

The infamous August 1999 decision by the Kansas Board of Education to delete references to evolution from Kansas science standards was heavily influenced by advocates of intelligent-design theory. Although William A. Dembski, one of the movement's leading figures, asserts that "the empirical detectability of intelligent causes renders intelligent design a fully scientific theory," its proponents invest most of their efforts in swaying politicians and the public, not the scientific community.

Launched by Phillip E. Johnson's book *Darwin on Trial* (1991), the intelligent-design movement

stated in the idiom of information theory." Wedge strategists seek to unify Christians through a shared belief in "mere" creation, aiming—in Dembski's words—"at defeating naturalism and its consequences." This enables intelligent-design proponents to coexist in a big tent with other creationists who explicitly base their beliefs on a literal interpretation of Genesis.

"As Christians," writes Dembski, "we know naturalism is false. Nature is not self-sufficient. . . . Nonetheless neither theology nor philosophy can answer the evidential question whether God's interaction with the world is empirically detectable.

## The Newest Evolution of Creationism

*Intelligent design is about politics and religion, not science.*

crystallized in 1996 as the Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture (CRSC), sponsored by the Discovery Institute, a conservative Seattle think tank. Johnson, a law professor whose religious conversion catalyzed his antievolution efforts, assembled a group of supporters who promote design theory through their writings, financed by CRSC fellowships. According to an early mission statement, the CRSC seeks "nothing less than the overthrow of materialism and its damning cultural legacies."

Johnson refers to the CRSC members and their strategy as the Wedge, analogous to a wedge that splits a log—meaning that intelligent design will liberate science from the grip of "atheistic naturalism." Ten years of Wedge history reveal its most salient features: Wedge scientists have no empirical research program and, consequently, have published no data in peer-reviewed journals (or elsewhere) to support their intelligent-design claims. But they do have an aggressive public relations program, which includes conferences that they or their supporters organize, popular books and articles, recruitment of students through university lectures sponsored by campus ministries, and cultivation of alliances with conservative Christians and influential political figures.

The Wedge aims to "renew" American culture by grounding society's major institutions, especially education, in evangelical religion. In 1996, Johnson declared: "This isn't really, and never has been, a debate about science. It's about religion and philosophy." According to Dembski, intelligent design "is just the Logos of John's Gospel re-

To answer this question we must look to science." Jonathan Wells, a biologist, and Michael J. Behe, a biochemist, seem just the CRSC fellows to give intelligent design the ticket to credibility. Yet neither has actually done research to test the theory, much less produced data that challenges the massive evidence accumulated by biologists, geologists, and other evolutionary scientists. Wells, influenced in part by Unification Church leader Sun Myung Moon, earned Ph.D.'s in religious studies and biology specifically "to devote my life to destroying Darwinism." Behe sees the relevant question as whether "science can make room for religion." At heart, proponents of intelligent design are not motivated to improve science but to transform it into a theistic enterprise that supports religious faith.

Wedge supporters are at present trying to insert intelligent design into Ohio public-school science standards through state legislation. Earlier the CRSC advertised its science education site by assuring teachers that its "Web curriculum can be appropriated without textbook adoption wars"—in effect encouraging teachers to do an end run around standard procedures. Anticipating a test case, the Wedge published in the *Utah Law Review* a legal strategy for winning judicial sanction. Recently the group almost succeeded in inserting into the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 a "sense of the Senate" that supported the teaching of intelligent design. So the movement is advancing, but its tactics are no substitute for real science.

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See also *Creationism's Trojan Horse: The Wedge of Intelligent Design*, by Barbara Forrest & Paul R. Gross, Oxford University Press, 2004.