

Recording the History of ID as it is Made

Darwin Strikes Back: Defending the Science of Intelligent Design

By Thomas E Woodward

Baker Books, 2006

A review by Steve Fuller (University of Warwick, UK)

Originally posted at Amazon.com November 22, 2006

Woodward is a knowledgeable and, by the standards of these things, folksy in his presentation of the twists and turns in the debates between evolution and intelligent design (ID) over the past ten years, more or less taking off from where he left matters in his last, and equally informative book, 'Doubts about Darwin'. Woodward is upfront about his theism, but he is also someone who reads widely and tries to deal with the key events and people himself in person. It's too bad that evolutionists don't have anyone comparable to him. Perhaps it means that evolutionists simply believe that the theory can sell itself.

And maybe it can. As Woodward observes, there are two burdens that ID must shift in the US context. (I stress US because things are different elsewhere in the world.) First, of course, is the dominance of the belief in Darwinian evolution by the majority of scientists considered relevant to an explanation of life on earth. But, equally important is the legal burden that in the US it is possible to disqualify a theory as unscientific, regardless of the credentials of the people or the research done, simply if you can demonstrate religious motivation for its promotion. This is the bigger problem, as I see it, as someone who testified for ID at the recent *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District*. (I believe it radically distorts the constitutional 'separation of church and state', but that's for another time.) The upside of the story, which Woodward documents, is that ID can be discussed completely and explicitly without making legally proscribed religious appeals.

For readers who are relatively new to the evo-ID debates, one feature of the rhetoric of this book is worth noting. Woodward periodically pauses in his narrative to decry the misrepresentation of ID by various defenders of the evolutionary faith, and even includes an appendix to this effect. It's worth pointing out that misrepresentation, or at least strategic characterization, is common to both sides of this debate. Here Woodward is simply fighting fire with fire. It is inevitable that in a debate as serious as this one both sides will portray each other in the least favourable light. But does this mutual misrepresentation really matter in the long term? Frankly, I don't think so.

The sanest way to deal with the issue is not by the mind-numbing repetition of who said what about whom, which you can find on various blogs endlessly trotted out like pre-programmed chess moves, sometimes (especially in the case of evolutionists) graced with a peanut gallery that would not be out of place in 'Beavis and Butthead'. (I guess that's what you get when you take 'self-organization' a little too seriously...) Rather, savvy readers should look at subtle shifts in position over time, both substantive and rhetorical, that both sides make. And both sides have indeed made quite significant shifts in how they argue their case over the last quarter century. If ID has done nothing else, it has helped evolutionists to smarten up their act and curb their terminal smugness. And ID, to its credit, does not introduce the Bible as evidence. 'Darwin Strikes Back' and Woodward's earlier book, 'Doubts about Darwin' give a pretty fair record from a participant-observer standpoint of the various twists and turns in the debate.

Readers of Woodward's book should pick up a copy of the DVD, 'Unlocking the Mystery of

Life', whose making he describes. It is probably the most sophisticated filmic treatment of ID yet, and would make for challenging viewing in a high school biology class. While some of the people involved in this film may have religious motives, they're never given expression. We are reaching a point where the merits (or not) of ID can be discussed without reference to politically controversial motives, just as we can do likewise for evolution without introducing sensitive matters like racial hygiene and eugenics, which were very much part of the history of Darwinism, independently of its actual scientific validity.