promoted by the CRSC is to base science on the supernatural.

The specific goals of the Discovery Institute were outlined in a "Wedge Document," which was leaked in 1999. Forrest and Gross establish the authenticity of the document and examine the current progress made towards its goals.

The goal of phase I of the Wedge is to create a scientific legitimacy for ID through research and publications. The authors show how this part of the plan has been a dismal failure in that no peer-reviewed ID articles have been published in the scientific literature although there are popular books in print. These books tend to emphasize the failure of modern science to explain all of life's intricacies and they often dwell on minor debates within scientific disciplines while ignoring the big picture such as the massive amount of evidence for evolution. ID publications also tend to overlook newer evidence. Forrest and Gross provide a bibliometric analysis of the references cited in ID literature showing that the recent/old citations ratio is 0.7-1.4 in comparison with 2.2-4.0 in typical science literature.

Phase II of the Wedge is targeted at swaying public opinion towards the acceptance of ID as a scientific theory. Unfortunately, The Wedge has had considerable success concerning this objective. This endeavor is more in the realm of public relations and has little to do with science. ID proponents have been powerfully persuasive in convincing the scientifically naïve about ID. This is a central theme of the text and is the greatest threat of the ID movement. As the authors put it, "This book is about a current, national, intellectual seduction phenomenon..." ID arguments often contain a plea for fairness that appeals to Americans' sense of fair play. This is elaborated to argue that ID (religion) deserves equal time versus evolution in the science classroom. Forrest and Gross ask "how many parents, already anxious about what their children are learning, how many journalists and lawmakers – weak in science but strong in politics, eyeing anxiously the support and votes of those parents – can resist joining in the call for an end to the "censorship?"

Phase III of the Wedge is based on confrontation. Part of this is to have Academic and Scientific challenge conferences. There have been ID conferences and in at least one case, legitimate scientists were duped into attending since they were unaware of the meeting's true agenda. Another aspect of confrontation is teacher training and legal action to protect teachers who profess ID. The CRSC had an ID Web curriculum entitled "Legally Permissible!" The New Mexico family council was sending free ID books to middle school libraries accompanied by a letter implying that they were from the UNM School of Medicine when they were not. Forrest and Gross examine many examples of the Wedge's educational and political initiatives.

In addition to covering the history of ID, there is ample analysis of the movement's claims, motivations, and arguments. It becomes apparent that the principle promoters of ID are creationists with an agenda to insert religion into science education. The authors also examine the funding for ID, which is contributed largely from conservative Christian sources. One of the strengths of the book on this topic and others is the numerous quotations from the proponents of ID themselves. The authors were adept at using ID supporters' own words to expose their true intentions.

The authors comment that “during the writing of this book, creationists caused significant conflicts in Ohio, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Kansas, Missouri, Alabama, Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.” The movement has had some success in national politics and even in other countries as well. Forrest and

Gross have issued a call to arms for each of us to consider what we will do about it.

KARL J. ROMSTEDT
Biological Sciences Department
Capital University
Columbus, OH 43209
Email: kromsted@capital.edu