

*Sightings* 9/8/05

*Editor's Note:*

*Today's issue of Sightings is the third in a series of three columns treating the evolution/intelligent design debate. These articles will appear along with responses by Sightings contributors Richard A. Rosengarten and Darren Henson, as well as medical ethicist Farr A. Curlin, on the [Religion & Culture Web Forum](#). Please feel free to join the conversation there in the coming days by posting your own reflections on the discussion board.*

Debating Darwin

-- Walter H. Mees, Jr.

As a Lutheran pastor nearing 60 years of age, I've had a love/hate relationship with Charles Darwin for more than 40 years. In the classrooms of my youth, more than one professor made it seem as though everyone of any intelligence knows that Darwin was correct. A college production of "Inherit the Wind" furthered my impression that the good guys were the Darwinists, while the Christians were the control-freak bad guys. But then, I am a Christian -- and I hope not a bad guy (though perhaps a bit of a control freak).

So I struggled with my father's view that he is free to believe in Creation no matter what science says, because as he would say, quoting an old-time radio show, "Vas you dere, Sharlie?" I finally settled on the understanding that science tells us how life began and religion tells us why. This was an uneasy truce at best -- and it was not to last.

As soon as I read what leading evolutionists actually said, I realized that there is no room for my truce in the world of neo-Darwinist materialism, no matter how many of us think we can be theistic evolutionists. A few representative textbook assertions prove my point:

"Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind" (George Gaylord Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution*);

"If humankind evolved by Darwinian natural selection, genetic chance and environmental necessity, not God, made the species" (Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature*);

"By coupling undirected, purposeless variation to the blind, uncaring process of natural selection, Darwin made theological or spiritual explanations of life processes superfluous" (Douglas Futuyma, *Evolutionary Biology*).

This was sobering news indeed, for it said to me that if I insist on maintaining that science tells us how life began and religion tells us why, I'm simply ignoring science. In 1993, however, I picked up a copy of the second edition of Phillip E. Johnson's *Darwin on Trial*. That book introduced me to the notion of "intelligent design" (ID), and helped me to see that the questions it asks of Darwinism and the challenges it offers to its materialist underpinnings deserve serious replies.

Since encountering Johnson, I have read numerous other books and articles on the topic by such writers as biochemistry PhD Michael Behe, astronomy PhD Guillermo Gonzalez, Cambridge

PhD Stephen C. Meyer, and molecular and cell biology PhD Jonathan Wells. The range and quality of their publications are impressive, as are the noteworthy venues in which they appear. These proponents of ID are serious scientists engaging in real debate against worthy opponents on real issues. For example, Dr. Behe, author of *Darwin's Black Box*, is credited with over 40 articles in such scientific journals as *DNA Sequence*, the *Journal of Molecular Biology*, and others.

So when I came across "Evolving Debates" by Darren M. Henson (*Sightings*, June 23), I was surprised to read his opinion that "proponents [of ID] have no intention of holding it to scientific standards." It didn't seem to me that this assertion was relevant to his call for pastors and bishops to mediate in the rift between supporters of ID and supporters of evolution, nor was the assertion borne out by my reading of ID proponents. What were all those books and articles but an effort to engage in debate, receive and respond to challenges, and, over time, to hold it to scientific standards?

A few weeks later, Richard A. Rosengarten concluded his article "Designs of the Times" with a reference to the "reactionary religious sensibilities" of "the exponents of creationism and 'intelligent design'" (*Sightings*, July 21). Once again, proponents of ID were, in my view, mischaracterized.

In my estimation, such assessments amount to the sort of prejudgments that should be avoided until more evidence is gathered. Meanwhile, we might explore some of the questions ID wants neo-Darwinism to answer. We could ask, for example, where the voluminous information in DNA came from, how it happens that life is possible on earth, and why biology textbooks continue to contain such long-discredited and repudiated "illustrations" of evolution as Haeckel's drawings of embryos, peppered moths glued onto trees, and Darwin's tree of life (in all its forms).

Should we do that, we would be following the scientific method ourselves, and asking Darwinism to behave like the science it purports to be. Science should follow the evidence wherever it leads, even if that destination is God.

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