

# The Postmodern Sin of Intelligent Design Creationism

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**Abstract** That Intelligent Design Creationism rejects the methodological naturalism of modern science in favor of a premodern supernaturalist worldview is well documented and by now well known. An irony that has not been sufficiently appreciated, however, is the way that ID Creationists try to advance their premodern view by adopting (if only tactically) a radical *postmodern* perspective. This paper will reveal the deep threads of postmodernism that run through the ID Creationist movement’s arguments, as evidenced in the writings and interviews of its key leaders. Seeing their arguments and activities from this perspective highlights the danger to science posed by both ID Creationism and radical postmodernism.

“I told them I was a postmodernist and deconstructionist just like them, but aiming at a slightly different target.”—Philip Johnson

## 1 Strange Bedfellows

It is well known that religious fundamentalism, especially Christian fundamentalism, is the father of creationism. This was always obvious about Creation-Science, and the religious parentage was also clearly evident in creationism’s latest offspring—Intelligent Design. What has been less appreciated about Intelligent Design Creationism (IDC) in particular, is that many of its distinctive elements have a quite different source in a radical academic philosophy. Intelligent Design Creationism is the bastard child of Christian fundamentalism and postmodernism. In particular, I want to show, it was born through the influence of Critical Legal Studies upon Phillip Johnson, who was the godfather of the ID movement and its philosophical approach to attacking evolution.

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Why a “bastard” child? Because IDC is the offspring of an illicit affair. Given their views about the exclusivity of religious truth, for most ID Creationists (IDCs), creationism and postmodernism were co-habiting but never truly married; this was a match that could never be made in heaven.

The religious underpinnings of IDC have been well documented previously,<sup>1</sup> so I will begin with just a brief review. The major portion of the paper will highlight the postmodern elements that are found throughout IDC writings. It will be important to see how these ideas are expressed in their own words, so I shall document this pattern with quotations from their writings and interviews, focusing mostly on those of Johnson who was the IDC leader who pioneered this new way of framing anti-evolutionism. Postmodernism played a key role in his personal mid-life crisis that led to his religious conversion, and in the ID movement he attempted to recreate the conceptual framework that led to his own rejection of evolution and acceptance of Jesus. This article is not intended as a review of the many well-known problems with ID creationist arguments, but rather as a history of one key aspect of its conceptual framework. However, there will be a few lessons for science education and for academic philosophy that we may draw at the end from our analysis of this strange affair.

## 2 God, the Father of IDC

Just as Creation-Science did, IDC claimed to be a scientific, not a religious view. Such denials were never plausible to anyone who had actually looked into the history of IDC and examined the writings, speeches and interviews of its leading advocates. In other settings he would never make such a statement, but in an interview to an evangelical Christian audience on the American Family Radio show Phillip Johnson put the movements’ standard deceptions aside and spoke bluntly of the IDC strategy and fundamental goal:

Our strategy has been to change the subject a bit so that we can get the issue of intelligent design, which really means the reality of God, before the academic world and into the schools. January 10, 2003. <http://www.afr.net/todaysissues/tibestof.shtml>

And in a book aimed at recruiting sympathetic students to the movement, Johnson wrote:

If we understand our own times, we will know that we should affirm the reality of God by challenging the domination of materialism and naturalism in the world of the mind. With the assistance of many friends I have developed a strategy for doing this, ...We call our strategy the wedge. (Johnson 1997a, pp. 91–92)

Such examples can be multiplied ad nauseum, yet to this day, in an endless stream of press releases and op-editorials, the Discovery Institute—the de facto high command center of the Intelligent Design movement—continues to protest that ID is not a religious view. But the curtain had long since been pulled aside, more memorably with the leak of “The Wedge”, a manifesto which detailed the Discovery Institute’s plans to promulgate ID

<sup>1</sup> While the evidence of the substantive religious nature of Intelligent Design that was presented in the *Kitzmiller v. Dover* (2005) trial is especially well known, there were many early and also more detailed accounts, including (Pennock 1996, 1999 Chaps. 1 & 5, 2004; Forrest 2001; Forrest and Gross 2003 Chap. 9).

as a theistic antidote to what it saw as the devastating cultural consequences of scientific materialism. The writing style makes it unlikely that Johnson wrote the Wedge document himself, but the text clearly reflects his way of framing the issues and articulating the goals of the movement. Darwin, Marx and Freud in particular are singled out for “debunking traditional conceptions of both God and man.” As put forth in the Wedge document, Intelligent Design aims at nothing less than to “defeat scientific materialism and its destructive moral, cultural and political legacies.” The positive governing goal was more ambitious still, namely, “To replace materialistic explanations with the theistic understanding that nature and human beings are created by God.” (Discovery\_Institute 1999).

The Christian elements of IDC are readily visible in the Wedge right from its opening sentence, which speaks of “the proposition that human beings are created in the image of God” as a bedrock principle of Western civilization. One also finds conservative political elements that reveal the connections of the movement to its deep-pocket right-wing political backers—claims that scientific materialism is to blame for the evils of “modern approaches to criminal justice, product liability, and welfare” as well as “coercive government programs that falsely promised to create heaven on earth.” (Discovery\_Institute 1999). And one especially finds IDC’s distinctive analysis of the purported philosophical walls and foundations—evolution and scientific naturalism—that they believe keep people from acknowledging God as True Creator.

Why do IDCs try to disguise the religious nature of their views? The simple, practical answer is that they needed to do so as a legal maneuver in the United States to try to get past the Constitutional separation of church and state. But they also see it as a way of controlling the terms of the debate to deflect discussion away from having to defend Biblical truth directly. As Johnson explains in an interview:

The great problem from the Christian viewpoint is that the whole controversy over evolution has traditionally been phrased as a Bible vs. Science issue, and then the question becomes how do you defend the Bible? Or do you defend it? You might just give up and say, “Well we’ll treat it as myth,” but then if you don’t do that, you have to decide what to defend, and you make a defense of the Bible and Biblical authority. Now, the problem with approaching it this way is that in our culture it is understood that science is some objective fact-finding proceeding. And if you are arguing the Bible vs. Science, then people think that you are arguing for blind faith against objectively determined knowledge or experiment. (Lawrence 1999)

The way to overcome this great problem is to attack the objectivity of science. What one does not see explicitly in the Wedge document, but which permeates IDC writings and strategy, is what formed the key conceptual weapon in its attack on materialism and scientific naturalism. “My plan, as it were, is to deconstruct those philosophical barriers” explained Johnson in an interview in the Berkeley Law School newsletter, “I’m relativizing the philosophical system.” (Silberman 1993, p. 4).

In the epigraph at the head of this article, Johnson explicitly—and with what seemed to be impish glee—identified himself as a deconstructionist and postmodernist (Johnson 1995a). This radical philosophy is the second, and most distinctive, progenitor of IDC.

### 3 Postmodern Patterns

In *Tower of Babel* I quoted that line and drew attention to the unusual postmodern element in the ID creationist movement (Pennock 1999, pp. 206–214). In one section, I highlighted

some of the ways in which postmodernist language and concepts appeared throughout Johnson's writings.

When he claims, for example, that scientists are attracted to naturalism because "It gives science a virtual monopoly on the production of knowledge," he is echoing the deconstructionist charge that knowledge is not discovered but rather is fabricated by the intellectual capitalists who own the factories of the knowledge business. When he equates scientific naturalism with "scientism" he is repeating the name-calling led by antiscientific cultural relativists. When he says Darwinism is science's "creation story" he is echoing the social constructionist charge that science simply delivers narratives that are epistemically on a par with other myths and stories. When he says that "Darwinist religion" is forced upon the public through "a program of indoctrination in the name of public education," he is following the lead of cultural relativists who hold that science is somehow a "Western" construct and that science education is merely propaganda. When he describes the scientific community as a "priesthood" that "guards the door" of knowledge, he is making the central post-modern point that knowledge is simply that story whose authors have the power to suppress other stories. (Pennock 1999, p. 211)

Such postmodern elements formed the basis of the IDC strategy for correcting the failed Creation-Science attack on evolution.

As Johnson himself pointed out, his approach was to take a chapter from postmodern Critical Theory and to deconstruct and relativize science's assumptions.

Scientific naturalism still reigns supreme among senior faculty and in the natural science departments, but in the liberal arts and social sciences a relativistic pluralism is gaining ground. ... The newly fashionable post-Modernist model of knowledge is not based on scientific empiricism, but on literary criticism, and its philosopher kings are Richard Rorty, Stanley Fish, and Jacques Derrida. Knowledge in this model is relative to culture, and no single picture of reality has absolute authority over rival cultural understandings. (Johnson 1992a)

There is no need here to discuss all these postmodern figures, but Johnson's appeal to Rorty is worth mentioning briefly. In a 1997 interview he explicitly calls on Rorty in his critique of naturalism and evolution to draw a radical relativist conclusion.

In reality, Johnson says, naturalism undermines reason. "Richard Rorty says, 'Darwinism means there is no objective rationality. All we know is what's good for us.' The obvious conclusion from that is, believe whatever you want to believe." Darwinian evolution says that the brain evolved strictly as a means to one species' survival. Why should it be capable of knowing truth? By evolutionary standards, a more postmodern version of truth would be likely truth as a means of hegemony, a way for one group to outsurvive another. "Deconstruction," Johnson says, "is the natural child of scientific rationalism and the materialist world-view." (Stafford 1997)

I will here resist the urge to offer a critique of the various problems with this view.

Johnson also appeals to several philosophers of science whose work had affinities with postmodern ideas. Thomas Kuhn's ideas about scientific revolutions are a staple. For instance, in responding to a question about the facts and evidence for evolution presented in natural history museums, Johnson says:

Well, you think those are facts, and actually they're imaginative reconstructions that come from people who have a very committed bias. ... What I'm saying is that there is a lot of interpretation based in these things which is—is done by human beings who already have a theoretical paradigm in mind. (Glassman 1997)

Other IDCs echo Johnson on this. William Dembski, for instance, writes, “As Thomas Kuhn clearly taught us, the old guard is not going to change its mind. By being wedded to a failing paradigm, they suffer from the misconceptions, blindspots, and prejudices that invariably accrue to a dying system of thought.” (Dembski 2004). In *Tower of Babel* I also discussed the way in which IDCs misappropriate Kuhn's own position and will not repeat that discussion here (Pennock 1999, 206–210). Johnson also appeals to John Searle's book *The Construction of Social Reality*, though he faults Searle for not taking constructivism far enough and recognizing that scientific materialism and Darwinism are themselves socially constructed (Johnson 1995b). Appropriating Searle is actually quite unfair, as the radical postmodernism that Johnson wields in attacking science goes well beyond Searle's more moderate and reasonable form of social constructivism.

With more justification, Johnson often appeals to the anarchist philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend. He writes that Feyerabend,

... became notorious as the leading voice for “epistemological anarchism,” the precursor of what today we call post-modernism. In his most famous book, *Against Method*, Feyerabend denied that there is any single form of reasoning that can be labelled “the scientific method,” asserting brazenly that the basic rule in science is that “anything goes.” Many scientists were not amused. (Johnson 1996)

Johnson goes on to draw a religious lesson, criticizing modernist theologians for rejecting the Truth of Jesus as the one way to salvation.

As a philosopher Feyerabend was particularly concerned with the tension between truth and freedom. Once we have found some final truth, something that is true beyond question, must we give up our freedom to doubt? Jesus claimed to be the only way to the Father, and also said “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” This is a scandal to modernists, for whom the idea of absolute truth implies oppression, not freedom. C. S. Lewis memorably caricatured the modernist mentality in *The Great Divorce*, in the form of a theologian who refuses to enter heaven unless the celestial powers guarantee that he will find there an atmosphere of free inquiry. The ministering spirit responds that, on the contrary, “I will bring you to the land not of questions but of answers, and you shall see God.” The theologian spurns this “ready-made truth which puts an end to intellectual activity” and opts for hell—where, as in a deconstructionist English Department, the absence of truth allows an unlimited scope for interpretation. (Johnson 1996)

There are many interesting details here that one could go into, but I want to draw out just two of these postmodern threads in more detail.

### 3.1 Postmodern Narratives: The Creation of Stories and the Story of Creation

One strand of postmodernism takes a certain view of literature as the primary model for understanding all knowledge claims. This view holds that knowledge is a story we tell ourselves (or that is told to us). As Johnson puts it, “Post-Modernism challenges the objective validity of academic traditions by starting from the premise that knowledge

comes in texts whose meaning and value are determined by communities of interpreters” (Johnson 1992b). In its radical version, postmodernism holds that knowledge can never be more than *just* a story. One can see the utility of such a view for someone who aims to overturn science.

The way Johnson explains the significance of the ID movement is always in postmodern terms of power and narrative. For instance, he regularly speaks of the function of evolution as a secular creation story and the way in which cultural elites indoctrinate the masses with it. In *Darwin on Trial*, he puts the point this way:

The story of human descent from apes is not merely a scientific hypothesis; it is the secular equivalent of the story of Adam and Eve... Propagating the story requires illustrations, museum exhibits, and television reenactments. It also requires a priesthood, in the form of thousands of researchers, teachers, and artists who provide realistic and imaginative detail and carry the story out to the general public. (Johnson 1991, p. 83)

He does the same thing in an interview in 2000. Explaining how he decided to tackle “the big issues” and become a “cultural revolutionary”, Johnson again singled out what he said is the signature cultural importance of evolution as its narrative of creation.

The biggest issue of all is the official creation story of our culture, the story that tells us how we come to exist and how we relate to ultimate reality. In our culture that is Darwinism... It governs not only science, but all aspects of intellectual work, including law. (Quinn 2000)

Johnson also claimed that he discovered that the idol of evolution had feet of clay, which is to suggest that it is a false idol, but the real postmodern critique also opens the door to creationists’ preferred theistic view of nature. Johnson puts it this way:

Darwinist evolution is an imaginative story about who we are and where we came from, which is to say it is a creation myth. As such it is an obvious starting point for speculation about how we ought to live and what we ought to value. A creationist appropriately starts with God’s creation and God’s will for man. A scientific naturalist just as appropriately starts with evolution and with man as a product of nature. (Johnson 1991, p. 131)

That is to say, do not think that science has anything to do with reality; evolution is just an imaginative story. It just happens to be one told by the science tribe. On the radical postmodern view, science has no special privilege over any other views of the world even with regard to matters of empirical fact; every tribe may take its own story as the starting point for its other beliefs. ID creationists are equally justified in taking God’s creation and will for man as their starting assumption.

There is another sense in which IDCs make special use of the postmodern idea of narrative that is worth mentioning. While Creation-Science focused on Genesis, IDC’s defining Biblical passage comes from John 1:1 “In the Beginning was the Word...” This is the divine Logos, the Supreme Rationality. While IDCs will often try to link this to the mathematical concept of information (Dembski says that ID is just the Logos of John’s Gospel put in the terms of information theory), the more basic point meshes nicely within the postmodern framework of the creation of narrative—God’s initial act of Creation takes place by means of language; it is a literary event.

### 3.2 IDC, Authority & Postmodern Power Dynamics

A second key concept in postmodernism is that of structures of power. Reversing the idea that knowledge is power, they say that it is power that determines what counts as knowledge. Power is wielded by controlling the terms of discourse. And by virtue of establishing the cultural narrative, the cultural elites maintain authority and power for themselves.

IDC regularly criticizes science in just this way. “Darwinism is politically correct for the scientific community” explains Johnson, “because it enables them to fight off any rivals for cultural authority.” (Johnson 1992a). Postmodern analysis is always put in terms of power dynamics, and Johnson attacks scientists with this critical bludgeon. Scientists supposedly do not accept evolution because of evidence, but rather because it helps keep them establish their cultural power, especially in relation to religious authorities. At one point, Johnson quoted Feyerabend again to emphasize his claim about scientists’ exercise of their power.

Scientists are not content with running their own playpens in accordance with what they regard as the rules of the scientific method, they want to universalize those rules, they want them to become part of society at large, and they use every means at their disposal—argument, propaganda, pressure tactics, intimidation, lobbying—to achieve their aims. (Johnson 1995b)

Usually, though, he just states the postmodern point about power elite and their control of the cultural narrative in his own terms.

The secular intellectuals become the priesthood. Their cultural story dominates. It feeds their sense that they have a wisdom the masses don’t have. Naturalism is their vehicle to replace the religious clergy with the scientific and intellectual professionals, the priesthood being the people who tell a society its creation story, and in this case the creation story being the naturalistic one. (Goode 1999)

IDCs regularly echo Johnson’s rhetoric of scientists as a “priesthood,” as “imperialists,” or some similar term that frames them as oppressive cultural authorities; elsewhere, for example, he speaks of “the mandarins of science” (Perry 2003) The postmodern point is to view science in terms of the assertions of power and control of discourse, thus rendering scientific conclusions not as discoveries but as dogma.

[I]f you want to see real dogmatism unrestrained, you must go to the higher reaches of the academic world and the scientific profession because the natural checks on dogmatism aren’t there. Now, you’re aware that out there in the culture there are people who are thinking differently than you, but they’re not authority figures, they don’t have any authority over you, so you don’t have to take them seriously if you’re in the higher reaches of the academic world and the scientific profession. (Goode 1999)

Here again we see the postmodern slide between the idea of being an authority and the notion of having authority or power over someone.

The authoritarian model of justification is connected to a particular notion of legislation: we are to accept laws because they are made by recognized authorities. The say-so of the proper authority provides justification for a law *because* a recognized authority is author of law. Here we see another connection to the idea of creation—recognized authorities ground laws because they have a licensed power to create them. The main thrust of the postmodern

critique of science, which rejects the possibility of scientific objectivity, is to analyze it within the framework of authoritarian power structures and then to challenge the privilege of scientists to pronounce upon the state of the world.

Curiously, at least some of the roots of the scientific notion of law do go back to an authorial model; specifically, to the authority and authorship of God. The “laws” of nature were understood as those nature must obey because they were so created by the divine legislator and Creator (Ruby 1986). Ironically, this idea that God set forth the laws of nature has historically been one common way to reconcile science and religion, but IDCs reject this and other forms of theistic evolution out of hand. Such a God is too “distant” they say. Such “accommodation” is unacceptable because it departs from their particular theological views about how God intervenes in the world.

Although in this article I am focusing mostly on the postmodern element in IDC, the evangelical Christian elements are always evident as well, as in Johnson’s Genesis-based explanation of what drives scientist to go so wrong.

Science is just like any other human activity, including religion or politics. Whenever it begins to get successful in worldly terms, you get careerists. You get people who want money and prestige, and so you get corruption. That’s the doctrine of Original Sin. (Busey 1992)

It is significant to his own Christian witness that Johnson does not exempt himself. Indeed, he explains that he understands this temptation because he too succumbed to it in his earlier academic life.

It follows along on my own experience of the intellectual arrogance that comes naturally to an academic winner, an academic goldmedal winner such as myself. Scientific naturalism is a thing that’s attractive to that sort of people because it says that the secular intellectuals are the people to whom the world should look for all wisdom. (Goode 1999)

It was a mid-life crisis that led Johnson to question his presumption and his assumptions and eventually come to accept Jesus and reject evolution.

#### 4 The Conception: Johnson and Critical Legal Studies

Johnson has told the story of his conversion to Christianity in many interviews. As an associate dean at Berkeley during the early 1970s, one part of him was repelled by the student radicals on campus while another part simultaneously envied them for actually believing in something, misguided though it was. He was disappointed by his academic career and by his life.

It seemed to me I had a genuine talent but I had wasted it. Then I went through a divorce, a period of single-parenting, and these experiences combined to convince me to a large extent, at least that people like me were not superior because of our higher rank in the intellectual hierarchy. (Goode 1999)

Listening to a pastor speak one night at his daughter’s Vacation Bible School, he was inspired by the man’s faith. “*You know he really believes this and I could too. I could be like that*” [emphasis in original] he recalls thinking. (Stafford 1997). He eventually joined a Presbyterian church in Berkeley known for being “a Bible-expositing church” (Busey



1992) and after a long period of soul-searching made a Christian commitment. As we will see in a moment, it is a curious irony that postmodernism was instrumental in Johnson's conversion.

He has also often told a story of how he decided to take on the "Darwinist establishment". As he began a sabbatical leave at University College in London for the 1987–1988 academic year, he says that he prayed for an insight that would be worthwhile and make him more than "an academic who writes papers and spins his words." He passed by a scientific bookstore on his walk to his office the very first day and "encountered" Richard Dawkins' book *The Blind Watchmaker*. He devoured the book and quickly followed it up with the 1985 anti-evolution book *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* by Australian antievolutionist Michael Denton, and "within a few weeks" told his wife that he understood what the problem was with evolution. He told her that being a law professor and not a scientist, he would be ridiculed to challenge evolution professionally and that it would become a lifelong, never-ending battle. "That was of course irresistible," he said; "I started to work the next day." (Stafford 1997).

It may not have been an answered prayer that led Johnson to pick up and buy *The Blind Watchmaker*. Significantly, it was just in that summer that Johnson began his academic year in London that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the *Edwards v. Aguillard* case that Creation-Science was not science at all but rather religious in nature and thus could not be taught in the public schools without violating the Constitution. As a lawyer and an adult convert to evangelical Christianity, this court decision no doubt stimulated his interest in Dawkins' book, which had just been published the previous year and which addressed just the sorts of arguments against the ability of evolution to explain complex biological design that Creation-Science appealed to. Later that Fall, Johnson was introduced to Stephen Meyer, now the head of the Center for Science and Culture at the Discovery Institute, but then a graduate student in History and Philosophy of Science at Cambridge University. Meyer's own anti-Darwinism was "well cemented" by that time (Meyer 2001) and he was already allied with a group in the Pacific northwest (the nucleus of the future Discovery Institute) who were attempting to form a stance and organization around the anti-evolutionary views of Charles Thaxton, Walter Bradley, Roger Olson and Dean Kenyon. (Yerxa 2002, p. 50). As Meyer tells the story, Johnson said that reading Dawkins and other popular explainers of evolution like Stephen Jay Gould, Michael Ruse and Mark Ridley made him suspicious: "'Something about the Darwinists' rhetorical style,' he told me later, 'made me think they had something to hide.'" (Meyer 2001). In a 1997 interview, Johnson explained the effect on him in more detail, and he did connect it to his prayer for insight: "I read these books, and I guess almost immediately I thought, *This is it. This is where it all comes down to, the understanding of creation.*" [emphasis in original] (Stafford 1997).

It is astounding, to put it mildly, that someone would feel that he understood "what the problem is" with evolution after just a few weeks of reading a handful of popular accounts. Why wouldn't one think it necessary to study the subject directly before calling the basic discovery and fundamental explanatory framework in biology into question? Why would one focus on the "rhetorical style" of popular accounts of evolution? This is especially strange with regard to *The Blind Watchmaker*, given that Dawkins forthrightly explains in the Preface that he will likely give pause to his professional colleagues in his use of the "tricks of the advocate's trade" to inspire the reader, rather than just dispassionately laying out the evidence as would be done in a scientific treatise (Dawkins 1986, p. x).

Part of the answer may lie in the fact that Johnson was reading with the eye of a professional advocate; indeed he prided himself upon having applied his legal skills to the task of evaluating the evidence for evolution. But this would be a misleading view; as I

have pointed out elsewhere (Pennock 1999, pp. 181–182), the legal rules of evidence bear scant resemblance to the scientific notion.<sup>2</sup> The more significant answer, as the outline above suggested, is that Johnson even at that time was thinking in postmodern terms. It was only 3 years prior to his London sabbatical that Johnson had published an invited review article on Critical Legal Studies in the *Stanford Law Review*. We shall see some of the details of this conceptual conversion and the review article shortly. My contention is that it was the reading and thinking about postmodern philosophy that Johnson did to prepare for that article that formed the basis for both his final conversion to Christianity and his subsequent attack on evolution. After the Law Review article was published, he continued to make use of what he had learned in his year-long study of this philosophy, by turning “the same critique these Marxist law professors were making” against a different set of subjects. He joking referring to himself as “the entire right wing of the Critical Legal Studies movement” (Kushiner 2002).

There is plenty of evidence for this conclusion in the consistent postmodern elements throughout Johnson’s writings on evolution. They are already present in the 1989 Position Paper he circulated for the Campion Center “Science and Creationism in Public Schools” Meeting, and they are even clearer in his 1990 *First Things* article “Evolution as Dogma: The Establishment of Naturalism”. Further direct evidence of how postmodernism is the mother of IDC may be found in a few interviews and other direct statements, such as the one quoted in the epigraph.

He explicitly articulated the full framework of his radical critique of evolution in a 1990 interview published in the *Bible-Science Newsletter*, the house organ of the young-earth creationist Bible-Science Association. The interview was done with young-earth creationist Nancy Pearcey, who became an early member of the ID movement and helped write the creationist textbook that would eventually be published as *Of Pandas and People*.

In his interview with Pearcey, who clearly knew just what questions to ask to elicit the intended critique, Johnson begins with what will become the signature trope of IDC, that evolution itself has no empirical support but is propped up by the philosophical dogma of scientific naturalism:

Darwinism is not a description of what scientists see at all. It is a deduction from what they believe. It is a statement in biological terms of philosophical naturalism: that nature is all that exists, that it is a closed system of material cause and effect. (Pearcey 1990, p. 8)

We also find an explicit rejection of the mainstream Christian view which holds that evolution is compatible with theism. “Theistic Darwinism” insists Johnson, “is a contradiction in terms.” (Pearcey 1990, p. 8). Darwin himself would have disagreed with Johnson’s sophomoric claim here.

The postmodern elements come to the surface in a section titled “Knowledge and Power”, where Johnson, speaking with a nod to Bob Dylan’s revolutionary anthem, says that “Times are changing.” Darwinism was an “intellectual fad” that had run its course. He compared it not only to the discredited ideologies of Marxism and Freudianism, but also to the authoritarian political ideology of Eastern Europe, whose walls were at that time crumbling before the world’s eyes. Even such an entrenched oppressive ideology can

<sup>2</sup> There may be a more cynical sense in which Johnson’s training as a lawyer reinforced his skepticism about science and his thoughts about conflicting stories. “In the legal culture,” he explained “there’s an inclination to believe there are two sides of every story, and that the experts are bluffing as much as not.” (Quinn 2000).

collapse in an instant once people lose their fear of it, as it stands only by virtue of power and intimidation. He put the point this way:

I believe intellectual intimidation has been the main strategy by which the Darwinist faith has been maintained in this country, and when people see that there's nothing to fear they'll be willing to challenge it. (Pearcey 1990, p. 10)

Johnson then appealed to a movement within the philosophy and sociology of science—the so-called “Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK)” or “Strong Programme”—which is not the same as, but does have close conceptual affinities to postmodernism. With no mention of Bloor (1991 [1976]), Barnes et al. (1996), or others of the “Edinburgh School” that spawned SSK, let alone the fierce criticism that it drew, he blithely claimed that it was now “regarded as a commonplace in the field that there is a ‘sociology of knowledge’ and that an intimate relationship exists between knowledge and power. What is presented as objective knowledge is frequently an ideology that serves the interests of some powerful group.” (Pearcey 1990, p. 11). This is not the place to discuss what is right and wrong about Johnson's quick gloss on the Strong Programme—in its extreme form, SSK does take a relativist approach to knowledge claims, but even in its heyday was not “commonplace” but rather was viewed with some disdain by much of the field. The significant historical point for our purposes here is that Johnson, who does gloss SSK and postmodernism in the same terms, explicitly says that he is taking up their approach in his critique of evolution:

The curious thing is that the sociology-of-knowledge approach has not yet been applied to Darwinism. That is basically what I do in my manuscript. (Pearcey 1990, p. 11)

The manuscript he is speaking of here in 1990, is that of his book *Darwin on Trial*, which would fire the opening salvo for IDC when it was published the following year. And, as I pointed out in *Tower of Babel* (p. 211), the publisher's title was not Johnson's choice; his preferred title for the book had been *Darwin Deconstructed*.

#### 4.1 Berkeley's Radical

In another long and especially revealing interview, Johnson went into more detail about his conversion experience. It was not a dramatic conversion, but rather a gradual one. Having been inspired during his personal crisis to consider the possibility that he could accept Jesus, he says that he then had to consider the philosophical question of “whether Christian metaphysics were real or imaginary, or if I would be throwing my brains out the window and adopting a myth because it satisfied my personal needs.” (Kushiner 2002). Ironically, it was postmodernism that helped him resolve the question for himself.

Johnson explains that to help address his philosophical question, he began to take up jurisprudence, the field that examines the philosophical roots of law. The timing was significant, for it was just at this time that Critical Legal Studies had emerged as a movement within jurisprudence scholarship. Critical Legal Studies, as he explained, “was the postmodernist, deconstructionist, epistemological relativism and Marxism that were in the English departments and had just come into the law schools, especially at Harvard and Stanford.” (Kushiner 2002). He says that he found it quite interesting.

In preparing for an invited review article on Critical Legal Studies for the *Stanford Law Review* he says he spent a whole year reading their dense 120-page law review articles and studying continental philosophy. In so doing, he developed “a love-hate relationship with

neo-Marxism,” rejecting its “infantile leftist politics” but agreeing with its critique of liberal rationalism and legal scholarship (Kushiner 2002). It was this reading, especially the critique of the idea of neutrality in law, that led him to reject rationalism and to accept the idea that Christianity could provide the fundamental premises for a new belief system.

One could devote an entire article to an analysis of the many ways in which the main elements of the IDC critique of evolution were prefigured in Johnson’s article on Critical Legal Studies, but because of constraints of space I will have to give just some representative examples. It is also striking just how easy it is to find the roots of what became Johnson’s odd hybrid of religion and postmodernism. In one passage where he turns the weapons of Critical Legal Studies against itself, he was already beginning to intertwine postmodern and Biblical ideas.

Even the fundamental premise of their criticism—that purportedly neutral legal doctrine operates to mystify and legitimate existing patterns of domination and subordination—is quite literally the oldest argument in the book, and its paternity is not encouraging. “‘You will not die,’ the serpent told Eve as they eyed the forbidden fruit, ‘[f]or God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’” (Johnson 1984, p. 248)

Although in this particular passage he is attacking Critical Legal Studies, in another section of the article he explicitly applauds its critical analysis of the received view in jurisprudence, which held that judges weighed laws from an objective position. He argued that CLS was correct to question what he called the “sham neutrality” of the judiciary, but argued that it had an enormous stake in protecting the illusion of neutrality. Why?

[B]ecause its power depends heavily on the public’s willingness to believe that the courts arrive at doctrines through some process of objective reasoning. If the public ever came to believe in Legal Realism, the independence of the judiciary would be in danger. A mystique is needed to prevent this calamity. (Johnson 1984, p. 270)

Johnson would later regularly deploy this argument against evolution and science, arguing that scientists conspire to maintain the mystique of science as an objective fact-finding enterprise and evolution as a fact. In this article he says that “the existing legal order, is not as securely founded upon reason as some people like to pretend” (Johnson 1984, p. 249). Later, he would simply turn this same argument against the existing scientific order. Science, he would come to argue, is actually a self-serving illusion supported by the biased philosophical dogma of naturalism.

It is especially ironic that in absorbing and later applying CLS’s postmodern critique of the established legal order into the IDC critique of evolution and scientific naturalism, Johnson forgot many of the problems he had noted in the article about that form of criticism.

[D]iscarding the vulnerable positive program of Marxism generates at least two further difficulties, neither of which has been adequately addressed in any of the Critical legal literature with which I am familiar. First, how are we to judge the validity of a Marxist critique of capitalist society if Marxism is so wrong in its positive program? (Johnson 1984, p. 259)

The second major problem with a purely negative use of Marxism is that criticism itself is meaningless without a standard of reference, whether express or implied. ... My point is not that one always has to propose an alternative when one criticizes, but rather that failure to specify the standard of reference robs the criticism of meaning. (Johnson 1984, pp. 260–261)

Critical scholars sincerely want to be radicals, he writes, but “Unfortunately, they do not have a radical alternative to propose. Their strategy in this awkward situation is to retreat into a mystical utopianism...” (Johnson 1984, p. 249). These very points would later be made against IDC. Johnson criticizes others for sins that IDC would later commit wholesale.

## 5 The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil

The postmodern element in IDC fulfils a strategic function in the attack on evolutionary naturalism, but for Johnson, at least, is not cynically strategic. If this account of his slow conversion is accurate, then postmodernism was a key aspect of his acceptance of Jesus. In the way he then set up the ID creationist attack on evolution, Johnson was witnessing and attempting to recreate for others the same conceptual conditions that allowed him to accept the Biblical story of Creation, morality and salvation as authoritative. And, yes, morality and Biblical authority is the basic issue.

In a 1992 interview that Johnson judged to be one of his best, he spoke of what he said are the two philosophical assumptions that Darwinian evolution depends upon. The first is what we have already discussed, namely, materialism or philosophical naturalism. The second, he claimed, is “that Science always has to have the answer to how we were created. You can’t say, ‘We just don’t know.’ That’s not allowed.” (Busey 1992).

Johnson is wrong on the second point as well as the first, of course. It is a basic virtue in science to be forthright about what one does not know; indeed there is hardly a scientific paper published that does not highlight unanswered questions. But why does Johnson think that pointing out gaps in scientific knowledge is not allowed? Because otherwise there would be a vacuum, he says, and everyone knows what would come into that vacuum:

Yes, God. The Creator. Then you would have people considering the possibility that God exists, that there might be a Creator responsible for our existence. And the whole point of the Darwinian system is to get rid of that idea... (Busey 1992)

Had the interviewer been a mainstream Christian theologian the next question would likely probed this reliance on the untenable God of the Gaps argument. But the evangelical interviewer does not recognize this as a problem and asks instead why scientists “hate the idea of God”? Johnson has a ready answer:

That’s always a major part of the human project, to get rid of God so we can be utterly self-sufficient and on our own. Darwinian Evolution did a better job of getting rid of the Creator than any other system. It’s really the foundation for everything that’s happened since. (Busey 1992)

And so we are back again to Original Sin—it is the sin of pride that comes before the fall. Naturalism, liberal rationalism, postmodernism and the morally hollow culture they purportedly cause are the result of the prideful attempt to usurp the authority of God. In postmodern terms, it is the rejection of any God’s-eye view or master narrative. Because everything is but an interpretation, we become the authors of our own narrative.

Secularized intellectuals have long been complacent in their apostasy because they were sure they weren’t missing anything important in consigning God to the ashcan of history. They were happy to replace the Creator with a mindless evolutionary process that left humans free and responsible only to themselves. They complacently assumed that when their own reasoning power was removed from its grounding in

the only ultimate reality, it could float, unsupported, on nothing at all. As modernist rationalism gives way in universities to its own natural child—postmodernist nihilism—modernists are learning very slowly what a bargain they have made. It isn't a bargain a society can live with indefinitely. (Johnson 1993)

### 5.1 Moral premises

One reason Creationists insist upon the significance of Creation is that they believe that the world has a moral structure that gets its justification only by virtue of God's intentional designs. Molecular biologists may argue for the validity of evolutionary theory on the grounds of its usefulness for scientific purposes, says Johnson, but a mother in Kansas might have different important purposes and so not want her children to be indoctrinated in the truth of a materialist system. "Should we consider, for example", he continues, "the much broader effects it has in terms of implying a certain kind of cosmos, in terms of delegitimizing certain kinds of moral order?" (Johnson and Easterbrook 1999).

I have previously discussed the creationists' basic existential worry that evolution implies that life is meaningless and without purpose and that it undermines the possibility of moral values (Pennock 1999, Chap. 7; 2007) so I won't repeat the details of that account, but will try to give a sense of it by means of a common example.

The first element is illustrated in Johnson's appraisal of a book by J. Budziszewski, who is probably most famous for the Christian advice column "Ask Theophilus" that he wrote for many years. Budziszewski is a Discovery Institute Fellow and one of a group of faculty members in the University of Texas at Austin Philosophy Department who are long-time ID advocates. In a glowing review of one of Budziszewski's books, Johnson especially lauds a chapter that takes up a Christian appraisal of Natural Law Theory, a view which holds that there is a moral structure inherent in the world itself. Budziszewski is right that natural law can't substitute for divine revelation or saving grace, writes Johnson; "For a Christian the Bible is the paramount authority on moral questions, but the Bible itself teaches that God has a witness (general revelation) to the pagans." (Johnson 1997b). This idea that God's design is detectable in the created world, especially in biology, is one of the central dogmas of creationism.

Johnson continues, "The concept of natural law makes sense only if our lives have a purpose." The evolutionary view—modernity's official doctrine of creation—thus provides no foundation for moral reasoning because we are simply accidental by-products of purposeless natural processes. We can do whatever we want to. Contrast this view to that of the Westminster Catechism, he says, which states that "Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever." According to Johnson, "From that statement we know that a moral law exists, and it consists of those precepts that teach us how to achieve our chief and highest end. If we start there, we can read what is written on our hearts." (Johnson 1997b).

Johnson emphasizes in nearly all his writings and speeches that one must build on the right starting premises. This is why overturning the false premises of materialism and reestablishing the proper theistic assumptions (their own, of course) is the governing goal of the ID movement. Again, it was his study of postmodern philosophy that led him to this conclusion. He explicitly credits Critical Legal Studies for the insights that led to his gradual conversion and that continued to guide his thinking.

The other component of rationality is having the right premises. How do you get them and how do you determine that they are right? Not by logical reasoning, surely,

because then you would be reasoning from other premises in order to justify them. There is an instinct, or revelation, or whatever you want to call it, that underlies your thinking, and the only interesting problem in philosophy is how you get *that* (Kushiner 2002).

Figuring that out, he said, was the death of rationalism, as far as he was concerned. It allowed him to accept the premises of evangelical Christianity and then eventually to critique the theory of evolution.

Remember that my interest was in finding out whether the Christian gospel was rational. Of course, it wasn't rational by the standards of the academic world. One of the good things about the Christian life was that it opened up a whole world of intellectual input that previously had been closed to me. I began to understand what was actually wrong with the academic culture, and to put a name on my uneasiness. It was the seed of what would later be a full-blown critique of Darwinism. It "evolved" in a directed and purposeful manner!

"Where do the givens come from?" was the question I often asked myself. Eventually, that led me to the whole question of the gospel, and the way Jesus deals with people. "Follow me," he said. He gave a new set of premises, a new foundation. One of the very interesting things about Jesus is that when he deals with people, whether they are believers or unbelievers, friends or foes, they are supposed to know who he is. It's perfectly understandable: "I am who I say I am." When you see the truth, when you meet it face to face, you're expected to know it. If you refuse it, you are refusing to see the truth. (Kushiner 2002)

This led him to what became the starting point for his new view of the world.

Either the gospel of Christ is the centerpiece of a new order or it's nothing. That was so fascinating to me. Then I saw how this was the right principle and starting point. In all of my writing, I concentrate on that starting point. "In the beginning was the Word." A few simple principles. If you stay with those, you'll be all right. (Kushiner 2002)

Again, this is the substantive assumption of the Intelligent Design movement.

## 5.2 Eve's Curse

As one example of how he sees Christian theistic principles applying in specific cases, Johnson writes about one of the central values of the Declaration of Independence:

The founding document of our national tradition states that "all men [we would now say all persons] are created equal." This means that, despite their differing abilities and attainments, all persons are of equal importance in the sight of their creator, who is the author of values." (Johnson 1992b)

How could human equality be vouchsafed if we suppose that "men and women are not created, and instead evolved by some haphazard process from animals"? What happens if "the author of values has been exposed as an impostor and all persons must now decide for themselves what they will believe. On what foundation, then, can human equality rest?" He poses just three options: that equality is just a fact everyone can see, a scientific hypothesis open for testing, or a story that appeals to certain kinds of listeners.

Setting aside consideration of the fallacies of this simplistic analysis, Johnson's example is telling in several ways. First of all, equality is a basic ethical value that he can expect

will be warmly received. He also clearly wants to show the connection between a Christian value and a basic political value of American democracy. But problems with the equality example arises even if one ignores the necessary usage update he had to make (i.e. his bracketed point that we would today say “persons” rather than “men”).

Is it really the case that we have no ground for equality without a sacred Christian notion of the Creation? And is this really the sound foundation that he claims. Not all Christian groups, after all, and especially not fundamentalists, are quite so supportive of equality. They often disparage the idea of women’s equality as well as that of many other groups. Indeed, Johnson himself is not beyond belittling various movements for social equality: “There is a mad reductionism at work [in the universities],” he says, “God is not a proper topic for discussion, but ‘lesbian politics’ is.” (Johnson 1992b). Criticizing post-Marxism, he writes:

In post-Marxism, racial minorities, feminists, and gays have assumed the mantle of the proletariat; the oppressor class is heterosexist white males rather than the bourgeoisie; and the struggle is for control of the terms of discourse rather than the means of production. (Johnson 1992b)

Indeed, he speaks of such academic movements in terms of cultural relativism and ideological prejudice.

As new groups have begun to assert themselves, the philosophy of cultural relativism has made it easy to justify the institution of advocacy departments, in subjects like ethnic studies, women’s studies, and now gay and lesbian studies. The premise of these departments is that the groups in question have been silenced and stigmatized, and therefore they need to find their own voices and assert their own theories of knowledge. This premise implies a certain homogeneity of ideological approach. One does not expect to find many professors of women’s studies who favor restrictions on abortion, although many women take that position. Just as the Evolutionary Biology Department by definition rejects the creationist, women’s studies by definition excludes the antifeminist.” (Johnson 1992b)

Given that so many of his most common examples of the wrongness of modernist thinking involve feminism, one may wonder whether Johnson still bears a grudge against the women’s movement of the early 1970’s that he blames for his divorce. But there may be a another explanation of the genesis of such views—Genesis itself.

The Biblical creation stories do not stop, after all, with the origins of the world and of biological life in general. They also speak of the creation of Adam and Eve (not Adam and Steve, as fundamentalists jokingly point out) and in their story of God’s creation of the pain of childbirth and God’s assignment of duties to man and to women.

To the woman he said, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” (Genesis 3:16, New International Version)

Moreover, the consistent Biblical commandment to women is to be quiet and submissive to men, and the “traditional” sort of moral order that ID and other creationists want society to be based upon is one where men and women have proper and God-given roles. Lesbian politics, gay marriage and feminism are unlikely to make the cut in the cultural renewal they envision.

This is but one aspect of the Biblical world order they hope to restore through the overthrow of evolution and scientific naturalism. As with the specifics of their true beliefs



about the nature of Creation, IDCs try to keep these conservative fundamentalist elements hidden behind their public façade, but the pattern is readily discernable when one wades deeply into their writings and it sometimes breaks to the surface with startling force. I once took some of my students to a talk by Discovery Institute Senior Fellow and co-founder George Gilder when he spoke about Intelligent Design to a local conservative political group; in this group of like-minded social conservatives his explanation of ID was perfunctory and he spent the bulk of his time railing against the evils of feminism, female-headed households, homosexuality, polygyny, and even Title 9 sports.<sup>3</sup>

## 6 The Sins of the Father: Postmodern Premodernism

In 1999, when IDC was still in the ascendancy, Johnson again spoke of the utility of postmodernism in the debate when asked about it in an interview in *Communiqué*. Postmodernism was “already having a big effect”, he opined. The confident scientific rationalism that had dominated the universities, he said, was giving way to the view “that there are different rationalities” and that no single kind of rational system could combine everything. He admitted that postmodernism could poison the mind when it became excessive and verged into nihilism or indifference, but insisted that “taken in the right doses, it’s a healthy antidote to excessive rationalism.” (Lawrence 1999) Here and elsewhere that Johnson is especially keen about the utility of postmodernism for attacking science. Postmodernism was having “a big effect”, he said, in helping to open the universities “to challenges to the dominant scientific materialism.” (Lawrence 1999)

He also mentions in passing an aspect of postmodernism that was especially healthy and positive in his view: “[Y]ou find the notion that non-Western ways of thinking must be treated with respect, that even ancient traditions of tribes may have their truth value...” (Lawrence 1999).

What “ancient traditions of tribes” must Johnson be thinking of here if not those at the root of Christianity? The governing aim of IDC program, as we have seen, is to bring about a cultural renewal where the Christian idea that human beings are created in the image of God is fully recognized as the bedrock principle for all aspects of social and political life and policy. Biblical truths about Creation are to be taken as the foundation for the true *theistic* science—truths involving God’s designs and purposes that supposedly provide a moral structure to the world, including a universal standard of proper behavior for men and women. No wonder the promise of recognition of the truth value of their tradition makes postmodernism seem so seductive, at least at first. No wonder the *pomme* is so tempting.

But there is a worm in the apple that is signaled even in the shiny phrase that these ancient traditions “may have their truth value”, because the radical postmodern view holds that all narratives—all “rationalities”—are equal and allows no special privilege to any truth claim over any other. Once this is understood, it is evident that for a religious fundamentalist, marrying Christian fundamentalism with postmodernism is an unholy union.

One *Communiqué* reader, who on other points found Johnson’s program to be “vital and sound”, balked at his appeal to postmodernism, using many of Johnson’s own favorite Biblical passages against him:

<sup>3</sup> This whole issue of IDC and sex deserves separate treatment, but that will have to wait for another opportunity.

The idea that there are different ‘rationalities’ is simply false. As Christians, we are committed to the view expressed by John 1:1—“In the beginning was the Word...”—the Logos, Supreme Rationality. At least part (and perhaps the most significant part) of what constitutes our being ‘made in God’s image’ is our rationality, a rationality that is one and however imperfectly, reflects God’s. So, to say that “there really isn’t one single kind of rational system that can combine everything in the world,” misses the fact that God’s single system of rationality does! (see John 1:1) [http://communiquejournal.org/q6\\_johnson.html](http://communiquejournal.org/q6_johnson.html)

This reader’s concern highlights the danger of IDC’s postmodern dalliance, for it undermines the Good News that they think evolution is censoring and blocking—that, God as they conceive him, is the one true Creator and does provide the only “God’s eye view”. It is hard to see how IDC leaders could fail to recognize this.

Dembski, for one, even while he uses postmodern theory as an acid to erode scientific naturalism and modernism, does recognize some of the problems that it causes for Intelligent Design with regard to its fundamental theological commitments. In particular, he warns, “Neither modernity nor postmodernity supplies the resources for discerning God’s hand in the world” (Dembski 1999, p. 44), which of course is what IDC hopes to legitimize as scientific. Postmodernism allows sign-seeking from God, but restricts it to believers in a religious community of discourse.

Within postmodernity, signs apply strictly within a community of discourse. To speak of ‘the signs of the times,’ as Jesus does, with the intent that certain signs assume universal significance irrespective of ideological precommitments, is anathema within the postmodernist perspective. Whereas modernism asserts that the sign-giver always remains silent, postmodernity asserts that the sign-giver is irrelevant and that any signs are strictly a matter of private interpretation by the sign-seeker.”(Dembski 1999, p. 45)

Dembski of course defends premodernism for it is, in his words, “a worldview rich enough to accommodate divine agency.” (Dembski 1999, p. 45).<sup>4</sup>

The fact that the quoted *Communique* reader took umbrage to the postmodern approach is not the least surprising. Creationism is and always has been a premodern view, so to try to marry postmodernism and Christian creationism as IDC does is to bring forth a monstrous hybrid with an internal contradiction. To give just one illustration, consider another major strategic innovation for creationism that is also due to Johnson. It was Johnson who is credited with forging an alliance between young-earth creationists (YECs) and old-earth creationists (OECs). He convinced them to set aside their internal theological differences in order to become more effective against their common enemy, evolution. Once they had successfully overcome evolutionary naturalism and established the basic fact of Creation they could turn again to the question of the age of the earth and other points of difference. To effect this alliance, IDC promised to remain publically agnostic about how old the earth is, which is no mean feat given the many orders of magnitude difference between the 4.5 billion year scientific estimate that old-earthers are willing to accept and the 6000 year estimate of the young earthers! The IDC leadership includes both OECs and YECs, but they would refuse to discuss which view they held.

After a decade and a half of strategic silence and deception regarding his own view on this key issue, it was only last week, as I write this, that ID leader William Dembski, in

<sup>4</sup> I have previously discussed the premodern sins of IDC (Pennock 2006) and won’t review that here.

response to a theological challenge from a Baptist pastor that attacked his doctrinal *bona fides* and thereby his teaching job at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, was forced to put in writing “I am an old earth creationist” (Dembski 2010).

In a similar way, the postmodern relativism that dispenses with truth in favor of culturally situated narrative is inimical to the fundamentalists’ belief that their truth is God’s Truth, so such an alliance among fundamentalists with different views of Biblical truths cannot be sustained for long, even for the political expedience of defeating their common enemy. It appears likely that Dembski himself does not accept postmodernism as a substantive part of his philosophy as Johnson seems to, but rather deploys the postmodern critique only strategically. However, such a cynical, ends-justify-the-means approach only compounds the deceptions that are endemic to IDC, causing a serious moral tension, to put it politely, in the movement. Either way, the “postmodern premodernism” of IDC is a devil’s bargain.

## 7 Avoiding the Postmodern Sin

The postmodern DNA that Johnson combined with creationism continues to define the ID movement today and its coiled threads still form the warp of its fabric. I have focused here on documenting these elements primarily in Johnson’s own words, but the repeating pattern may be seen in all the leaders and followers of the movement. Dembski, for instance, regularly uses not only the postmodern locutions that we have already mentioned, but has become a master at pushing it farther. In one creative passage he not only echoes the standard postmodernist tropes, but even brings in Post-Colonialism, comparing evolutionary scientists to oppressive British imperialists:

For now, evolutionists are sitting pretty. They hold the reigns of power in the academy, they control federal research funds, and they have unlimited access to the media. But, like English colonialists trying to keep a colony in check, they are in a distinct minority. A feature of colonialism is that colonists are always vastly outnumbered by the people they are controlling and that maintaining control depends on keeping the requisite power structures in place. The reason intelligent design has become such a threat is that it is giving the majority of Americans, who don’t buy the atheistic picture of evolution peddled in all the textbooks, the tools with which to effectively challenge the evolutionists’ power structures. (Dembski 2004)

Johnson’s postmodern notions were governing the IDC rhetorical strategy even as the movement was on the ropes in the historic 2005 *Kitzmiller v. Dover* case. Richard Thompson, the Thomas More Law Center attorney who was defending the Dover School Board’s Intelligent Design policy, was asked in an interview whether he wanted to change the definition of science to include the supernatural. “Yes,” he answered, parroting Johnson’s appropriation of Thomas Kuhn’s notion, “we need a total paradigm shift in science.” And perhaps without quite realizing what he was saying, he appealed to social constructivism and SSK: “What is science, and what is not science, is merely a convention. It can be challenged and changed at will by scientists themselves. And scientists are the products of their culture, too.” (Slack 2005) To mention just one more example, after the trial Norman Levitt wrote an excoriating critique of the radical social constructivism he found in the views and arguments of IDC witness Steve Fuller (Levitt 2006).

These and the full arsenal of IDC's arguments utterly failed in their courtroom test. But 4 years after the Dover verdict put the nail into the coffin of the "cdesign proponentsists"<sup>5</sup> and their movement, the Discovery Institute is still flogging the postmodern horse, charging in a suit they are pursuing against a science center that canceled one of their films that excluding them amounts to "viewpoint discrimination." Johnson had introduced the legal theory that discriminating against creationism would be a form of viewpoint discrimination in *Darwin on Trial*. I previously discussed this argument and its postmodern connection in *Tower of Babel* (Pennock 1999, p. 361–376) and there is no need to repeat it here. Scientists must still be vigilant in responding to attacks on science education that use IDC ideas but, like postmodernism itself, the movement has played itself out conceptually and is spinning its wheels. Recognizing the postmodern structure of their arguments will also make them easier to rebut.

The history of the postmodern roots of IDC presented in this article also suggests an important lesson for science education. Part of the reason that the postmodern ideas used by IDC were as successful as they were is that we do not do enough in education to explain the nature of scientific methods of investigating the world. Not yet possessing concepts of evidence and argument, high school and even beginning college students typically take an argument to be merely a matter of opposing assertions. This fits with their idea that support is achieved by citing authorities. The sophomoric rebuttal to a claim is thus an indignant or belligerent "Sez who?!" Students in this adolescent stage of cognitive development still think that issues are decided by appeal to authority.

A key concept for science educators to help our students understand is that science rejects that notion of appeal to authority; whatever authority scientists have is only indirect, deriving from their methods of uncovering the natural laws that govern the world. The central task of the scientist is not to be an author but to be an investigator, and the justification for a scientific conclusion does not derive from the say-so of an authority, but depends upon observational evidence. Blaise Pascal put the point succinctly: "On subjects in [the physical domain] we do not in the least rely on authorities—when we cite authors, we cite their demonstrations, not their names." (Cohen 1995, p. 159) Indeed, the Royal Society, one of the oldest professional scientific institutions in the world, adopted the motto *Nullius in verba* to explicitly distance empirical justification in the then new modern science from the ancient method of justification by reference to an authority. "Upon the words of no one" was to stand in contrast to the idea expressed in Horace's phrase [*Iurare in verba magistri*, that is, "to swear upon the words of the master".

Creationists want to return to the words of the master—literally to the word of God. As we noted, the favorite scripture of the IDCs is the passage from the Gospel of John "In the Beginning was the Word," and it is upon this authority that they ultimately want to base their "theistic science." Dembski goes so far as to say, following theologian Karl Barth, that "any view of the sciences that leaves Christ out of the picture must be seen as fundamentally deficient." (Dembski 1999, p. 206).

What we need to do as science educators, is to get our students to move beyond simple-minded appeals to authority and teach them the structure of argumentation and the nature of evidence so they can recognize the difference between good and bad reasoning and between real scientific evidence and religious pseudoscience.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Forrest unearthed this now-classic transitional form between creationists and design proponents in an early 1987 manuscript draft of the IDC textbook *of Pandas and People* that was subpoenaed as part of the Kitzmiller trial, showing clearly how Intelligent Design was literally a relabeling of Creation-Science. <http://ncse.com/creationism/legal/cdesign-proponentsists>.

This article was not meant to be an argument against IDC, which has been well debunked and has not had any new ideas worth debating in over a decade. Like the undead Creation-Science movement, IDC now operates in a zombie state of mindless attack and repetition of long-buried arguments against the possibility of any natural explanation for “irreducible complexity”, “complex specified information” and the “purposeful arrangements of parts.” Strictly speaking, those arguments were themselves not even new, but just variations of Creation-Science chestnuts. In detailing the postmodern element in IDC, my goal was mainly to explain a feature of IDC that was especially distinctive and to give a history of its genesis.

However, in the end, there is a lesson to be drawn from this history, though it is not about the details of creationism’s dalliance with postmodernism; this affair, in any case, is not the worst of IDC’s sins by any means. The real scandal is that of the academy in *its* dalliance with radical postmodernism. Intelligent Design Creationism is a particularly telling example of the postmodern sin.

IDC shows in a striking manner how radical postmodernism undermines itself and its own goals of liberation. If there is no difference between narratives—including no difference between true and false stories and between fact and fiction—then what does liberation come to? Are scientific investigations of human sexuality really no more likely than the Genesis tale of Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib? Those original goals—the overthrow of entrenched ideologies that hid and justified oppression—that motivated the postmodern critique were laudable. But the right way to combat oppression is not with a philosophy that rejects objectivity and relativizes truth, for that guts oppression of its reality.

In his article, Johnson began with some harsh words for the practitioners of Critical Legal Studies:

We expect adolescents to come up with grand criticisms of the existing order without proposing a realistic alternative, but by the time one graduates from law school, or at least by the time one achieves tenure on a law school faculty, we generally expect the former adolescent to have developed a willingness to come to terms with reality. (Johnson 1984, p. 248)

In an interview many years later Johnson remarked, “I’ve found that people often say things about their enemies that are true of themselves” (Johnson 1992a), without apparently appreciating the reflexive irony of his observation. His rhetorical question to those who might be tempted by Critical Legal Studies (which he must have forgotten when embarking on his own adolescent challenge of evolutionary science), applies equally to Intelligent Design Creationism and to extreme postmodernism—“Do You Sincerely Want to Be a Radical?” We do not need a God’s-eye view of truth-with-a-capital-T to recognize oppression, but we do need the grounding in reality that science helps provide. We need at least that mundane sort of truth if we are to be set free and it was the sin of radical postmodernism to think otherwise.

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