

LITERATURE REVIEWS

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MAKING IT ALL UNCOMFORTABLY CLEAR

The Politically Incorrect Guide to Darwinism and Intelligent Design. Jonathan Wells. 2006. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing. 273 p. Paper \$19.95.

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Jonathan Wells is widely known for writing *Icons of Evolution*,¹ a book that some consider the most useful book yet produced by proponents of Intelligent Design (ID). In *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Darwinism and Intelligent Design (PIGDID)* Wells continues his skewering of Darwinism and, unsurprisingly, this new book has received the same scorching reception that *Icons* did. Darwinist P. Z. Meyers was so upset by Well's critique of Darwinism that he lashed out in his blog with the all-purpose standby *ad hominem* accusation of misquoting experts, adding a frenetic "Literally. He is actually that dishonest"² just to ensure readers get the point. As is common with sneering accusations against opponents of Darwinism, the facts support the accusation no better than they support Darwinism itself.³

Wells writes with just the kind of clarity that lays bare Darwinism's wizened underpinnings. This is wonderful for those who seek to understand what is going on in the frequently complex and obscure arguments that surround Darwinism and ID. For those who wish to continue using hot air instead of actual data and logic to support Darwinism, this has to be a very uncomfortable and public stripping down. Why new arguments are not forthcoming to replace those that have been refuted is mysterious. Maybe contentions like, "[Gill] slits are found in the embryos of all vertebrates because they share a common ancestor: fish in which these structures first evolved."⁴ really are the best that Darwinism has to offer. Charles Darwin himself seemed to think so: "Embryology rises greatly in interest, when we look at the embryo as a picture, more or less obscured, of the

progenitor, either in its adult or larval state, of all the members of the same great class.”⁵ Why this is nonsense requires reading the book.

In fairness to Wells’ most vocal critics, he leaves them little option other than to attack his honesty, religion and competence. Clearly he has them trumped when it comes to logic and data, so *ad hominem* attacks are all that are left to respond with. Opponents of ID are not about to admit defeat on the basis of logic and data when, in the first place, their arguments frequently operate independent of both.

One criticism that may have some validity is that *PIGDID* is merely a rehash of *Icons of Evolution*. In some ways that is true, but *PIGDID* is much broader in scope and clearly targeted to a different audience than *Icons*. The language is simpler and less knowledge of science and scientific thinking is assumed. This makes it an easy read for anyone with a high school education. In addition Wells’ first book concentrated on ten incoherent arguments or factually untrue claims used to indoctrinate students into Darwinism. *PIGDID* addresses much of the dust that has been kicked up around ID including the court cases, constant attempts to entangle it with religion and the tiresome claim that the ID is not discussed in peer reviewed literature. In addition, it explains the positive arguments for ID including such things as information encoded in DNA and molecular machines inside cells.

Most readers will appreciate the concise and clear way that Wells covers a broad range of topics related to ID. Some may find the politically conservative slant found in all *Politically Incorrect Guides* somewhat off-putting. Clearly this is a book written with conservatives in mind and as a result it includes a chapter entitled “Darwinism and Conservatives.” On the one hand such a chapter is probably useful when discussing the political climate surrounding ID, but it is less useful to those who simply want to know the arguments and are not concerned about political considerations which seem to have no correlation with the truth of an idea. At the same time, it would have been interesting to see a chapter dealing with “Darwinism and Liberals.” An analysis is needed of why the liberal tradition of open mindedness and a free market of ideas has not resulted in a more tolerant and free-ranging discussion of ID in the academy.

The Politically Incorrect Guide to Darwinism and Intelligent Design is the most comprehensive and easily understood guide to ID and Darwinism published to date. It covers a huge amount of territory in remarkably few pages and does so in an engaging style that is both readable and still manages to convey important nuances in the questions it addresses.

It is probably the fastest way to get up to speed on what ID is and why Darwinists react so negatively to it. But reading this book should not be the end of one's study of ID. Other books, for example Denyse O'Leary's *By Design or By Chance*, explain the religious struggles surrounding ID in richer detail and with more historical perspective. The problem for readers today is not, what is a good book to read to get up to speed with ID? Rather, the problem is which great book about ID one should start with. Jonathan Wells' *Politically Incorrect Guide* certainly makes an excellent choice for novices and also for those who wish to understand ID in its broader scientific and sociological perspective.

ENDNOTES

1. Wells J. 2000. *Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth?* Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc.
2. See http://www.pandasthumb.org/archives/2006/08/the_politically_3.html.
3. P. Z. Myers' obscure accusation is that Wells uses a quote talking about one stage of development as if it applied to a different stage. Unfortunately, Myers appears to have only read a sidebar quote on p 35 and failed to note the longer version of the same quote earlier on p 30 and 31 of *PIGDID*. In neither case does Wells relate the quote to the stage Myers says he does and in the full quote Wells includes the stage Meyers accuses him of being "that dishonest" about; an obscure misrepresentation that might slip by the ignorant.
4. Ayala FJ. 2006. *Darwin and Intelligent Design*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, p 35.
5. Darwin CR. 1872. *Origin Of Species By Means Of Natural Selection, Or The Preservation Of Favoured Races In The Struggle for Life*, 6th Edition. London: John Murray, p 396.