

Truth Sheet #03-05 (revised 7/05)

The “Wedge Document”: How Darwinist Paranoia Fueled an Urban Legend

Overview: In 1999 someone posted on the internet an early fundraising proposal for Discovery Institute’s Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture. Dubbed the “Wedge Document,” this proposal soon took on a life of its own, popping up in all sorts of places and eventually spawning what can only be called a giant urban legend. Among true-believers on the Darwinist fringe the document came to be viewed as evidence for a secret conspiracy to fuse religion with science and impose a theocracy. These claims were so outlandish that for a long time we simply ignored them. But because some credulous Darwinists seem willing to believe almost anything, we decided we should set the record straight.

1. The Background

- In 1996 Discovery Institute established the Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture. Its main purposes were (1) to support research by scientists and other scholars who were critical of neo-Darwinism and by those who were developing the emerging scientific theory of intelligent design; and (2) to explore, in various ways, the multiple connections between science and culture.
- To raise financial support for the Center, Discovery Institute prepared a fundraising proposal that explained the overall rationale for the Center and why a think tank like Discovery would want to start such an entity in the first place. Like most fundraising proposals, this one included a multi-year budget and a list of goals to be achieved.

2. The Rise of an Urban Legend

- In 1999 a copy of this fundraising proposal was posted by someone on the internet. The document soon spread across the world wide web, gaining almost mythic status among some Darwinists.
- That’s when members of the Darwinist fringe began saying rather loopy things. For example, one group claimed that the document supplied evidence of a frightening twenty-year master plan “to have religion control not only science, but also everyday life, laws, and education”!
- Barbara Forrest, a Louisiana professor on the board of a group called the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association, similarly championed the document as proof positive of a sinister conspiracy to abolish civil liberties and unify church and state. Forrest insisted that the document was “crucially important,” and she played up its supposed secrecy, claiming at one point that its “authenticity...has been neither affirmed nor denied by the Discovery Institute.” Poor Prof. Forrest—if she really wanted to know whether the document was authentic, all she had to do was ask. (She didn’t.)

- There were lots of ironies as this urban legend began to grow, but Darwinist true-believers didn't seem capable of appreciating them:
 - Discovery Institute, the supposed mastermind of this "religious" conspiracy, was in fact a secular organization that sponsored programs on a wide array of issues, including mass transit, technology policy, the environment, and national defense.
 - At the time the "Wedge Document" was being used by Darwinists to stoke fears about Christian theocracy, the Chairman of Discovery's Board was Jewish, its President was an Episcopalian, and its various Fellows represented an eclectic range of religious views ranging from Roman Catholic to agnostic. It would have been news to them that they were all part of a fundamentalist cabal.
 - Far from promoting a union between church and state, Discovery Institute sponsored for several years a seminar for college students that advocated religious liberty and the separation between church and state.

3. What the Document Actually Says

- The best way to dispel the paranoia of the conspiracy-mongers is to actually look at the document in question. It simply doesn't advocate the views they attribute to it.
- First and foremost, and contrary to the hysterical claims of some Darwinists, this document does not attack "science" or the "scientific method." *In fact, it is pro-science.* What the document critiques is "scientific materialism," which is the abuse of genuine science by those who claim that science supports the unscientific philosophy of materialism.
- Second, the document does not propose replacing "science" or the "scientific method" with "God" or "religion." Instead, it supports a science that is "consonant" (i.e., harmonious) with theism, rather than hostile to it. To support a science that is "consonant" with religion is not to claim that religion and science are the same thing. They clearly aren't. But it is to deny the claim of scientific materialists that science is somehow anti-religious.
- Following are the document's major points, which we still are happy to affirm:
 - (1) ***"The proposition that human beings are created in the image of God is one of the bedrock principles on which Western civilization is built. Its influence can be detected in most, if not all, of the West's greatest achievements, including representative democracy, human rights, free enterprise, and progress in the arts and sciences."*** As a historical matter, this statement happens to be true. The idea that humans are created in the image of God *has* had powerful positive cultural consequences. Only a member of a group with a name like the "New Orleans Secular Humanist Association" could find anything objectionable here. (By the way, isn't it strange that a group supposedly promoting "theocracy" would praise "representative democracy" and "human rights"?)
 - (2) ***"Yet a little over a century ago, this cardinal idea came under wholesale attack by intellectuals drawing on the discoveries of modern science. Debunking the traditional conceptions of both God and man, thinkers such as Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud portrayed humans not as moral and spiritual beings, but as animals or machines who inhabited a universe ruled by purely impersonal forces and whose behavior and very thoughts were dictated by the unbending forces of biology, chemistry, and environment."*** This statement highlights one of the animating concerns of Discovery Institute as a public policy think tank. Leading nineteenth century intellectuals

tried to hijack science to promote their own anti-religious agenda. This attempt to enlist science to support an anti-religious agenda continues to this day with Darwinists like Oxford's Richard Dawkins, who boldly insists that Darwinism supports atheism. We continue to think that such claims are an abuse of genuine science, and that this abuse of real science has led to pernicious social consequences (such as the eugenics crusade pushed by Darwinist biologists early in the twentieth century).

- (3) ***“Discovery Institute’s Center... seeks nothing less than the overthrow of materialism and its cultural legacies.” It wants to “reverse the stifling dominance of the materialist worldview, and to replace it with a science consonant with Christian and theistic convictions.”*** We admit it: We want to end the abuse of science by Darwinists like Richard Dawkins and E.O. Wilson who try to use science to debunk religion, and we want to provide support for scientists and philosophers who think that real science is actually “consonant with... theistic convictions.” Please note, however: “Consonant with” means “in harmony with.” It does not mean “same as.” Recent developments in physics, cosmology, biochemistry, and related sciences may lead to a new harmony between science and religion. But that doesn’t mean we think religion and science are the same thing. We don’t.
- (4) ***“Without solid scholarship, research and argument, the project would be just another attempt to indoctrinate instead of persuade.”*** It is precisely because we are interested in encouraging intellectual exploration that the “Wedge Document” identified the “essential” component of its program as the support of scholarly “research, writing and publication.” The document makes clear that the primary goal of Discovery Institute’s program in this area is to support scholars so they can engage in research and publication Scholarship comes first. Accordingly, by far the largest program in the Center’s budget has been the awarding of research fellowships to biologists, philosophers of science, and other scholars to engage in research and writing.
- (5) ***“The best and truest research can languish unread and unused unless it is properly publicized.”*** It’s shocking but true—Discovery Institute actually promised to publicize the work of its scholars in the broader culture! What’s more, it wanted to engage Darwinists in academic debates at colleges and universities! We are happy to say that we still believe in vigorous and open discussion of our ideas, and we still do whatever we can to publicize the work of those we support. So much for the “secret” part of our supposed “conspiracy/”
- A final thought: Don’t Darwinists have better ways to spend their time than inventing absurd conspiracy theories about their opponents? The longer Darwinists persist in spinning such urban legends, the more likely it is that fair-minded people will begin to question whether Darwinists know what they are talking about.