

PBS' "Judgment Day" Is a Misjudgment
by Christine Dao*

On November 13, 2007, PBS aired the NOVA program *Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial*, featuring a re-enactment of the controversial 2005 trial *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School Board*. Although the program was purportedly a balanced presentation of the intelligent design versus evolution debate, this re-enactment—as well as the expert dialogue on the definitions of science—highly favored evolution, employed falsified facts, and omitted important information that would have otherwise dramatically leveled the playing field between the two camps.

The Trial

In 2004, the quiet town of Dover, Pennsylvania, made national headlines when Dover Area School District board member Bill Buckingham requested that a textbook teaching intelligent design be introduced into the town's science curriculum. The board voted against adopting the book. Buckingham and his curriculum committee then drafted a [statement](#) that would be required for all biology teachers to read before starting any unit that involved evolution, telling students of the gaps and problems that exist in Darwin's theory and letting them know that copies of a textbook on intelligent design (*Of Pandas and People*) would be available in the school library for those interested in "gaining an understanding of what Intelligent Design actually involves."

The mandatory statement sparked resistance by both parents and teachers, and families of 11 students filed lawsuits claiming that the statement violated their First Amendment rights. The trial of one of the parents, Tammy Kitzmiller, went before Judge E. Jones III on September 26 and lasted until November 4, 2005. Judge Jones ruled in favor of evolution. (Highlights from his 139-page ruling can be listened to and/or read at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/id/judge.html>.)

An Agenda

The NOVA program—which executive producer Paula Aspell said sought to reduce the conflict between supporters and critics of evolution by presenting the science behind the controversy—was instead intended to persuade supporters of creation science and intelligent design to accept evolution.

When asked why she chose to take on the project, Aspell said, "I think the real reason why I made that decision [to make *Judgment Day*] is because evolution is the foundation of the biological sciences. As one famous biologist said, 'Nothing in biology makes sense except through the lens of evolution,'" quoting from the 1973 essay by evolutionary biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky that was published in the *American Biology Teacher*.

Aspell likens the *Kitzmiller* trial to a biology textbook in which “some of the best biologists went in to testify.” However, the NOVA program left out much of the background behind the testimony that was presented at the trial. For instance, both the re-enactment and the program on the whole omitted the important fact that many expert witnesses who were scheduled to testify in favor of intelligent design ultimately chose not to testify because they were denied the right to have their own legal counsel on hand. Without these witnesses, expert testimony understandably was tipped in favor of evolution.

Discovery Institute, an intelligent design think tank, discusses these issues in greater detail on its website at

http://www.evolutionnews.org/2007/11/pbs_airs_its_inherit_the_wind.html.

Creation Safaris also addresses the program and its depiction of the trial at <http://creationsafaris.com/crev200711.htm>.

In an [interview](#) available on the PBS website, *Judgment Day* producer Aspell effectively equates science and evolution, and makes clear the proselytizing nature of the program: “Recent polls tell us 48 percent, almost half of all Americans, still question evolution and still believe that some kind of alternative should be taught in public schools,” Aspell said. “The issue of evolution is not simply a political issue; it’s not part of the culture wars. It’s a scientific issue. I really believe that if people understood the science, saw why it was so essential to modern biology, and understood that it’s not at all incompatible with religion, then we would have much less conflict over it in this country.”

The results from a recent Gallup Poll on American beliefs on human origins can be read at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/21811/American-Beliefs-Evolution-vs-Bibles-Explanation-Human-Origins.aspx>.

The Science

The definition of science rests at the core of the evolution versus intelligent design debate, and supporters of both camps reject the idea that the opposing view is “science.” When NOVA attempted to define the term and ideology of science, it sought out the opinions of seven “scientists, philosophers, and educators,” all of whom supported evolution. The intelligent design viewpoint was never presented.

“You can’t have gaps that you fill in by appeal to miracles,” said one of the seven experts, Robert T. Pennock from Michigan State University, who ignored the fact that such gaps also cannot be filled with leaps of faith or logic, such as macroevolution that has been neither observed nor proved through testing.

An excerpt from the *Judgment Day* educator’s briefing packet defines science as “a systematic form of inquiry, based on observation, prediction, reasoning, and testing, that explains how the natural universe works and seeks to continually advance our knowledge....Scientific knowledge is constantly refined or altered by

new evidence; if a hypothesis can be disproved by experimentation, scientists reject it and formulate a new hypothesis that better fits the observed data.”

Both creationists and evolutionists accept this definition. However, the briefing packet defines intelligent design as “[T]he idea that certain features of the universe and life are too complex to have arisen by natural causes and instead are best explained as being the product of an intelligent designer.” A creationist would supplement this by including the Intelligent Designer as an essential part of the definition.

The educator’s briefing packet also cited political reasons, rather than scientific evidence, regarding why intelligent design should not be taught alongside evolution: “The federal courts have ruled that creationism, creation science, and intelligent design are not science but instead endorse a specific religious belief. Therefore, these topics are not appropriate content for a science classroom.”

The NOVA program presented various “scientific” evidences for evolution, such as the fossil *Tiktaalik rosae*, which was presented as key evidence of a bridge in the evolutionary gap between fish and amphibians. The fossil, “which clearly indicate[s] Darwinian evolution in action,” the NOVA website states, was unearthed in 2004 by a field crew digging in the Canadian Arctic. Such an interpretation, however, is far from “clear.” In a [response](#) to this particular finding, ICR scientist Frank Sherwin wrote, “Before evolutionists start celebrating, they should keep in mind that *Tiktaalik rosae* is incomplete. Scientists as of yet are unable to determine what the hind fins and tail might have looked like.”

NOVA also cites several of Darwin’s predictions that supposedly support the late naturalist’s creditability and evolutionary ideology. The most famous observation that sparked the acceptance of Darwinism occurred during his journey to the Americas. Few know that of Darwin’s five years aboard *The Beagle*, he spent only five weeks in the Galapagos Islands. Darwin himself did not actually go to the island of Daphne Major, but had specimens collected for later study. He was particularly interested in the beak variations of a species of finch called *Geospiza fortis*. These variations would form the basis of Darwin’s understanding of natural selection, which would ultimately lead to his evolution theory and the publishing of the controversial works *The Origins of Species* and *The Descent of Man*.

However, creationists point out that the beak variations are evidence of microevolution, or changes within a species, and not macroevolution, which are changes from one species to another. ICR President John D. Morris and ICR scientist Kenneth B. Cumming address Darwin’s finches at <http://www.icr.org/article/1135/> and <http://www.icr.org/article/418/> respectively.

Furthermore, the creditability of Darwin’s predictions is brought into question by his own words that liken Africans and those of African descent to apes. In the sixth chapter of *The Descent of Man*, he writes:

At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races. At the same time the anthropomorphous apes...will no doubt be exterminated. The break will then be rendered wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilised state, as we may hope, than the Caucasian, and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of as at present between the negro or Australian and the gorilla.

The full chapter and book can be viewed online at <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>.

Evolution and God?

Another element underlying the PBS program was the notion that the theory of evolution is compatible with a belief in the Creator God. "We had to really disallow people of this notion that somehow to accept evolution is to reject God, because that's not true at all. The fact I sorta believe is that the beauty of evolution can really enhance your belief in a Creator and God," said executive producer Paula Aspell. She did not, however, explain how evolution can enhance a belief in the Creator when its philosophy is based specifically on the omission of God.

Not all proponents of evolution are confirmed atheists. In fact, some creationists in the past have compromised the authority of the Bible for the sake of human opinion, and have attempted to bridge the gap between evolution and intelligent design with concepts such as the Gap Theory and the Day-Age Theory.

But others choose the authority of Scripture over the dictation of ever-changing scientific theory, and more creationists are seeing that science in fact supports a perfect Creator. For them, to reject the Genesis account of the true beginnings of the earth and the universe is to reject what Christ did on the cross. If it was not man's sin that brought death and separation from God—in other words, if God is the source of the ceaseless cycles of death that evolution requires—then Christ's atoning sacrifice becomes meaningless. It is not enough to simply agree with biblical truth; one must live it as well. ICR's website, as well as those of other creationist ministries, details many of the scientific discoveries that testify to the biblical account of creation.

Conclusion

NOVA's presentation did not seek to present a fair and balanced report of the intelligent design versus evolution debate so that the viewer could make his or her own conclusions about the issue. Instead, as Aspell indicated in her interview, the show intended to win more supporters for Darwinian evolution.

If anything, *Judgment Day's* disregard for the evidences presented by supporters of intelligent design and creationism is a sign that the 150-year-old evolution

theory needs more help to stand against thousands of years of intelligently designed creation.

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