

*Creationism's Trojan Horse: The Wedge of Intelligent Design*. By Barbara Forrest and Paul R. Gross. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. 401 pages. \$40.00.

The thesis of a recent book by philosopher Barbara Forrest and biologist Paul Gross, *Creationism's Trojan Horse: The Wedge of Intelligent Design (ID)*, is straightforward enough: Intelligent design and its institutional home, Discovery Institute, are part of a sinister plot to abolish civil liberties, unify church and state, and “replace the scientific method with belief in God.”

Anyone familiar with Discovery Institute will immediately sense something peculiar afoot. No leading design theorist opposes separation of church and state, least of all Discovery Institute, a secular think tank whose officers and fellows represent a range of religious views, from Presbyterian to Roman Catholic to Jewish to agnostic. The assistant director of Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture, John West, has even written a book (*The Politics of Revelation and Reason*) highlighting the benefits of disestablishment and religious freedom in America's constitutional system. But that does not fit Gross and Forrest's conspiracy theory; so they mischaracterize West's book as an argument for unifying church and state.

How did the pair arrive at the conclusion that ID is part of a fundamentalist cabal to establish a global theocracy? Their inferential chain is difficult to reconstruct. They make much ado about design theory's claim to be agnostic concerning the identity of the designer, characterizing this claim as a clever scheme to get creationism into the public schools. How do they know it is just a clever scheme? Answer: Leading design theorists are Christians and, therefore, believe the designer is God. One might forgive such erroneous reasoning from a biologist, but Forrest, a trained philosopher, should know better. Detecting design is one mode of inquiry. There are many others. Consider the outboard motor called the bacterial flagellum. Biochemist Michael Behe argues that it has the clear hallmark of design, but there is no signature on the bushing of this amazing little motor that reads, “Created by the Good Lord.” In sum, irreducibly complex biological machines signal design, not the identity of the designer. The biochemical argument stops at a design inference because that is where the evidence in the biochemical world stops.

The book is also marked by a running failure to distinguish persuasion from coercion. The authors quote William Dembski and Jay Richards, “The Christian apologist is a contender for the faith, not merely a seeker after the truth,” and from this concludes, “So Christian truth and Christian community—as Dembski and Richards apprehend them—must trump tolerance and civil peace. The implications of such a view for a religiously pluralistic, democratic society are chilling” (263). Bracket off, for the moment, that the

quotation comes from *Unapologetic Apologetics*, a book with a focus much broader than just design theory. Gross and Forrest's error here is more fundamental. By failing to distinguish between coercion and persuasion, they imply that if Dembski and Richards seek to persuade others in the public square—rather than merely seeking truth privately—then they have pitted themselves against “tolerance and peace.” If Forrest and Gross really believed this, they would not be trying to persuade people in the public square themselves.

The other point Gross and Forrest muddle concerns motivation. Most of the book is given over to demonstrating in mind-numbing detail (*a*) that design theorists like Dembski, Richards, Phillip Johnson, Stephen Meyer, and Jonathan Wells are practicing theists who believe scientific evidence supports their position; and (*b*) that these theists believe the world would be a better place if they could persuade large numbers of people to agree with them. What follows from this, according to the book? Design theorists should be ignored or, better, shut down.

The conclusion seems to rest on two unstated premises. One is that if design theorists are motivated by religion, they cannot also be motivated by scientific evidence for design. That is, an action can only have one motivation. The other premise is that motives matter, not evidence or argument. Find a nefarious motive, in other words, and you can safely ignore your opponent's argument. These two assumptions are, of course, manifestly false. Human agents are almost always motivated by a variety of things. And scholars should be evaluated on the quality of their evidence and arguments, not on this or that motive. Forrest herself serves on the board of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association, which describes itself as “an affiliate of American Atheists, and [a] member of the Atheist Alliance International.” Applying Gross and Forrest's own motivation standard to themselves would mean that their book should be dismissed out of hand.

Other than their attack on motives, Gross and Forrest's main complaint seems to be that proponents of ID do not produce genuine scholarship or research, especially in peer-reviewed publications. That complaint is baseless, too. There are peer-reviewed academic books like *The Design Inference* (Cambridge), as well as a number of journal articles. Biochemist Michael Behe has defended his theory of irreducible complexity in peer-reviewed journals, and his recent peer-reviewed article in *Protein Science*, cowritten with physicist David W. Snoke, makes a case against a key pillar of neo-Darwinism. Stephen Meyer recently published an essay arguing for intelligent design in a biology journal published out of the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of Natural History. And two papers by Douglas Axe in *The Journal of Molecular Biology* report on his lab research indicating that proteins rapidly lose function due to alterations in sequencing. The results suggest that the proteins are so isolated one from another that there

is no continuously functional Darwinian path from one protein to a fundamentally new type of protein. Forrest and Gross assert that design theorists have produced no new verifiable facts, but here is an eminently testable inference from repeated laboratory work.

In one way, it is surprising there is this much ID work in the peer-reviewed literature. The editor who published Stephen Meyer's essay, evolutionary biologist Richard Sternberg, was vilified by the Darwinist community. It requires little imagination to see why other editors are not eager to set themselves up for similar treatment. The best strategy for winning an argument is to build a better case. But if one has the much weaker case, combined with the reins of institutional power, the temptation is to resort to *ad hominem*. This is the strategy of the Darwinists, and it characterizes almost every page of *Creationism's Trojan Horse*.

The book was penned by a biologist and a philosopher. The reader might expect from the book a trenchant critique of the science and philosophy of ID. But the philosophical critique is almost nonexistent, consisting of (a) a question-begging appeal to methodological naturalism and (b) an appeal to consensus, which supposedly exists despite the protests of the design theorists because, thanks to (a), the design theorists are not doing science. The consensus appeal also involves a buried historical argument, namely that the consensus position in science has been consistently correct. That too is obviously false.

As for the scientific critiques of various design arguments, each reads more like a response to somebody's op-ed than to an extended argument by a highly trained scholar. To call their brief critique of Stephen Meyer's argument for design in the Cambrian explosion a straw man would be to lend the rebuttal mass it cannot claim. Their description of his argument is worse than a stick figure. Every objection they lodge is meticulously anticipated in Meyer's writing, usually on multiple fronts. Most of their other critiques quickly retreat to the consensus appeal, a ready substitute for sustained argumentation.

On every page of the book, there is a tone of paranoia. One need not be an especially perceptive reader to sense that the threat Forrest and Gross fear is not to science but to materialism. Why do Gross and Forrest cling to their ideology even to the point of sacrificing the most basic principles of reasoned argumentation? There are resources for answering that question, but they lie outside the theory of ID.

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