

Book Review

Barbara Forrest and Paul Gross. Creationism's Trojan Horse: The Wedge of Intelligent Design. (Oxford, 2004), 315 pages plus endnotes and index. Page references referring to this book appear in the text.

By Gary Jensen, Pastor and M.A. candidate in Science and Religion from Biola University

Who are the Authors?

The book, *Creationism's Trojan Horse* (CTH), has two authors. Barbara Forrest was firstly an instructor and then Professor of Philosophy at Southeastern Louisiana University (SLU) where she has served since 1988. She received her B.A. in English (SLU), and both her M.A. (Louisiana State University) and her Ph.D. in philosophy with her dissertation in "**Naturalism** in Education" (Tulane University -- boldface mine). She is on the Board of Directors of the *National Center for Science Education*, and the Board of Trustees of *Americans United for the Separation of Church and State*. Significantly she is also a member of the *New Orleans Secular Humanists Association* (where she was named *Humanist of the Year* in 2006)¹ and, as a matter of relevance,² also a plaintiff in the *Kitzmiller vs. Dover* legal decision pertaining to allegations of teaching of "creationism" in public schools near Dover, PA.³ In one of her lectures, Forrest stated, "*The motivation behind all [creationist arguments] is religion. In no case has the teaching of creationism been motivated by scientific advancement or anything like that.*"⁴

Paul R. Gross earned his B.A. in 1950 and a Ph.D. in general physiology in 1954, both from the University of Pennsylvania. He received honorary degrees from Brown University and the Medical College of Ohio. As of the time of the website posting, he is also a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has taught at Brown University, the University of Rochester, MIT, and now is Professor Emeritus at the University of Virginia. He has written extensively on the themes of science and culture.⁵ His article titled "Politicizing Science Education,"⁶ drew the ire of the Discovery Institute of Seattle (DIS),⁷ by his assertion that the latter's Intelligent Design (ID) agenda "*gravely misrepresented several of the key issues*" of scientific theory and practice. Significantly, the book cover identifies the authors' agenda as one of documenting "*the most recent manifestation of American science education's perennial affliction: creationism*" (boldface mine -- notice the prejudicial verbiage employed by even the publisher). Me thinks they doth protest a wee bit too much!

The Main Theses

The substance of the authors' line of argumentation is based on five assertions: 1) Strategies of inquiry based on ID are incompatible with legitimate *scientific* investigation, 2) ID is substantially indistinguishable from young-earth creationism (YEC), **3) The DIS "Wedge Document" gives indication that ID's considerations are driven by religious convictions; not scientific truth**, 4) DIS is dishonest about its ultimate intentions, including its employment of "theistic" science for the purpose of

¹ http://www2.southeastern.edu/Academics/Faculty/bforrest/Forrest_ONLINE_Vitae_July_07.pdf

² David DeWolf, etc. "*Scientists and Advocates on all Sides of the [ID] Issue have Religious (or Anti-Religious) Motivations.*" Traipsing into Evolution: Intelligent Design and the Kitzmiller vs. Dover Decision. (Discovery Inst. Press, 2006), p. 113f.

³ Op.cit. (1), p. 114.

⁴ Barbara Forrest, William Jaynes, and Steve Harvey, "Religious Liberty and Public Education." Youtube.com/watch?v=_YcitVs-KYo (16:50f).

⁵ <http://www.scienceinmedicine.org/fellows/Gross.html>

⁶ http://www.edex.s3-us-west-2amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/Gross_7.pdf

⁷ "Open Letter to Paul R. Gross." <http://discovery.org/a/391>. p. 1.

advancing a theocratic society, and 5) ID claims are roundly discredited on the grounds of “legitimately-attained” (that is, Darwinian) scientific understanding.

The Overall Contents and Organization of CTH

Two general themes dominate this work. Firstly, CTH both begins and concludes its book with considerations about DIS’s “Wedge Document” (WD). Chapters 1-3 examine and judge ID’s religious and philosophical underpinnings and goals, while chapters 6-8 identify ID’s strategy and assesses its progress in achieving the goals envisioned in WD. Secondly, chapters 3-5 evaluate the intellectual claims of the leading proponents of ID, most notably, Michael Behe, William Dembski, Philip Johnson, Stephen Meyer, and Jonathan Wells.

Strengths?

In order to justify my assessment of this book, I wish to clarify what I judge to be minimal factors that constitute legitimate academic scientific discourse. Valid scientific inquiry into a specific question entails minimally at least three aspects: 1) the commitment to seeking the truth itself, and doubly-so, in light of the empirical and mathematical data that is relevant to the matter that is under consideration,⁸ 2) commitment to a self-critically-grounded humility which acknowledges the limitations of scientific knowledge with respect to the philosophical question, “Can life in its present level of complexity be accounted for by mindless, and consequently unguided processes, alone?”, and 3) a commitment by each party that the deliberative process should be judged under the same criteria and standards.

As I have written in one of my postings, it is not only YECs who are epistemologically hindered by their *a priori* religio/philosophical agenda, but Darwinists too (by their reductionistic philosophical naturalism). While it is the case that under ID inquiries into the question of evidence for an intelligent designer, neither religious texts nor anti-theistic philosophical commitments restrict which direction the data of the phenomenon that they are investigating will lead their search for answers to their questions that are under consideration, that is not true for committed Darwinists. In a manner consistent with YECs, they too restrict themselves to evidence which assumes Darwinism to be true. As for criterion 3 (above), William Dembski spotlights the imposition of a double standard by the authors of CTH in their goal to discredit ID investigations. In summary, in regard to accounting for the history of the development of life, they didn’t enter into a contest that is framed between **equally** empirically-bound hypotheses. Instead, they applied a double standard in which ID proponents are expected to make an air-tight case that is based on currently observed “eliminative” scientific facts, while Darwinism, on the other hand, is entitled to hold out for potential (yet-to-be-discovered) “pathways” that *could* conceivable be imagined to successfully account for the present complexity of biological order. In Dembski’s reply to that challenge, he wrote, “*Evolutionary theory is thereby rendered immune to disconfirmation in principle, because the universe of **unknown** material mechanisms can **never be exhausted***” (boldface mine).⁹

Since ID conclusions are not drawn primarily from either induction or deduction, but instead by inference to the best explanation in the face of multiple competing hypotheses (abduction), it is unreasonable that they should be criticized on the grounds of their evidence falling short of actual proof. The critique that DTH brings to bear on ID is consequently grossly unfair (pun intended);

⁸ When former atheist Antony Flew became a believer in God, it was in part insights from ID discoveries which played a significant role in his conversion. Regis Nicoll. “Antony Flew’s Change of Mind.” www.breakpoint.org/features-columns/breakpoint-columns/entry/2/1604.

⁹ Wm. Dembski. *The Design Revolution*. (Intervarsity, 2004), p. 222.

especially so since Darwinian evolutionary assertions rest far less on empirical support than they do on the postulation of abstract possibilities (above paragraph). For this reason, I judge this book to amount to more huffing and puffing than bringing truth, concerning the origins and development of life, to light.

Weaknesses?

At the first direct mention of ID proponents (page 6), over a span of just ten lines, the authors introduce their entire movement by repeatedly connecting deliberately-unflattering modifiers together with their respective nouns and verbs ("*perennial nuisance*," "*persistent fecklessness*," "*attempts to insert religion...are unceasing*," "*efforts to force [religion] into our curricula*," "*the most notorious nearly successful attempt*." My initial suspicion that this sarcastic ploy would continue throughout the book was quickly proven not to be mistaken.

Recommendations?

Although I am persuaded that the authors were convinced that they accomplished their intention to delegitimize ID, I judge their tome to be so riddled with personal animosity as to render it difficult to separate fact from fabrication and fiction. For this reason I judge them to have not adequately supported their theses. Should the authors reconsider this venture, I suggest they revisit the three criteria I raise in the first paragraph under the section, "Strengths?" (above). I understand that CTH is very popular with Darwinists. Nevertheless, for the reason that CTH kindles more smoke than light, I simply cannot recommend it to any group, either curious students of ID, or budding Darwinists.