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## Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics

Review by Jeff Stueber

Robert Pennock's book *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics* is a monstrous 805 page manifesto that pays lip service to several anti-ID arguments, but includes numerous other essays that have nothing to do with the main thrust of scientific ID arguments. This is not to discount the seriousness or merit of these essays. They simply have nothing to do with the main topic of the book which is a critique of ID.

Pennock is a convinced anti-ID evolutionist. His recent book *Tower of Babel* is a typical Darwinian manifesto that, apparently, does not include anything new. Robert Kirkpatrick, who reviewed the book for amazon.com, said he bought the book expecting state of the art arguments supporting evolution but "the arguments are weak and have been made repeatedly by others." Allan Steel, who reviewed the book for the *Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal*, criticized it for failing to note the distinction between operational science and origin science, for not understanding the limited evidence that microevolution (speciation in finches, for instance) tells us about macroevolution, for suggesting that evolution of language is evidence of biological evolution, and misunderstanding numerous creationist arguments.

In *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics*, Pennock includes Phillip Johnson's article from *First Things* discussing evolution as a philosophical metaphysical system of thought. That essay bookends another by Paul Nelson that contends religious ideas influence evolutionist arguments. (Nelson says evolution "was born in a turbulent embrace with theology, and it has yet to relinquish that embrace.") Pennock also includes an essay by Stephen Gould calling for a synthesis of theology and science that only accomplishes this goal by making theological ideas nothing but fiction. (Gould calls the papal insistence on the divine infusion of the soul "a sop to our fears," something that only has "metaphorical value.") These have nothing to do with ID's scientific arguments and appear to me more as filler than important information.

The meat of Pennock's book comes near the middle. Peter Godfrey-Smith denies that Dembski can convert improbabilities, using logarithms, into information content. I certainly agree that something does not possess information merely because it is improbable. (The design of my car is improbable, but would it therefore possess information?) However, given the fact DNA is a code – a code, in fact, that influences itself - this criticism might be muted since a code to change itself is an informational package. Dembski's idea of "functionality" is also vague, he says. But then he answers Dembski by merely repeating the standard evolutionist argument. How can we get from bacteria with low functionality to a camel with high functionality? "Slowly" we are told while Godfrey-Smith spins a tale of how mutations accomplish the task. There are examples like bacteria becoming more adapted and Godfrey-Smith informs us that creationists have to deal with these issues. Yet, creationists have pointed out these changes are minor and do not reflect the changes that are needed to prove evolution.

One of the interesting give and takes in the book reflects the common animosity unbelievers have toward any ideas of divine intervention. Pennock worries that if we admit the divine into our scientific theories, we will lose the potential for scientific predictability. Even Phillip Johnson, as law professor, would suffer from this malady. Pennock, as quoted by Dembski, summarizes:

For the law to take [Johnson's view] seriously as well, it would have to be open to both suits and defenses based on a range of possible divine and occult interventions. Imagine the problems that would result if the courts had to accept legal theories of this sort. How would the court rule on whether to commit a purportedly insane person to a mental hospital for self-mutilation who claims that the Lord told her to pluck out her eye because it offended her? How would a judge deal with a defendant, Abe, accused of attempted murder of his son, Ike, who claims that he was only following God's command that he kill Ike to prove his faith? The scriptural reference here is obvious.

Pennock, Dembski says, is asking us to choose between magic and mechanism and any sane man will choose mechanism and reject magic which, in this case, is ID and any theory that purports to explain the world through divine intervention. Dembski proves that he can quote equally from Darwinists and reproduces a now famous quotation from Richard Lewontin saying his [Lewontin's] fellow scientists accept science because of their prior adherence to material causes to produce material explanations. "But," Dembski says, "design can be explanatory without giving away the store." Pennock, in a subsequent article in this book, will have nothing of this explanation, accusing Dembski of a "smoke and mirrors trick" and backing the same type of creationism as Henry and John Morris who believe humans were specially created by God. Dembski, it seems, to at least be scientifically respectable to Pennock and his ilk, must abandon any linkage between ID and his Bible. It's almost as if Pennock, finding that his father is still alive, refuses to believe it because his father is an axe murderer. Pennock fears ID because he knows God is hiding behind it.

This book is a fine addition to any scientific or theological bookshelf. What the book shows is that no compromises are possible on this issue despite the intelligent design movement's attempt to craft a scientific and mathematical method of detecting design, and this is mostly because unbelievers fear the ground that ID is attempting to break. *LSI*