

Editorial Reflections

Evolution: Who's Panicking Now?

Years ago a widely read book sported the title, *The Ugly American*. Its chapters jumped around the world where Americans are at work giving bad examples of our people and our influence, people primarily in political circles overseas. One chapter described the work of an American engineer who went out into rural villages helping the people a great deal—and became a hero to them. He was the “ugly” American of the book’s title, not part of the foreign capital city’s social whirl.

But, of course, more people by ten to one see a book’s title and don’t read it. Most people thought that the authors were labelling all government representatives as “ugly Americans,” and in another sense they were. This is what electrified Americans, and attracted wide attention.

At that time I lived in Guatemala, and for the first time as far as anyone could remember, US Embassy people made a token visit out to a rural city, putting on a drink-all-you-want party for all Americans and a handful of prominent nationals in that part of the country. Of the thirty or so people gathered, well over half were non-drinking missionaries. The party was not a success. But it certainly proved the power of a book title, even if misunderstood.

Now I would like to believe that the same thing will happen with two recent cover stories. *Wired* magazine for October, and *National Geographic* for November both fall into the same trap (implying what they don’t believe). *Wired* carried in large letters the title of a short article way in the back of the magazine—obviously chosen to attract attention—“*The plot to kill evolution.*” In even larger letters, *National Geographic* trumpeted on its cover the question, “*Was Darwin wrong?*”

In neither case does the actual text of the articles inside give Darwinists any reason for concern. But in both cases I am sure many panicky readers are going to be held spell-bound, reading every single line, fearing that some not-so-nice thing is going to be said about the sacred doctrine of evolution.

Wired’s article actually presented a bit of the critical view of evolution in a longer and more objective account of the three-year running battle in the State of Ohio over how to teach evolution, and whether any critical views can be mentioned in their school materials. But the article is “loyally” and plainly opposed to the Intelligent Design side. For example, it describes a key debate between four real scientists, two on each side. The two favoring evolution are

described as “scientists.” The two who feel evolution should be taught along with its problems, are described as mere “representatives” of the other point of view.

The big “mistake” *Wired* made was to print a lengthy side bar written by a technology guru, George Gilder, a man who edits the highly praised *Gilder Technology Report*, now tied in with *Forbes* magazine. Gilder, speaking quite authoritatively, predicts the downfall of Darwinism as “a faith-driven 19th-century myth.”

Frankly, the *Wired* article may have gone as far as you can go, or a bit too far, and still be printed in a periodical seeking to maintain secular subscribers. Sure enough, in the December issue (that came out early in November) *Wired* devoted a full page to mostly screaming letters denouncing the magazine for even opening the door a crack to scepticism about Darwinism.

The longest letter, however, taking up half of the space for letters, is a polite, measured letter defending the Discovery Institute, somewhat maligned in the article, which was a major player in winning very mild approval for criticism about Darwinism in the State of Ohio school system. You’ve got to hear one of the screaming protests, though. It starts out,

I’m designed intelligently? As far as I can see, I was designed by an idiot. My parts are neither interchangeable nor replaceable. I could use a new ankle right now, and almost everything I do injures my back ...

That blast is not going to convert many to Darwinism. Surely he has forgotten about heart transplants and kidney transplants.

The *National Geographic* article by contrast is 30 pages (more pages and pictures, less text) and begins with the sentence, “The evidence for evolution is overwhelming.” It makes no clear reference to any opposing ideas or people or literature, much less an opposing movement.

Furthermore, it subtly takes advantage of the inherent ambiguity of the very word *evolution*, which can be used quite sensibly if you are referring to the “evolution of the American automobile” (where thousands of intelligent engineers were at work at every point) or even to the genetic engineering over time, due to either incidental or intelligent selective breeding of individual species—an intelligent activity which none of the hominids ever pulled off and, we are told, did not occur until 11,000 years ago.

On the other hand, the concept of an all-encompassing *evolution* of life from an inorganic “soup” is something greatly different, and its weaknesses are shielded by *National Geographic’s* constant bundling of that view together with the sensible uses of the word.

The web site, www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/0411 is already full of mainly emotional spoutings on both sides—very light weight. Even the Discovery Institute’s specialists were quoted as saying in the article that their presentation “framed the issue quite differently than our [more emotional?] supporters.” Evidently the screamers on both sides are hogging the air waves. This is no time for ridicule or sarcasm. It may bring laughs but that’s all. Discourtesy is not the best approach.

When I was a teenager two brilliant believers waged war against unbelief. Harry Rimmer, some said, “led (church) audiences in laughs” about the evolutionists. Irwin Moon produced such high quality films about the marvels of creation that they were used in 235,000 public schools. I must admit, however, that some statements of the evolutionists are a bit humorous. Nancy Pearcey in her book reviewed here quotes the most outspoken of all prominent evolutionists, Oxford professor, Richard Dawkins, as saying,

“Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose,” but he feels he must disprove that. (p. 183)

There is little doubt that people on both sides are getting panicky. But panic attacks don’t produce clear thinking, much less win arguments.

Stepping back, we might ask why the emotional content on both sides? Some individuals on both sides seem to be defending an orthodoxy in ways that are emotional and even irrational to some extent. One group may be fearful of the consequences of acknowledging a Divine Being who judges behavior. The other group may be fearful of the consequences of losing a Divine Being who represents great hopes.

If somehow the concrete issues could be disentangled from such fears it would appear to be easier to compare notes on things. **IJFM**

Book Review

—Reviewed by Ralph D. Winter

How are Frontiers Identified?

There would seem to be a close affinity between the phenomenon of invention and the discernment of mission frontiers. Recently I read a review of a book which I think readers of a journal on frontiers of mission ought to take seriously.

Juice: The Creative Fuel that Drives World-Class Inventors, by Evin I. Schwartz (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004) is a book that is notable, according to the review I read, because it points out that discovering a problem is more than half of the solution. Or, that solutions are not as difficult as the recognition of a problem in the first place.

The book is one long series of engrossing real life stories, but it is also carefully systematized because the contents themselves are very revealing:

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| 1. Creating Possibilities | 7. Applying Analogies |
| 2. Pinpointing Problems | 8. Visualizing Results |
| 3. Recognizing Patterns | 9. Embracing Failure |
| 4. Channeling Chance | 10. Multiplying Insights |
| 5. Transcending Boundaries | 11. Thinking Systematically |
| 6. Detecting Barriers | |

If you want a taste of the writing style, try this from the Prologue entitled, “What Drives Invention.”

Most popular notions of what an inventor is ... depict inventors as irrationally passionate, emotionally unstable, or downright mad. Inventors are only a little bit like that ... to focus [on those traits] would be a distraction ... [our] focus is on their strategic thinking patterns, the series of ‘Aha!’ moments that leads to the final products we recognize as inventions ...

Where and when do inventors come up with breakthrough ideas? They do it everywhere and all the time. They’re assigning themselves problems at bedtime and dreaming new ideas as they sleep; they’re having epiphanies in the shower; they’re incubating concepts while driving; they’re brainstorming while exercising on treadmills, riding bikes, climbing mountains, and jogging through canyons; they’re informally bouncing possibilities off of colleagues; they’re reading constantly; they’re observing everything around them, looking for clues; and they’re often absorbed in their own thoughts ...

But they’d be the first to tell you that most of their ideas aren’t brilliant. They need to generate a lot of ideas to come up with the fewer viable ones ... Invention is a set of strategic thinking tools that you can teach, learn, and practice, just as you can with other skills like cooking, acting, or sailing.

That last sentence is the most important, even though the author goes on to complain that invention is not usually something that is taught. Why can’t it be taught? I think it can. And that is one reason for the *International Journal of Frontier Missions*.

