



Published 2009

## Review – Ben Stein’s Expelled – No Intelligence Allowed

Review by Jeffrey Stueber

Until 2008 Ben Stein may have been associated with the movie *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* or his game show *Win Ben Stein’s Money*. Now one can associate him with the intelligent design (I.D.) movement and an investigation of evolutionist bias on college campuses.

Secularists like to foist the myth of the unbiased scientists. For instance skeptic Chester Dolan <sup>1</sup> says “The good scientist will suspend judgment until his theories are supported by well-founded facts. The religionist has been trained to believe that it is perfectly natural to make judgments without the slightest need for facts.” This is certainly a utopian view that is not revealed by the evidence. Scientists are people too and subject to the same biases and predispositions as other humans, one of these the desire to de-god the universe.

Stein suggested this is the case. His first interviewee was Richard Sternberg who was guilty of publishing an article by intelligent design advocate Stephen Meyer in the *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington*. Meyer surveyed various scientific explanations for life’s origin and evolution and found each wanting and concluded the paper by saying, “An experience-based analysis of the causal powers of various explanatory hypotheses suggests purposive or intelligent design as a causally adequate—and perhaps the most causally adequate—explanation for the origin of the complex specified information required to build the Cambrian animals and the novel forms they represent. For this reason, recent scientific interest in the design hypothesis is unlikely to abate as biologists continue to wrestle with the problem of the origination of biological form and the higher taxa.” Sternberg told Stein that Meyer’s paper raised numerous issues that he wanted to get into the open and, according to the movie, he lost his office in the west wing of the Natural History Museum at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History and was pressured to resign because of Meyer’s publication.

This is not the exception according to Stein, but one must juxtapose these incidents with criticisms of this movie. Caroline Crocker mentioned intelligent design in her cell biology class at George Mason University and was told by her supervisor she would have to be disciplined for teaching creationism. At the end of the semester she lost her job and was thence blacklisted against getting another. She must have been teaching some type of I.D. because a web site that rates professors has this rude comment about her back in May of 2006: “Just another Bible-whacking lunatic... do we really need wingnuts like this in a public college?” <sup>2</sup> The critical web site *expelledexposed.com* suggests Crocker continued to teach after her alleged dismissal, but does admit she tried to introduce intelligent design ideas into the classroom and hence may have been let go partly because of this.

Guillermo Gonzalez, coauthor of *The Privileged Planet*, was denied tenure after its publication. Gonzalez put it succinctly: If you value your career, keep your views quiet. *www.expelledexposed.com* suggests that Gonzalez had a diminishing record of bringing in research funding and grants and around that time Gonzalez became involved with *The Privileged Planet*. So both Gonzalez and this site could be correct in that he had diminishing returns for the university, but was denied tenure because the ID project was the nail in the coffin of his recent failures which caused his exit.

Sternberg, *expelledexposed.com* says, did not follow proper review procedure in publishing Meyer’s article. Sternberg was asked to move as part of a reorganization of space. He refused the location that was offered him and instead took an office in another part of the museum.

Clearly evolutionists did not perform well in this movie. Eugenie Scott said one of the best kept secrets is that Catholics and mainstream Protestants are “ok” with evolution, and thereafter Richard Dawkins stated bluntly that his study of evolution turned him toward atheism. Michael Ruse suggested one popular theory is that life originated on the backs of crystals (and suggested to Stein this is true) whereas I have found there are a host of theories, none with any secure validity. Dawkins suggested that evolution is a fact as firmly established as any fact we have, the evidence for this is overwhelming, and those who doubt evolution are stupid or ignorant. Stein says, however, doubters he interviewed are not ignorant people and David Berlinski, another bomb thrower into the halls of science, suggested that before we can surmise whether Darwinian theory is true, we must be able to tell whether it is clear enough so that it could be correct. However, he finds that evolutionary biology lacks of the scientific discipline of mathematical physics which lacks the scientific discipline of mathematics and there is a gradual descent of unintelligibility from math to Darwinian biology. In fact Berlinski said Darwinism is a “mess” akin to looking into a room filled with smoke. We can’t even yet define what a species is. William Provine, professor of history of biology at Cornell, said that the path to believing in evolution starts with giving up a personal deity and belief in life after death, and once that is done the rest falls into place. Then one must give up a belief in absolute morality and free will and, he said, if you believe in evolution you cannot accept there is any free will.

Near the end of the movie, Dawkins presented himself once again for abuse when he suggested that it is quite liberating when one gives up his or her belief in a god. Stein asked him about the origin of his data for this belief and Dawkins responded that he has received many letters telling him that much. Stein, quick to the punch, asked him how many letters he’s received. (There are, after all, billions of people in the world.) Dawkins admitted that nobody has any idea how the first self-replicating organism got started even though he believes we can still have confidence it happened by accident. Dawkins is willing to give intelligent design a hearing when he suggested a very advanced form of mankind may have seeded life on this planet. So it seems intelligent design is a worthy idea of science, but not intelligent design by God, and Dawkins indicated his bias when he admitted that the existence of the Hebrew God would be an “unpleasant prospect.”

Of particular disturbing feature of evolutionism is its connection to the Nazi regime. Here Stein traces down Richard Weikart, author of *From Darwin to Hitler*, who strongly asserts that Hitler and many of the physicians who carried out the extermination of Jews were fanatical Darwinists. That evolution is much at the root of Nazism is my reaction as well when reading *Mein Kampf*.

We are told by Stephen Meyer to be wary of the sound of one hand clapping and so this movie has produced a liberal response. Ronald Bailey took up the case for and against the movie in Reason magazine [3](#) and commented that “the film is entirely free of scientific content—no scientific evidence against biological evolution and none for ‘intelligent design’ (ID) theory is given.” Of course the movie is really not about evidence against evolution but the inability of scientists who find fault with it to get their views published and respected. However, the revelation by Berlinski that nothing in evolutionary biology is clearly defined should give Bailey enough reason to reconsider whether evolution is true. Bailey glossed over the connection between Nazism and evolution by noting “this overlooks the fact that people down through the millennia have found all sorts of justifications for why they are permitted to murder each other, including plunder, tribal competition, and, yes, **religion**.” Bailey is technically true. The mere fact that I cite someone, say, Warren Krug, as permission for stealing an item does not mean I am justified in blaming him. However, the idea that different races of people evolved at different times — some therefore more evolved or primitive than the others — was a key evolutionist concept during that time and Nazis were merely properly applying this idea to their genocidal ways. Numerous books and articles have highlighted this link. [4](#)

*Scientific American’s* web site [5](#) covered the movie and argued that intelligent design is not “out of bounds” because there is some preference for atheism, but because science by definition excludes design.

Actually, science avoids design explanations for natural phenomena out of logical necessity. The scientific method involves rigorously observing and experimenting on the material world. It accepts as evidence only what can be measured or otherwise empirically validated (a requirement called methodological naturalism). That requirement prevents scientific theories from becoming untestable and overcomplicated. By those standards, design-based explanations rapidly lose their rigor without independent scientific proof that validates and defines the nature of the designer. Without it, design-based explanations rapidly become unhelpful and tautological: “This looks like it was designed, so there must be a designer; we know there is a designer because this looks designed.”

While it is true that science involves rigorous testing of the natural world and generally avoids design-based explanations, this is not always so. Archaeology would be impossible without an ability – and overwhelming tendency – to ascribe things to intelligent design (by humans, of course). Obviously no scientist has decided that design explanations in archaeology “become unhelpful and tautological” and even “lose their rigor.” Furthermore, scientific knowledge allows us to set boundaries around what is possible or not possible by natural processes or events and invoke design explanations when proper. Rather than pontificate over how science necessarily excludes design, we need to adjust our view of science depending on what we are studying.

To counter the argument that belief in evolution leads necessarily to atheism, Kenneth Miller of Brown University is trotted out. However, Miller’s methodology of squaring random evolution with divine intent reveals numerous fallacies and irreconcilable contradictions you won’t find in this online article. You also won’t find any mention of Miller’s predisposition toward his theistic evolution type of creationism which arises from his inability to imagine a god who creates by divine acts instead of establishing a natural process to accomplish what He wants. So Miller is obviously trying to shoehorn the Bible into evolutionary theory.

I still find this movie useful, but it must be considered when bracketed with some of the more critical sites I mention above. What this movie also reveals is that evolutionists would be wise to not appear on camera in a movie that is willing to ask whether evolution is really true. **LSI**

1. See my review of his book *Holy Daze* at <http://webpages.charter.net/jeffstueber/dolan1.htm>
2. <http://www.ratemyprofessors.com/ShowRatings.jsp?tid=649890>
3. <http://www.reason.com/news/show/125988.html>
4. For instance, see Milford Wolpoff and Rachel Caspari, *Race and Human Evolution*, (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1997)
5. <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=six-things-ben-stein-doesnt-want-you-to-know&page=3>