

## Article

*Historical Method and the Intelligent Design Movement*

*Part I: Intelligent Design Movement as a Foray in Secularization Theory*

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*Proponents of the Intelligent Design Movement identify themselves principally as scientific thinkers working to remove philosophical bias from modern science, especially evolutionary biology. A review of their popular literature, focusing on that of Phillip Johnson, shows that their arguments rest heavily upon historical, not scientific critiques. They are less concerned with science itself than they are with the impact of science on culture. They enter the debate with desired cultural norms pre-selected as the conclusions of their arguments. They therefore write about the secularization of the West and in doing so betray a polemical and apologetic rationale underlying their critique of Darwinian evolutionary theory.*

**P**hillip Johnson, and after him members of the Intelligent Design Movement (IDM), want to know why important and powerful members of the Western societies seek to do without religion. As the name implies, Intelligent Design (ID) is an attempt to revive the theistic Argument from Design, not on classical premises but on scientific observations purportedly not explicable by known natural forces or laws. IDM is a multifaceted intellectual, polemical, and political movement. The main force in its public presence has been Johnson and his campaign to unseat what he sees as the pseudo-science supporting modern evolutionary biology. On the technical side, William Dembski has presented highly sophisticated (though not widely accepted) mathematical and philosophical models for supporting IDM and for creating a design-oriented scientific method. However, at the popular level, as it is expounded in his books and articles, Johnson's ID campaign is really about the place of theology as a science itself (and the misplacing of science as a theology); about the role of philosophy in the interpretation and teaching of scientific investigation; and about

forms of authority in the academy and society at large, especially in areas related to ethics. In short, as Johnson has framed it, IDM is much about the secularization of the West.

In the now more than decade long history of the IDM and its critics, arguments have clustered around a series of thematic nodes: whether it is or is not reasonable to conclude that the complexity of living things indicates their design rather than chance appearance; whether many biologists' resounding negative to that question indicates a conclusive scientific finding or is in fact a philosophical prejudice; whether such discussions should appear in textbooks; whether, if "teaching the controversy" were in textbooks, the argument would breach the separation wall between Church and State. In all of this, one angle appears ignored, or certainly underplayed: the extent to which the IDM is a fundamentally historical enterprise. After all, the two basic claims advanced by the movement are historical assertions. The first is that a study of organisms living and fossil, not dependent upon the context of a sacred text, nonetheless reveals the action of intelligent design. Proponents proclaim that life history is in fact the history of an agent or agents acting in our world. The second, which is much nearer to what people tend

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to think of as “history,” is a claim about the intellectual development of the West since the era of the Enlightenment and principally since Darwin published *The Origin of Species* in 1859.

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It is not my purpose to enter into the debate about which scientific facts support or demolish claims of design. Instead, as a historian, especially with some background in Church and intellectual history, I want to focus on the historical claims about the recent past of the West put forward by IDM proponents, specifically Johnson but also Nancy Pearcey. It is interesting that while Johnson has a great deal to say about the impact of philosophical naturalism (which he sees at an apogee in Darwinian evolutionary theory) on western intellectual life and society in general, he has not attracted many historians to his cause. Perhaps only one historian of national reputation has become an IDM scholar. Richard Weikart has written engagingly and provocatively about the impact of evolutionary thought on German eugenicists and on the Nazis. Nevertheless ID arguments seem to have moved few historians. This may well be because historians are insular (which I think they are), or because they are overwhelmed by the scientific nature of the debate. I suspect it is also because historians just do not sense the same cultural crisis moment or sense it in the same way that those IDM proponents do and thus are not moved by the IDM’s historical critique of Darwinism.

Since the early 1990s, Johnson has appeared in print voluminously and across several formats. He is well documented on the web, especially at the Access Research Network website, in various journals, especially *First Things*, and most famously in various books: *Darwin on Trial* (1991; 1993), *Reason in the Balance* (1995), *The Wedge of Truth* (2000), and *The Right Questions* (2002).<sup>1</sup> Though he engages in scientific and philosophical polemic, Johnson is also essentially writing a Christian history (and not only

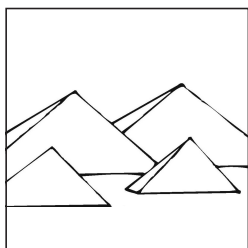
in the sense of applying terms of Christian philosophy to the problems of history). Johnson argues that “more than science” is at stake. He writes:

These questions [of whether evolution is literally true or just the best naturalistic theory available] cannot be left to the sole determination of a class of experts, because important questions of religion, philosophy, and cultural power are at stake. Naturalistic evolution is not merely a scientific theory; it is the official creation story of modern culture. The scientific priesthood that has authority to interpret the official creation story gains immense cultural influence thereby, which it might lose if the story were called into question. The experts therefore have a vested interest in protecting the story, and in imposing rules or reasoning that make it invulnerable. When critics ask, “Is your theory really true?” we should not be satisfied to be answered that “it is good science, as we define science.”<sup>2</sup>

## Secularization as a Historical Narrative Scheme

Johnson answers this challenge by re-writing a creation story of his own: once there was a time when right belief guided people in their basic assumptions and choices about the good of life. Then through the eighteenth century machinations of intellectuals, temptation in the form of secular state theory and in the form of philosophical materialism crept into the original Eden. People clung to the old truth in their minds through force of habit or, more likely according to Johnson, because they were not fully persuaded of the temptation. Then Darwin, in part deluded and in part deluder, produced a grand lie: material forces and natural processes alone could explain the existence and diversity of living things. It was a catastrophic assault on God and God’s order. People through ignorance or through the increasing authority and power of science imbibed the lie. Jurists, legislators, even theologians co-opted themselves to promote the lie. Error replaced right reason as the basis of law and policy, and chaos ensued. Thus the Fall. Then, when all seemed blackest, persons of good will and ability began to unravel the lie. It was possible, they said, that in restoring right reason to science, one might therefore refashion science itself to see the old truth once hailed by theology: the origin of all creation in God and God alone. Once acknowledging that fact, people could rebuild law, commerce, education, and science on solid principles of the Natural Law. Right Order might yet return. Thus the Redemption.<sup>3</sup>

In summarizing Johnson this way, I do not intend to be flip. The Creation, Fall, and Redemption scheme is one promoted by IDM commentators, especially Nancy Pearcey. Pearcey is a fellow of Seattle’s Discovery Institute, the flagship institution of the IDM. She has also served as the



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managing editor of IDM's main journal, *Origins and Design*. She is a Christian apologist and polemicist heavily influenced by Reformed theology, and an impressive debater. Apologists like Johnson and Pearcey represent a striking renaissance in evangelical intellectual life. Johnson in particular is possessed of a broad and brilliant mind, an engaging wit, and facile and tenacious debater's skill. There is nothing inherently wrong with his choice to create a mythological narrative of the decline of the West. It is in fact well within an ancient tradition of Western historiography dating certainly from the advent of Christian times. In recent history, commentators like Oswald Spengler or Arnold Joseph Toynbee, although in different idioms, have done no less.<sup>4</sup>

My objection is not so much in principle, but that this narrative does not carry much persuasive force. The IDM narrative myth depends crucially on our ability to identify unambiguously a time when the power of the lie did not distort humans' minds. To do this, we must presumably survey Western societies sometime between the advent of Christendom but before the onset of the Darwinian revolution. We must identify not only philosophers and thinkers who are saying the "right thing" according to Johnson's criteria, but we must also identify populations in these societies who are routinely doing the right thing and then stop doing it once they feel the impact of Darwin. This is a difficult task, even in the recent history of the modernizing United States.

In their famous study of Muncie, Indiana, Robert and Helen Lynd believed they had documented secularization and the decline of religious belief. Visiting the town in 1929 and again in 1935, they concluded that religious life was markedly declining compared to twenty or thirty years earlier.<sup>5</sup> However, when the National Science Foundation conducted a follow-up study for the fiftieth anniversary of the Lynds' work, the results indicated a strong reversal: by all measures, the town showed a greater religiosity than was apparent even in 1929.<sup>6</sup> Subsequent studies have shown the same thing and more: it is likely that people, in the United States at least, are not only more religiously active but also more religiously literate than ever before.<sup>7</sup>

Such data do not satisfy Johnson. He may concede that people are talking a great deal about God. He argues that they are discussing the wrong one. Johnson has consistently complained that modern theology, having imbibed the evolutionary story, can now only discuss a god who does not do anything: does not create life directly and does not apparently intervene to alter life or to catalyze events on Earth. Such a do-nothing god, as Johnson would have it, is not compelling or even interesting. For his narrative, Johnson wants a god who is demonstrably (in an empirical sense) on the move.

We can say the same for his pre-Enlightenment, pre-Darwinian philosophies: we want to see where such ideas actually reshaped societies, created worlds alternate to our own. Presumably, we will need to see clearly that such societies existed and existed in their ideas and not the other way around. I believe that, though the historical record documents many individuals having reached ascetic and moral heights through their immersion in philosophy or theology, it will not reveal any such *society*. If anything, Johnson's purported "Age of Faith" may be just as much a nineteenth-century construction as was early Darwinian evolutionary theory.<sup>8</sup>

Consider the rates of illegitimacy in pre-Darwinian societies. Presumably, these societies, still under the sway of an authoritative Christian world view, would demonstrate a different attitude toward marriage, sex, and procreation than the Darwinized, secularized western societies Johnson critiques. However, the historical record does not make any such distinction clear. For example, eighteenth-century Toulouse touted a rise in illegitimacy from roughly 2% in the 1680s to roughly 25% in 1788.<sup>9</sup> Depending on the region of the country, between 10% and 30% of all English brides throughout the Stuart era came to the altar pregnant or with children.<sup>10</sup> In America, the prevalence of premarital sexual activity (as measured by reported cases of unwed mothers) has ebbed and flowed in cycles, not in a pattern of steady progression. The pattern indicates peaks in illegitimacy not only in the twentieth century since 1950 but also across the second half of the eighteenth century as well.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, behavior and public expression have not always matched. As late



as 1969, 110 years after the advent of Darwin, 68% of Americans agreed that "it is wrong to have sex relations before marriage."<sup>12</sup> The case of vice is similarly ambiguous. Nineteenth-century America, from before the Civil War, sought to deal with adultery and prostitution by specifying in the laws that such actions constituted crimes only when committed flagrantly and publicly. Social commentators and reformers acknowledged that controlling the acts was impossible, so they hoped simply to keep such behavior out of the public eye.<sup>13</sup>

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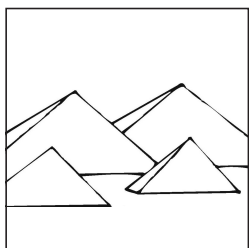
Guessing why these trends might have preceded intellectual disaffection with religious morality, one might point to trends in urbanization just as easily as any cause. As the city grew, what were housing patterns? What happened to family relationships and kin oversight of young people? Could people easily reach the services of clergy and did they want them? Were the fornicating couples of Toulouse religious? One might argue that these people were indeed religious, but not necessarily Christian. Perhaps they were self-identified Christians who were nevertheless ignorant of or dissidents against Church sexual morality teachings. It all depends a great deal upon what one means by "being religious."<sup>14</sup> Certainly those Toulouse artisans were not studying the arguments of scientific philosophical naturalism. The truth seems close to this: as historical observers, we have no way to establish any criteria for Johnson's assertions. We have no way of knowing the actual impact of ideas on populations or, for that matter, whether ideas are part of the cultural output of various societies, or the shapers of the societies in which they reign. Consider one further example: since 1859, have people increasingly fornicated? If they have, is it because they became convinced naturalists who doubted the existence of a law-giving God?

ID proponent Ben Wiker has argued something like this in his *Moral Darwinism*.<sup>15</sup> Wiker explicitly links the hedonism and activism of contraception champion Margaret Sanger to the moral deconstructionism he sees inherent in Darwinian thinking. Setting aside arguments regarding the strength of Wiker's analysis, one is still left with a conundrum: how can we know people's motivations? Were not the changing patterns of sexuality simply the result of people gaining access to cheap, easily supplied contraceptives (arbitrarily picking a reason from among many causes like migration, changing family composition, work patterns, changing political demographics, etc.)?<sup>16</sup> Did people need or wait for philosophical and political justifications for using contraceptives? We have no reason to suspect that, if Darwin had never published, people would have refrained from demanding contraceptive technologies once they were known to exist. In fact, the historical record indicates that people have used contraceptive techniques throughout time, whenever they became aware of them. Considering this point, perfecting the vulcanization of rubber in the mid-1840s<sup>17</sup> was just as big a step along the road to the Culture Wars as anything Rousseau, Locke, Voltaire, or Darwin ever published. Perhaps Charles Goodyear is our villain. Or to reverse the problem: we have no reason to think that a narrative that explained changing patterns of sexuality based solely on the history of contraceptives would be any more convincing than one that blamed philosophical naturalism.

## Intellectual vs. Social History: Which Narrative?

Johnson's choice of granting privilege to intellectual history can superficially help his case. By practices of selective sampling, he and allies like Pearcey can portray a contemporary intellectual milieu seemingly awash in Darwinian dogma.<sup>18</sup> In her recent contribution to William Dembski's IDM anthology, *Uncommon Dissent*, Pearcey posits a sort of Darwinian academic coup that in our day has captured school curricula for the purpose of indoctrinating students with a particular world view.<sup>19</sup> She also has produced a lengthy prescriptive history of the ills of Christianity in America. That work addresses the problems of American Protestantism principally in terms of philosophy and doctrine. There are extensive sections on various aspects of developing "worldview." There are over fifty pages dedicated to the dissection of Darwinism. There are, however, no references to nationalism, to either world war, or to the ambiguous role of the churches in the history of segregation. In short, Pearcey again contends that a particular intellectual history, with spin to match her neo-Calvinist preferences, is sufficient for understanding the social crisis she perceives.<sup>20</sup>

However, this reliance on a tilted intellectual history can and often does place these authors in a bind. Evidence does not indicate that a top-down transformation of



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culture has occurred. If Darwinism has had such a deleterious impact on people, how is it that polling figures show an overwhelming number of Americans who acknowledge God's work in creation or at least question the status of Darwinian evolutionary theory? As the power and prestige of twentieth-century science increased, why did communities like Muncie not apostatize? And what do Americans believe today? Some numbers will help illustrate the point. According to the Gallup Poll organization, between 1982 and 1997, the percentage of Americans who agreed with the statement, "God created people in their present form roughly 10,000 years ago" held steady at around 45%. Two-thirds of high school students polled in 1999, asked about their choice if confronted with contradictory scientific and religious explanations of the world, said that they would accept the religious explanation. Only 27% credited scientific knowledge with priority over religious knowledge. Moreover, between 1983 and 1999, a constant one-third of U.S. public school teachers favored equal time for Creationist alternatives to evolution in the classroom. Lastly, in the general population, between 1982 and 1997, never more than 11% of respondents affirmed the statement that evolution had occurred without any interference at all by God.<sup>21</sup>

It would seem that, given the persistence of the Darwin-doubting numbers in the polls, and given the frustrations this causes people like Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Eugenie Scott, there should be no problem from Johnson's point of view. However, Johnson in return cites social trends in violence, family law, abortion, even the apparent ruling philosophy of the Supreme Court to argue that there is a great problem and that philosophical naturalism is the cause.<sup>22</sup> He would counter that while there is resistance to this naturalism at the grass roots, it is nonetheless confused, somewhat passive, and constantly endangered by the power prerogatives of the naturalist elite.

However, one must note that even while that resistance is recorded in these polls consistently from the 1980s, the nation nonetheless has moved relatively seamlessly into a seemingly permanent accommodation of the same social trends which so alarm Johnson. The historian is compelled to ask whether there has ever existed in people's minds an

active correlation between the tenets of "Darwinically" buttressed philosophical naturalism and the other things they do in daily life. If believing in Darwin made for the various practices Johnson decries, then the polls suggest that these practices should in fact be relatively rare. If disbelieving in Darwinian theory would make people less likely to engage in or to accept these various practices, then why do Americans, who rank the highest in the world when it comes to doubts about Darwin, eschew the barricades and get on with life in the face of these rapidly changing social trends?

Johnson, of course, bypasses this complexity. Instead, he understands that before he can begin his prosecution, he must establish that a crime has in fact been committed. He must do so even if threatened by historical evidence that does not fit his narrative. Getting that indictment is the purpose of his foray into intellectual history and the goal that keeps him from worrying about contradictory evidence of the sort just cited. It is also the mission of his books, especially *Reason in the Balance*. In some ways, *Reason in the Balance* is nothing but an extended essay on the rise and impact of philosophical naturalism in the West. Johnson begins the book with a brief recounting of the public reception of his *Darwin on Trial* (1991). Here he made the argument, that at least at the level of textbooks and science popularizations, explicators of modern Darwinian evolutionary theory were guilty of misappropriation of evidence, falsely sweeping conclusions, and rhetorical infractions serious enough, in his opinion, to impugn evolutionary theory altogether.

Predictably, critics reacted harshly to Johnson and, as he himself says, the ensuing argument soon came to focus not on individual facts but on "how science works." Johnson's critics claimed he was in error in understanding what constituted a scientific fact and how scientists used such facts in their thinking. Johnson argued that he was not ignorant of scientific method, but that he consciously refused to accept the premises that philosophical naturalism basically equated science or that he was under any obligation to propose alternative models for the origin of life or for biological diversity.<sup>23</sup> Instead, Johnson responded with a historical argument. He claimed that for reasons not

really driven by scientific discovery, the civilizations of the West had effected a swap in "Creation Stories." The older model had been the familiar one of creation by God for a set purpose and according to a plan. The newer one, which Johnson would date to the latter eighteenth century, he calls the "naturalistic creation story." This story, he claims, is marked by a consensus first among elites, then generally, that God is but the product of human imagination, and that "all living creatures evolved by an unguided, purposeless material process of random genetic change and natural selection." This naturalism, he argues, only "took hold" after Darwin's 1859 publication of *The Origin of Species*.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, the problem, as Johnson sees it is one of intellectual apostasy. The crisis (and Johnson is emphatic that there is a great crisis) of the West is all a matter of cognition. Other social and economic trends do not figure in his story, except insofar as they may appear to stem from Darwinism. The sin of the West is "thought crime" and from this fundamental error, many others have sprung. In his later works, Johnson, and some of his colleagues like Pearcey, have not been coy about declaiming the results. They link the collapse of theology as a premier intellectual pursuit, the decline of public education, public moral standards, the advent of legalized abortion, and even the twentieth-century totalitarian dictatorships to the rise of a Darwin empowered philosophical naturalism in the arts and sciences. Johnson, Pearcey, and some other IDM writers do not seem interested in population trends, migration, capitalism, industrialization and the growth of the cities, nationalism, not one but two world wars, mass communications, mass transit, or even the computer age. For them, everything hinges on Darwin. It is this rigid single-mindedness that causes these IDM proponents to discount and/or misunderstand other forms of historical evidence and other narratives. I suspect that it is also a strong reason why most historians take no interest in Johnson's crusade.

## From the Privilege of Intellectual History to the Privilege of Theology

In IDM literature aimed at specifically scientific issues, IDM advocates are careful to repeat that the nature of the designer is not an issue. Their claim is simply that living things display a profound complexity which known natural processes cannot have created. Johnson comments:

Science is committed by definition to empiricism, by which I mean that scientists seek to find truth by observation, experiment, and calculation rather than by studying sacred books or achieving mystical states of mind. It may well be, however, that there are certain questions—important questions, ones to which we desperately want to know the answers—that cannot be answered by the methods available to our science. These may include not only broad philosophical issues such as whether the universe has a

purpose, but also questions we have become accustomed to think of as empirical, such as how life first began or how complex biological systems were put together.<sup>25</sup>

This, by the way, raises the question of a rationale for ID. ID purports to use the tools of empirical science to *rule out* the possibility of mere naturalistic laws and chance being sufficient as causes for phenomena like the origin of life or the construction of complex biological systems. How can we obtain an empirical demonstration of the unsuitability of empiricism for investigating phenomena we suspect are beyond the realm of empirical investigation in the first place? And, how can we determine which such phenomena are in fact outside that realm?

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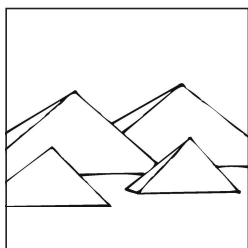
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Assuming they have carried that point, proponents continue that it is reasonable and scientific to infer a designer.<sup>26</sup> Of course, IDM writers like Dembski, Michael Behe, Jonathan Wells, and Paul Nelson so far have not carried the first point in the general marketplace of ideas. But where they have, they assure their opponents that there would be no need to specify the designer. Johnson has been more forthright. Acknowledging that emphasis on Gen. 1:1 ff. has severely handicapped creationist critics of evolutionary biology, Johnson has repeatedly argued that the discussion should shift to the prologue of St. John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word ..." <sup>27</sup> Johnson contends that this is a broadly theistic assertion, leaving room for an allegorical interpretation of Genesis and possibly even the inclusion of other, non-Christian theists. He is undoubtedly right as far as that goes but the greater question remains: it is not clear just how this shift of ground will please Johnson's scientific critics any better than the use of Gen. 1:1 ff. Johnson must know that it will not and therefore must employ the tactic to different ends, like squelching disharmony between young earth creationists and other potentially IDM-friendly groups, a problem endemic to the "Big Tent" strategy of IDM.<sup>28</sup> The point stands however that, in the works of Johnson, IDM is inseparable from a theological position wherein the science plays an apologetic role.

Still, Johnson is a master of engaging polemic, provocative, and highly emotionally charged rhetorical jousting





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worthy of the "culture war" debates of the 1990s. However, just as many critics cannot bring themselves to call it "science," it is equally difficult for a historian to see it as good history. If I were to classify Johnson's place in Western historiography, I would see him as an "anti-Whig." The Whig historians of the nineteenth century, particularly skeptical rationalists like W. E. H. Lecky or J. B. Bury, argued that the advance of civilization was a sort of evolutionary process which became visible in retrospect to the eye trained to follow the intellectual threads of progress. Moreover, the narrative of this development was progress indeed, a sort of teleological journey toward the higher intellectual consciousness wherein humanity freed itself from superstition and ignorance, namely religion. As the great British intellectual historian Owen Chadwick commented:

[H]istorians of European intellect, like ... Lecky or ... Bury, doubted [that the Christian Churches fruitfully adjusted to new knowledge of the world]. To them the progress of truth consisted in the light of science invading dark chambers inhabited by mysticism, until at last no darkness should be left.<sup>29</sup>

For Johnson, the trend is precisely the opposite. As we have seen in his works and those of other IDM apologists, there was a time when Western intellectual life was on the right track. Then, beginning in the eighteenth century, something began to go wrong. Finally, with the advent of Darwin, catastrophe struck, precipitating the Fall. The floodgates of apostasy opened and chaos ensued. Taken in this light, the narrative of *Reason in the Balance* is a Christian history.

Johnson asserts that the rise of philosophical naturalism as the defining method of the sciences has spilled over into other areas, including theology. Having imbibed its own antithesis, theology is powerless to speak to the problems of the now deluded public. Christian influenced policy ideas have no hope in a setting where philosophical naturalism is triumphant and the very fundamentals of society are in jeopardy. As Johnson puts it: "Christian family morality looks like oppressive nonsense if you take for granted that Christian metaphysics has been shown to be false."<sup>30</sup>

So according to Johnson, the real goal behind it all is the rescue of Christian family morality via the rescue of Christian metaphysics. It becomes clear that the IDM is about something else besides science, or at least something more than just science. Particularly in the writings of Johnson, ID becomes a scientifically based apologetic designed to make room for the revival of theology as a serious academic and even public policy enterprise. Even theorist William Dembski routinely resorts to language and ideas of the Culture Wars when writing outside of his scientific idiom. The popular public face of IDM is cultural criticism. It is the very progression from culture critique to idiosyncratic intellectual history to theology driven policy that has rendered ID suspect and has clouded whatever scientific contribution its advocates might otherwise have made. \*

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>For a sympathetic but very informative coverage of Johnson's anti-evolution career, see Thomas Woodward, *Doubts About Darwin: A History of Intelligent Design* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003).

<sup>2</sup>Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, 2d ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 159.

<sup>3</sup>Nancy Pearcey, "Century of Cruelty: Making Sense of Our Era," *Boundless* (December 1999). See also Pearcey's forward to Johnson's, *The Right Questions: Truth, Meaning, and Public Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002). Pearcey repeats her use of this scheme in her *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 134ff.

<sup>4</sup>For Toynbee's great work, see D. C. Somervell, *A Study of History*, abridged, 2 vols. (New York: 1947-1957). See also Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 2 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1926-1928).

<sup>5</sup>Robert Lynd and Helen M. Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: 1929), 407.

<sup>6</sup>Theodore Caplow, et. al., *Middletown Families: Fifty Years of Change and Continuity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 192, 229,

255–6. For an overview of the development of the secularization debates, see William H. Swatos, Jr. and Kevin J. Christiano, "Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept," *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999): 209–28.

<sup>7</sup>Swatos and Christiano, "Secularization Theory," 215.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 219–20. The idea that an "Age of Faith" is a nineteenth-century misinterpretation of medieval history is developed in the work of the Jesuit historian Peter Raedts. See also W. de Ruyter, "Dark, Backward, and Barbarous," *Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions Newsletter* 1, 3–8.

<sup>9</sup>Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, Canto Edition Reprint (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>10</sup>Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580–1680* (New Brunswick, NJ: Routledge, 1984), 84–6.

<sup>11</sup>Daniel Scott Smith and Michael S. Hindus, "Premarital Pregnancy in America 1640–1971: An Overview and Interpretation," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5, no. 4, The History of Family, II (Spring 1975): 537–70.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 560.

<sup>13</sup>Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 8–10.

<sup>14</sup>Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 45–59.

<sup>15</sup>Benjamin Wiker, *Moral Darwinism: How We Became Hedonists* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

<sup>16</sup>Smith and Hindus, 559–60.

<sup>17</sup>Charles Goodyear patented the process of vulcanization in 1844. Soon thereafter, both industrial and consumer rubber products, including vaginal diaphragms, became increasingly available. See Tone, *Devices and Desires*, 53–5.

<sup>18</sup>Johnson, *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997). This is Johnson's popular guide for "striking back" at the supposedly monolithic control of "Darwinism" in intellectual and public life.

<sup>19</sup>Pearcey, "Darwin Meets the Berenstain Bears: Evolution as a Total Worldview" in William A. Dembski, ed., *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), 53–73.

<sup>20</sup>Pearcey, *Total Truth*.

<sup>21</sup>Eugenie Scott, "Problem Concepts in Evolution: Cause, Purpose, Design, and Chance," *NSCE Resource Publications* (1 October 1999), [www.ncseweb.org/resources/articles/695\\_problem\\_concepts\\_in\\_evolution\\_10\\_1\\_1999.asp](http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/articles/695_problem_concepts_in_evolution_10_1_1999.asp) Johnson himself has used similar data to argue not that the public has safely rejected unwarranted philosophical naturalism, but rather that the academic elite have staged a coup against the democratically based educational system. Johnson, "Evolution as Dogma: The Establishment of Naturalism," *First Things* 6 (October 1990): 19–21.

<sup>22</sup>Phillip E. Johnson, "Nihilism and the End of Law," *First Things* 31 (March 1993): 19–25.

<sup>23</sup>Johnson, *Reason in the Balance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 12–5.

<sup>24</sup>Note that Johnson's narrative is linear and unidirectional. Research into the phenomenon of secularization indicates it may in fact be cyclical. See Swatos and Christiano, "Secularization Theory," 16–7.

<sup>25</sup>Johnson, "Evolution as Dogma," 21.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996); William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999); William A. Dembski, *No Free Lunch: Why Specified Complexity Cannot Be Purchased without Intelligence* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002).

<sup>27</sup>Johnson, *The Wedge of Truth: Splitting the Foundations of Naturalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 151–7.

<sup>28</sup>Robert T. Pennock, *Tower of Babel: The Evidence against the New Creationism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 18–26.

<sup>29</sup>Chadwick, 15.

<sup>30</sup>Johnson, *Reason in the Balance*, 32.

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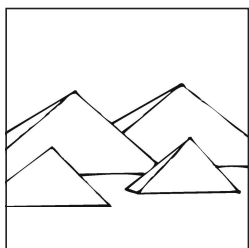
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## Article

*Historical Method and the Intelligent Design Movement  
Part II: A Historical Critique of a Historical Critique*

# Historical Method and the Intelligent Design Movement

## Part II: A Historical Critique of a Historical Critique

*Kenneth E. Hendrickson*

*I hope to offer specific evidence that demonstrates the weakness of Johnson's case and to show that, taken to its own logical conclusions, his secularization argument will ultimately become destructive of the very ideals he hopes to promote.*

*A previous section of this article argued that the Intelligent Design Movement (IDM) functions more as a historical cultural critique than as a scientific paradigm. This section will offer a critique of IDM in those terms: how well it performs the task of historical argument and criticism. IDM publicists like Phillip Johnson or Nancy Pearcey do not offer a well-rounded assessment of the recent intellectual history of the West. Neither do they give a clear picture of the public role of the Churches in the West, a topic central to their thesis. Anglican Bishop N. T. Wright is proposed as a superior model of Christian history writing and historical criticism.*

In the first part of this article, I argued that at the heart of the Intelligent Design Movement (IDM) there lies a historical world view rooted in a narrative of intellectual apostasy and cultural decline of the West. Phillip Johnson, a leading popular promoter of the national movement, has routinely invoked history in an attempt to demonstrate that the advent of Darwinian evolutionary theory brought on a terrible moral and social crisis in western Europe and North America. He offers this narrative of crisis as one of his proofs that Darwinism is "false knowledge" and as a principle reason to subject Darwinism to rigorous dissection and ultimately rejection. He argues that once science re-acknowledges Divine agency in the origin and diversity of life, the West will have regained the road to cultural and spiritual regeneration.

I attempted in the first part to show that Johnson's line of argument begs more questions than it answers. First, he writes from the assumption that intellectual history is a privileged history, more likely to give us real knowledge than other forms of history. He assumes that such intellectual history best describes western secularization, for that is what he is describing. He also assumes that his intellectual history describes a cause, not symptoms or results, of the changes that he investigates. In the concluding part of this

article, I hope to offer specific evidence that demonstrates the weakness of Johnson's case and to show that, taken to its own logical conclusions, his secularization argument will ultimately become destructive of the very ideals he hopes to promote.

When he resorts to his narrative of Western intellectual apostasy predicated on accepting Darwin, Johnson has committed the same error he decries in his opponents. William Provine,<sup>1</sup> a harsh critic of IDM and a self-declared atheist, once wrote:

[W]hen he deduced the theory of natural selection to explain the adaptations in which he had previously seen the handiwork of God, Darwin knew that he was committing cultural murder. He understood immediately that if natural selection explained adaptations, and evolution by descent were true, then the argument from design was dead and all that went with it, namely the existence of a personal god [sic], free will, life after death, immutable moral laws, and ultimate meaning in life.<sup>2</sup>

This argument begs too many important questions: who says that everything about Christian theology hung solely on the argument from Design? Who says there was "a" Christian theology to "be demolished" in the

manner Provine describes?<sup>3</sup> Indeed, who says that the fate of one English Protestant theological argument had much to say about world Christianity at all? Johnson makes a terrible mistake by agreeing with Provine that this is a reasonable or accurate assessment of the problem. Unfortunately, it is a mistake at the very heart of his historical assessment of Darwin; he is not merely responding to a critic like Provine, he is playing the exact same game albeit from the other end of the court. This strategy is a mistake because this historical assessment betrays a limited perception of the Christian world, both in the nineteenth century and today.

It is true that the publication of Darwin's *Origin* caused theological controversy in Britain. It is also true that it was not particularly disturbing in the Catholic or Orthodox worlds. Darwin's contemporary and countryman, John Henry Cardinal Newman, a staunch anti-liberal, saw no threat in Darwin at all. He even endorsed a plan for Oxford to give Darwin an honorary doctorate.<sup>4</sup> It is equally true that numerous, influential American evangelicals did not see a crisis in Darwin's work.<sup>5</sup> Johnson tends to dismiss Christians who do not take umbrage at evolutionary theory. In this, he is persuaded by the critique offered by the nineteenth-century American Reformed theologian Charles Hodge.<sup>6</sup> Hodge argued that Darwinism was *de facto* atheism and that evolutionary thinking and Christian theology had no meeting points whatsoever. His argument, however, was not then or now universally accepted. Provine and Johnson reveal a parochialism when they assert that the fate of nineteenth-century Anglican design arguments determined the course of all Christianity or, as Provine would have it, all theism. One hardly knows what to make of such generalizations as appear in Provine's quote and one hardly knows what to make of the Christian theist Johnson for accepting Provine's terms of argument.

## Theology Beyond Design: The Case of Thomas Chalmers

By 1859, the debate as to whether Christian revelation hinged on successful design arguments was hardly new, especially in Johnson's own Reformed tradition. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the national Church of Scotland, the Kirk, endured a serious internal struggle. The causes were political and theological, but one of the venues of contention was the role of "natural revelation" in the overall Christian message. How much, if at all, should a Christian rely upon the apparent indications of Divine action in the world as a means of detecting God and discovering his attributes?

Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847) was a Scottish-born theologian, educator, philosopher, and political thinker and perhaps one of the most influential voices in nineteenth-century Reformed Christianity. Early in his career, Chalmers established himself with his 1813 publication

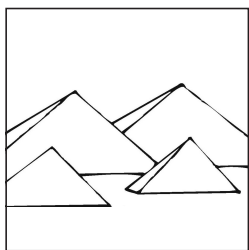
of "Christianity," an article in the *Edinburgh Encyclopedia*. In that piece, he forcefully repudiated the role of natural theology in Christian conversion and formation.<sup>7</sup> The rationalistic natural theology of William Paley did not illustrate a simple synthesis of science and religion in nineteenth-century Britain. Chalmers, for example, rejected the eighteenth-century paradigm not as antithetical to faith, but as insufficient to encompass the Christian doctrines of sin and salvation.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, Chalmers was a scientific and systematic thinker, extolling Baconian induction and defending the historicity of Christian tradition in terms of a scrupulously Baconian dissection of the historical record.<sup>9</sup> Christian faith, he argued, could credibly stand on its own historical credentials and testimonies. It ought not stand, he continued, on its "reasonableness of doctrine," since the whole point of revelation was to open to human minds those aspects of the divine life which would not appear reasonable at all, being beyond human experience and cognition.<sup>10</sup>

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*Chalmers argued that ultimately Christianity must be historically grounded in the testimony to the life of Jesus and the internal conversion that that testimony impelled on the believer. Natural theology was not an independent insight into the mind of God.*

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The very next year, in 1814, Chalmers published *The Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation*, a free-standing version of the *Encyclopedia* article. As the Glasgow Religious Tract Society circulated pamphlets based on extracts from *The Evidence*, Chalmers' arguments circulated among a national audience. A great debate ensued over whether natural theology and the reasonableness of Christian belief ought to outweigh the internal conviction experienced by readers of Scripture who found in it an "accurate portrayal of the human condition and of its remedy." Natural theology had some role to play in Christian doctrine, but was not necessarily the basis. Chalmers argued that ultimately Christianity must be historically grounded in the testimony to the life of Jesus and the internal conversion that that testimony impelled on the believer. Natural theology was not an independent insight into the mind of God.<sup>11</sup> After all, it was quite possible that people could easily inject their preconceived notions, or



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project their own desires, onto their image of God. It was also likely that people not otherwise believing in God could misconstrue the evidence of God's presence in creation.

In later life, Chalmers converted to an advocacy of natural theology. By the 1830s, his reputation was such that the Royal Society invited him to author one of the Bridgewater Treatises. In 1833, he duly published *The Adaptation of External Nature to the Moral and Intellectual Constitution of Man*. Invoking the argument from design as evidence for God's role in creation, Chalmers rather predictably relied on biological complexity and the insufficiency of chance. Responding to earlier criticisms, Chalmers further argued that while natural theology could not convince or convert the skeptic, it nonetheless functioned to place a moral burden on the skeptic to make an open-minded investigation of Christian faith. He cited the existence of human moral reason as evidence of a Creator who purposely elevated the human mind above the logic of mere survival.

Ultimately, it was a case of apples and oranges. As Chalmers put it, the historical and rational evidence of Christianity was "abundantly sufficient to satisfy the scrutinizing researches of the learned." However, the internal evidence, comparing one's own experience of conscience to the teachings of Christianity, "lay within the grasp of every sincere inquirer." Chalmers had purposely redirected the role of natural religion in theology toward a theodicy of personal experience, the universality of conscience, and the internal pull of Scripture on the heart of the believer.<sup>12</sup> Even in his Bridgewater phase, Chalmers never concluded that a natural theology, specifically the argument from design, constituted a *basis* of Christian revelation. It could, he argued, be never more than a tool and even that only under certain circumstances. When Charles Hodge later published *What is Darwinism?* he therefore took a more radical stand than was prevalent even among Reformed Christians and which did not really speak to Christianity in general.

The case of Chalmers demonstrates that long before Darwin, and even under the sway of the famous Bridgewater project, theologians did not universally place science

apologetics at the heart of Protestant Christian theology. Neither Provine nor Johnson in their exchanges acknowledges this history. They rather have created a false dilemma, about which for their own reasons they agree, even if from opposite sides. As Irving Kristol has commented:

[S]cientific "naturalism" and "creationism" do not exhaust the possibilities of explanation. Any "teleological" explanation, in purely philosophical terms, that sees the origins of species as an inevitable movement from "lower" to "higher" can be made to fit the facts very plausibly. Such explanations are irreconcilable with scientific "naturalism" which rejects teleology, but can be made to fit rather neatly into a religious view, which would then posit a claim to being able to explain the source of this teleological dynamic. There are some quite distinguished German and French "phenomenological biologists" who think along these lines ...<sup>13</sup>

### **The Secularization Narrative Revisited: The Role of Protestantism**

Nearly thirty years ago, Owen Chadwick produced a series of lectures which became his classic, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*. In the book, Chadwick argued that historians could only describe secularization as a trend or movement without really being able to define it precisely at all. As with other epoch titles like "the Middle Ages" or "the Renaissance" or even "the Reformation," one could be much surer that something had happened than one could be sure of precisely what. One could pick an arbitrary "before" point and find fruitful contrasts with an arbitrary "after" point. Still, the observer would have to be careful not to take his "before" and "after" as absolute realities. Moreover, according to Chadwick, it matters a great deal *which* secularization one wants to discuss. Is it elite intellectual skepticism like that of the *philosophes*? Or perhaps the speaker means to refer to working class anticlericalism and bluff unbelief? Or again, perhaps someone employing the term means to refer to middle class disaffection from the material and commercial restrictions of

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traditional society based on Church authority? Do we mean to discuss cool bourgeois religious conformity, ribald peasant anti-piety (whether European or of the sort that scandalized promoters of both the first and second Great Awakenings in America), or the rise of unchurched urban masses in the modern industrial era?<sup>14</sup> Not all secularisms are created equal. Neither are the causes of secularization monolithic or obvious. Some lie even within the Churches themselves.

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*From the sixteenth century forward, breaking the transnational reach of the Roman Catholic hierarchy proved appealing to various emerging national governments. ... Recourse to Protestant theology and ecclesiology often facilitated the break and promoted secularization friendly to civil authority.*

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In truth, there are a plethora of causes that historians attach to secularization. Scientific advances are only one and perhaps not the foremost.<sup>15</sup> Not all historians even acknowledge secularization as a real phenomenon; there are those who do not.<sup>16</sup> Most historians who do accept it, see secularization as the loss of authority of the institutional churches in the Western societies (as opposed to an actual loss of popular religious belief). The causes of this institutional loss are many. Political liberalism itself militates against the very idea of official dogma. Capitalism produced an industrial working class in conflict with propertied classes who controlled the churches. Anti-clericalism fed on nationalism, and on class-based political movements, and was exacerbated by loss of contact with local clergy as populations moved and expanded. The experience of competing forms of entertainment and enlightenment in the burgeoning urban centers drew people away from churches. The rise of professional historical research and teaching, with its emphasis on systematic research, and causative narratives sounded a retreat from the notion of Providence. Finally, mass migration disrupted the transmission of community traditions.

There is another way in which the churches themselves became the catalyst of modernization and secularization. In the political battles between Protestantism and Catholi-

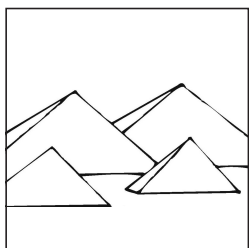
cism across Europe, more often than not it was Protestantism which proved more congenial to the emerging nation-states and more congenial to state control or acquiescing to state power. Historically Catholicism could easily enough find itself co-opted to the needs of local government (one thinks of the Church in France both prior to the Revolution and under the Napoleonic settlement). Nonetheless the Church tended to become the champion of various particular constituencies inconvenient to the state: the Papacy, clergy and religious orders, sometimes aristocracy, sometimes ethnic minorities, and sometimes electoral minorities (who might also qualify as ethnic minorities like the Bavarians).

Over the course of the nineteenth century, various Popes, especially Pope St. Pius IX, used the Vatican as a platform to critique and influence modern social trends. It is well known that from the sixteenth century forward, breaking the transnational reach of the Roman Catholic hierarchy proved appealing to various emerging national governments (particularly in Britain and Germany where Darwinism later did very well). Recourse to Protestant theology and ecclesiology often facilitated the break and promoted secularization friendly to civil authority. Edward VI (or more properly his council) and Elizabeth I of England certainly thought so, but the trend continued long after them. Writing about the resurgence of papal authority in the nineteenth century, Chadwick stated:

So there is some element of truth in the proposition that, in those political circumstances [of an assertive papacy and reviving Catholicism], Protestantism led towards secularization. Some of the leading French anticlericals were neither atheist nor agnostic but Protestant. Bismarck conducted his Kulturkampf—which had a secularizing effect in all the German churches and not only the Catholic—in the name of evangelical freedom.<sup>17</sup>

## The Role of Protestantism: The Case of John William Draper

The recourse of nineteenth-century science apologists to anti-Catholicism rather than anti-theism makes the same point. John William Draper (1811–1882) was an English born chemist, medical researcher, and historian of science. In his youth he immigrated to the United States, where he studied medicine. He established a successful academic career at the University of the City of New York in the chairs of chemistry and medicine. By the early 1870s, he was an eminent man of American science. Such was Draper's reputation that when Edward L. Youmans created his famous International Scientific Series, he turned to Draper for a volume on the conflict between "Religion" and "Science." The series brought together some of the biggest names in Anglo-American science writing: John Tyndall, Walter Bagehot, and Herbert Spencer. Draper's



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contribution, *The History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* (1873), was a smash hit in both America and Britain. The first printing sold out as did the printing of the very next year. It rapidly appeared in eight languages besides the original English. More than fifty years after its release, *Conflict* still circulated among the interested population and was re-released as a pocket edition by the London-based Rationalist Press Association. Recommended companion volumes were Haeckel's atheist *Riddle of the Universe*, and Joseph McCabe's lurid and sensationalist Catholic bashing *Twelve Years in a Monastery*.

Draper for his part did not pit science against all Christianity. He argued at great length that Catholicism was the real enemy and that the Reformation churches, even if they did not always recognize it, were the natural friends, even sisters of science. Draper held that the Reformation made possible a safe retreat from Christian anthropomorphism such as Muslims had already achieved. Ideally, for Draper, the continued advance of Protestant liberty would finally crush Roman obscurantism and with it such supposedly pagan doctrines as the Incarnation and the Trinity.<sup>18</sup> Darwin and Darwinian evolution figured not at all. Draper, his publisher, and his worldwide audience were quite satisfied that the real question at hand was the authority of the Catholic Church and its reactions to scientific progress.

Only years later does one find references to Darwin and the *Origin* as the center of the "conflict" against all Christianity.<sup>19</sup> By that time, much historical mythologizing had occurred, not the least being T. H. Huxley's famous misrepresentation of his debate with Bishop Samuel Wilberforce at Section D of the 1860 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.<sup>20</sup> It was not clear whether Darwin or Darwinian political mythology had become the enemy of Christianity, if enemies they had to be. E. B. Pusey, Anglican priest and a critic of Darwin's theory so harsh as to compete easily with the absolutist Charles Hodge, believed that the real theological crisis of the 1860s was the publication of *Essays and Reviews*, which first introduced German rationalist biblical criticism to English audiences. Pusey did not publicly respond to evolutionary theory as a threat until 1878.<sup>21</sup>

It simply was not the impression of contemporary observers then, or for some time after, or the consensus of historians now, that the publication of *Origin of Species* or *Descent of Man* alone constituted the dramatic breakpoint that Pearcey or Johnson would have us believe. Certainly these books both occasioned controversy but that is not to say, as do Johnson and Pearcey, that they marked a massive paradigm shift away from Christianity. More than thirty-five years ago, sociologist and historian Susan Budd demonstrated that large-scale loss of belief, in Britain at least, did not rely on the sorts of intellectual trends Johnson and Pearcey cite. As Budd wrote: "... the revolution in scientific and theological thinking seem[ed] largely irrelevant. The loss of faith for Free-thinkers was not an intellectual but a moral matter."<sup>22</sup>

Protestant assaults on Catholicism, read as internecine religious conflict, contributed just as much. Moreover, modern researchers even now do not see that Darwin's books occasioned a death knell for religion. It is good to recall here William Provine's falsely dichotomizing polemic against Johnson. Reflection reveals that the Victorian-era process of secularization tied into many social trends, Catholic/Protestant tensions foremost among them, as much or more than it did to scientific progress. Christianity itself as a general phenomenon has contributed to secularization whenever it allied with state powers to repress native spiritualities or in its centuries long attack on magical practice.<sup>23</sup> It has contributed too whenever it has been invoked to reject established norms of the sacred even within itself. As Richard K. Fenn has observed:

No force is more secularizing than a religion of the spirit that refuses to make the customary sacrifices to the old shrines, whether they be of the temple and its priesthood or of the Christian church itself. The Reformation is the prime example of a movement that broke the monopoly of the church on the sacred, and the Pentecostal movements of Latin America and Africa are ... contemporary cases in point.<sup>24</sup>

Chadwick and Fenn are hardly alone. Most historians and sociologists of religion have pointed out that Protestantism itself has been

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a type of secularizing force, especially in the United States and western Europe. Given their rhetorical commitments, it is difficult to see what use Johnson or Pearcey could make of that history.

## An Alternative Model: The Case of N.T. Wright

Johnson proposes that western intellectuals would do well to assume the posture of the theistic realist,<sup>25</sup> meaning the belief that God is objectively real and objectively “Other” to humans and all creation. He therefore is advocating a route to ontological certainty which he thinks is denied to those who deny theistic realism. He also asserts that all other positions must capitulate to a naturalist agnosticism. Yet this all-or-nothing approach is not necessary for the attempt at a Christian history. It may in fact be harmful since, as I have tried to show, the a priori commitment to defend this theistic realism can handicap historical inquiry.

To get at this point, let us consider the work of N.T. Wright. Wright is a particularly fitting choice for a number of reasons: he holds impeccable Christian theological credentials being recent Canon Theologian at Westminster Abbey, now the Anglican Bishop of Durham and a Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge Research Fellow; he is critical of Catholic theology, a distaste Johnson shares; and he is deeply informed by the Reformed tradition, a taste which Johnson also shares. He is a biblical exegetical scholar of world reputation. It is not my purpose, or within my competence, to deal with Wright as a theologian and Bible scholar. Rather, I am interested in comparing Wright’s use of historical method and exposition of Christian belief to Johnson’s methods. I make the comparison because I believe that Johnson is best understood as a Protestant apologist. In his recent *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Wright performs as a Christian historian *a fortiori*. He sets himself the task of upholding the historicity of the Resurrection and thus the reasonableness of the Christian confession of faith.

Wright works to show that St. Paul and the Apostles meant two specific things in their early preaching: (1) that Jesus was risen from the dead in a definitive and concrete and bodily way; and (2) that the Resurrection of Jesus showed he was both Messiah and the Son of God divinely sharing in God’s own nature. This two-fold demonstration is a necessary move. Wright fully understands that in retrospect, a resurrected Christ is the Christ of the Church. However, in a first-century context, a resurrected Jesus of Nazareth, though truly resurrected, might yet signify something else entirely.<sup>26</sup> Historical exactitude demands Wright take nothing for granted and allow no anachronism to creep into his investigation. The two-fold scheme also shows that Wright is doing Christian history in both senses apparent in Johnson: Wright is reciting and affirming the Christian narrative, specifically of Redemption, but

he is also approaching a critical appraisal of his texts in a Christian-informed epistemology that leaves open for him conclusions affirming the objectively real, concrete, and bodily Resurrection of Christ. Wright is working simultaneously at levels of metaphor, sacred myth, but also of the universally accessible historical record. Wright presupposes nothing.

Johnson might well argue, and in fact frequently says, that he is not interested in steering science to any given conclusion but rather to opening science to possible conclusions shut off by philosophical prejudice. But notice the difference between Wright and Johnson. Johnson is not coy about proposing the first chapter of St. John’s Gospel as the appropriate creation story from which to begin our exploration of the world. Neither is Johnson coy about the political implications of his epistemological choices: he very much wants American society, having regained knowledge of God’s dignity as Creator, to reform public policies along lines of Natural Law. Wright wants to demonstrate that the Gospels are in fact credible historical evidence for a miraculous event. However, despite the detail and force of his arguments, even Wright shies from delivering ontological certainty of the Resurrection or conclusions that would follow from it.

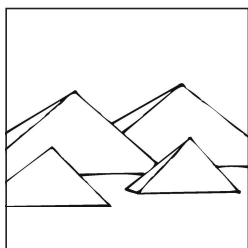
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*[Wright] builds his case from the ground up: starting with the first-century environment of Second Temple Judaism, of pagan beliefs, of philosophy, and of lexicography. Wright reconstructs a historical milieu while Johnson postulates a pre-Fall state.*

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He builds his case from the ground up: starting with the first-century environment of Second Temple Judaism, of pagan beliefs, of philosophy, and of lexicography. Wright reconstructs a historical milieu while Johnson postulates a pre-Fall state. Wright breaks his problem into several different subtasks. He is careful to avoid question begging by acknowledging the multi-faceted nature of his task. He knows he must say something about the environment of Judaism in antiquity, about traditional beliefs of the Jews, about the beliefs of the various Gentile peoples, about applicable historical sources, and about the reliabil-





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ity of the Gospels as historical sources. He is also clear that he must divide his task between that which is principally historical and that which is theological or apologetic. Wright wisely warns us not to accept a facile, pseudo-absolute wall of separation between such fields, but he is very far from conflating them himself.

Despite the more than eight hundred pages of his book, Wright caps the limit of his investigation with one crucial move: he rejects the Gospel of St. Peter. He does this because (1) the Church in forming the canon of Scripture did so and because (2) he independently agrees with that decision based upon his critical reading of Peter.<sup>27</sup> The decision signifies a great deal, because Peter is the purported Gospel that supplies eyewitnesses to the actual Resurrection event. The canonical Gospels do not describe the actual rising of Jesus but rather the immediate resulting environment and the reactions of various people as they meet the risen Jesus or hear of what has happened.

Therefore, after pouring out a mass of scholarly work, Wright confirms that while he can confidently say what he thinks the Apostles thought and preached, and what he thinks the Apostles experienced, he cannot provide an ontological certainty regarding the Resurrection of Jesus. Neither the nature of the event nor the available historical records can do that. The Bible itself does not promote such a scheme but rather teaches that faith rests on Apostolic testimony (e.g., John 20:29) and that it is ultimately a gift from God. In other words, there is a necessary dependence on indirect transmission and interpretation. This is not very surprising since that is how all of history works, sacred and profane.

Consider some of Wright's comments on his own method. On the one hand, Wright is clearly sympathetic to a point often repeated by Johnson: in doing history, or any intellectual inquiry, an arbitrary exclusion of things "too theological" is a *de facto* favoritism for some form of deism, agnosticism, or atheism. On the other hand, Wright cautions, the mirror image of this error is

rank supernaturalism whose miracle working god routinely bypasses historical causation ... To recognize the link between history and theology ... is not

to decide questions of history or theology in advance, but to give notice of the many-sidedness of the topic.<sup>28</sup>

Johnson cannot hold to this advice because his historical narrative of the Fall is specifically about a *loss of the Creator*. Therefore, as a historical critic seeking to put things aright, he inevitably looks for the opportunity to reintroduce the Creator. Thus we have from the latter 1990s on, his increasing reference to the Prologue of St. John's Gospel. And note, St. John is not writing generally about deity, as does St. Paul in Romans 1 (there Paul affirms only that nature provides evidence of God's existence, not the actions or the thoughts of God) but is explicitly referring to the *Logos* of God in the person of Jesus Christ. When Johnson must return to revelation to complete his critique of modern naturalism, he thus violates his own and Wright's cautions. By nature, the creature cannot know much if anything about the Creator without the Creator's self-revelation. But, as Wright decisively demonstrates, the Revelation of God is not history (or science) as we usually practice it; it is miracle. As he puts it:

What we do not know—not because we inhabit a modern scientific worldview, but because at this point all human history tells the same story—is that someone who is well and truly dead can become well and truly alive again.<sup>29</sup>

Wright denies he can offer historical "proof" of Christian claims.

It is not, as Johnson and Pearcey have contended, that a specific world view blinds us to God's hand in the origin and diversification of life. It is that all human experience points to the same thing—that people, plants, and animals exist and proliferate and change based on internal capacities related to material forces. Therefore it is not patently absurd to suppose that people, plants, and animals originate in material forces. To *know* that it requires the hand of God in turn requires revelation. It is a specifically religious belief. I do not, as many do, categorize that as a lesser knowledge or disparage belief as such. In fact, Johnson may well be correct that possessing such knowledge is objectively better than not possessing it. That would be a separate argument. How-

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ever, it is part and parcel of Christian belief that God's generous creation of the world is an anomalous act. Therefore I have to acknowledge that it will not be amenable to any investigation that could fit under what we normally call "science": the unraveling of causes *within the world*.

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*It is not, as Johnson and Pearcey have contended, that a specific world view blinds us to God's hand in the origin and diversification of life. ... [P]eople, plants, and animals exist and proliferate and change based on internal capacities related to material forces. Therefore it is not patently absurd to suppose that people, plants, and animals originate in material forces. To know that it requires the hand of God in turn requires revelation.*

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If this were not so, it is difficult to understand why the very beginning of the Bible is dedicated to crediting God for his creation. Tradition has it that the Torah was given to Moses in special revelation, presumably to tell him and the people of the Covenant what they would otherwise not know about the world. Why tell them something glaringly obvious? Hebrews 11:3 indicates that we know God is Creator through Christ only in faith. The passage claims that creation *ex nihilo* is known by faith. Even St. Paul in Romans 1 does not say, for instance, that from creation people could discern God's goodness but only his power. As Thomas Chalmers argued nearly two hundred years ago, the Bible itself does not support a natural theology, at least not one that gets us very far in answering the questions that Johnson thinks are important. Wright understands this clearly. He concludes his massive study taking the strong position that the bodily Resurrection of Jesus is not just a sufficient but a necessary condition for explaining the historical records of early Christianity. In doing so he nevertheless analyzes his own conclusions with impeccable historical logic:

I do not claim that [my conclusion] constitutes a "proof" of the resurrection in terms of some neutral standpoint. It is, rather, a historical challenge to other

explanations, other worldviews. Precisely because ... we are faced with worldview-level issues, there is no neutral ground, no island in the middle of the epistemological ocean, as yet uncolonized by any of the warring continents. Saying that "Jesus of Nazareth was bodily raised from the dead" is not only a self-involving statement; it is a self-committing statement, going beyond a reordering of one's private world into various levels of commitment to work out the implications [emphasis in the original].<sup>30</sup>

Wright takes his readers no farther because the forms of knowing required to turn his historical conclusions into Christian commitment do not fall within the goals and methods of history. I would argue that the same situation pertains when we change venues from history to science and from the historicity of the Christian Gospels to the origin of life.

## Conclusion

Phillip Johnson once wrote:

Occasionally, a scientist discouraged by the consistent failure of theories purporting to explain some problem like the first appearance of life will suggest that perhaps supernatural creation is a tenable hypothesis in this one instance. Sophisticated naturalists instantly recoil with horror, because they know that there is no way to tell God when he has to stop. If God created the first organism, then how do we know he didn't do the same thing to produce all those animal groups that appear so suddenly in the Cambrian rocks?<sup>31</sup>

I aim Johnson's complaint back at IDM writers to express my own objection to their uses of history. If it should be the business of science to cite the specific workings of God in nature, then how do we merely stop at biology? Why then do we not extend "Design" to the humanities as well? Reflecting upon the rhetoric of IDM apologists like Johnson and Pearcey, I conclude that IDM could also become a "history stopper." While posing a historical case for the failure of science, it begs more questions than it answers and it turns a conveniently blind eye on the history that does not support its political claims.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Johnson has met Provine in debate on a number of occasions and is even fond of describing the good relations that exist between them. As Johnson sees it, he and Provine are agreed on the meaning and stakes of the debate about philosophical naturalism and Darwin: that the options are Darwin or nothing, or Design or nothing. Neither man accepts third alternatives to this dilemma.

<sup>2</sup>Provine, "Responses to Phillip Johnson," *First Things* (October 1990): 23.

<sup>3</sup>The work of John Hedley Brooke and Jonathan R. Topham has demonstrated that the supposed omnipresence of Paley, even in British Protestant theology, is largely a myth. John Hedley Brooke, "Natural Theology and the Plurality of Worlds: Observations on

# Article

## Historical Method and the Intelligent Design Movement Part II: A Historical Critique of a Historical Critique

the Brewste-Whewell Debate," *Annals of Science* 34 (1977): 221–86; —, "The Natural Theology of the Geologists: Some Theological Strata," in L. J. Jordanova and Roy S. Porter, eds., *Images of the Earth: Essays in the History of the Environmental Sciences* (London: British Society for the History of Science, Ltd., 1979); Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Jonathan R. Topham, "An Infinite Variety of Arguments: The Bridgewater Treatises and British Natural Theology in the 1830s," (Ph.D. diss., University of Lancaster, 1993). All works cited in Jonathan R. Topham, "Science, Natural Theology, and Evangelicalism in Early Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Thomas Chalmers and the Evidence Controversy" in David N. Livingstone, D. G. Hart, and Mark Noll, eds., *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup>Gregory P. Elder, *Chronic Vigour: Darwin, Anglicans, Catholics, and the Development of a Doctrine of Providential Evolution* (New York: University Press of America, 1996), 73–7.

<sup>5</sup>David N. Livingstone, *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought* (Edinburgh: Regent College Publishing, 1987).

<sup>6</sup>Charles Hodge, *What is Darwinism?* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1874). Historian Edward B. Davis sees Johnson as a latter day Hodge, a characterization that Johnson tacitly accepts. Edward B. Davis, "Of Gods and Gaps: Intelligent Design and Darwinian Evolution," *The Christian Century* 115, no. 20 (July 1998): 678–81.

<sup>7</sup>Topham, "Science, Natural Theology, and Evangelicalism," 45.

<sup>8</sup>In fact, several historians of Scottish Christianity have found that Hume's famous critiques of causation, at times held along with his critique of miracles to be severely damaging to Christian theology, rather strengthened doctrines of the Kirk regarding the role of biblical revelation and the individual experience of God's activity. Topham, "Science, Natural Theology, and Evangelicalism," 147–8.

<sup>9</sup>Daniel F. Rice, "An Attempt at Systematic Reconstruction in the Theology of Thomas Chalmers," *Church History* 48, no. 2 (June 1979): 177.

<sup>10</sup>Topham, "Science, Natural Theology, and Evangelicalism," 152, 155.

<sup>11</sup>Rice, "An Attempt at Systematic Reconstruction in the Theology of Thomas Chalmers," 176–7.

<sup>12</sup>Daniel F. Rice, "Natural Theology and the Scottish Philosophy in the Thought of Thomas Chalmers," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24 (1971): 35–8.

<sup>13</sup>Irving Kristol, "Responses to Phillip Johnson," *First Things* (October 1990): 25–6.

<sup>14</sup>Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, Canto Edition Reprint (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 10, 12.

<sup>15</sup>Sociologist Steve Bruce argues that science has not undermined religion very much at all, at least not in a direct clash between particular findings of science versus particular religious beliefs. Surveying the works of Peter Berger, Bryan Wilson, David Martin, and Roy Wallace, Bruce notes that none saw science as a serious force in secularization. The apparent paradox is this: secularization in the West is profound; science per se does not seem to cause it at all. See Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Malden, MA: Blackwood Publishers, 2001), 106–17.

<sup>16</sup>For the most part, since the 1990s, historians and sociologists have tended to accept that "secularization" is a real phenomenon (rather than perhaps just a trend whereby spirituality moved out of institutions). This was not always the case and is not universal consensus now. Moreover, the term "secularization" is a network of meanings and ideas. At base, all these ideas suggest that we are discussing "a long-term decline in the power, popularity, and prestige of religious beliefs and rituals." Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*, 44.

<sup>17</sup>Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, 139.

<sup>18</sup>John William Draper, *The Conflict Between Religion and Science* (1927; reprint, London: Watts and Co., 1873), ix–xvi. Draper had

already explicated these themes at tremendous length in his two volume *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* (New York: 1861). The success of *The Conflict* led him to issue a second edition of the massive *History* in 1876.

<sup>19</sup>Chadwick comments that he does not see routine references to "Darwin has disproved the Bible" until the 1880s. On anecdotal evidence, Chadwick would not place the impact of Darwinian ideas on general society much before that time.

<sup>20</sup>J. Vernon Jensen, "Return to the Wilberforce-Huxley Debate," *British Journal of the History of Science* 21 (1988): 161–79.

<sup>21</sup>Elder, *Chronic Vigour*, 33.

<sup>22</sup>Susan Budd, "The Loss of Faith: Reasons for Unbelief among Members of the Secular Movement in England, 1850–1950," *Past and Present* 36 (April 1967): 106–25. The quote is her concluding sentence.

<sup>23</sup>Richard K. Fenn, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001): 196–7.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>25</sup>Johnson, *Reason in the Balance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 48–50.

<sup>26</sup>N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2003), 27.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 15, 152–5.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>29</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 711.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 717.

<sup>31</sup>Johnson, "Evolution as Dogma," 18.

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