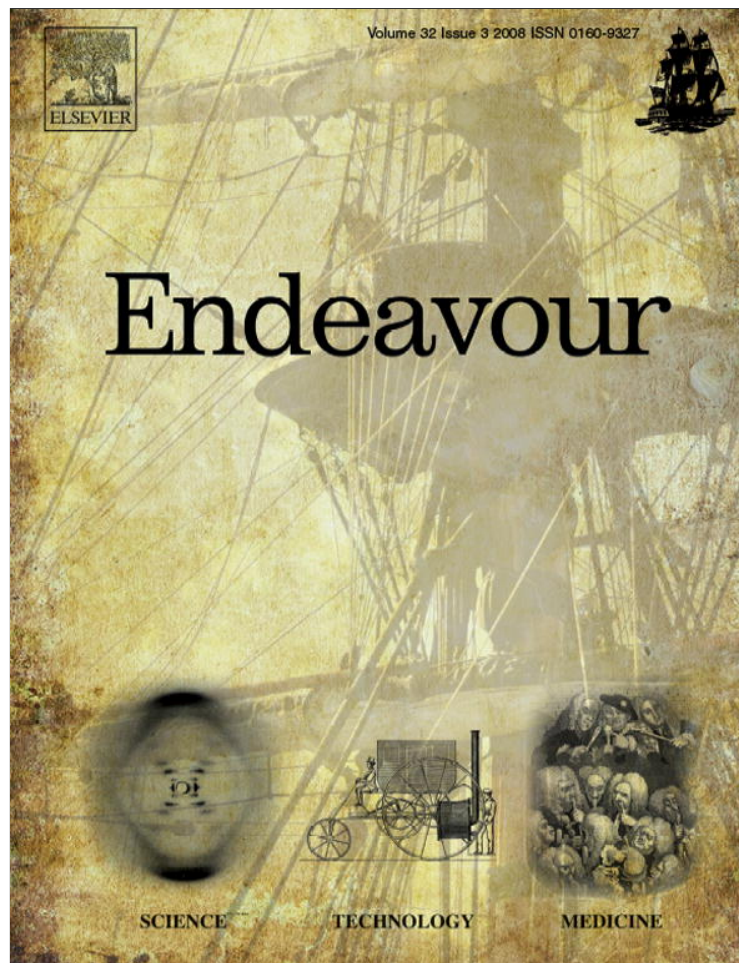


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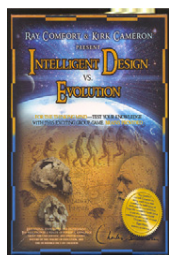
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A box full of ironies

Intelligent Design vs. Evolution, Living Waters Publications, Bellflower, California, USA, US\$ 29.95

Brian Regal

History Department, Kean University, Morris Ave. Union, NJ 07083, USA



At the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925 enterprising hucksters were selling stuffed monkeys and other anti-evolution memorabilia outside the courthouse. The Creation Mega Conference held in 2005 to coincide with the anniversary of the trial would have been a good opportunity for modern-day hucksters to do the same for a new generation. The event, sponsored by the Christian Fundamentalist

organization Answers In Genesis and held on the campus of Liberty University in Virginia did have a substantial concession area, but while there were plenty of books and DVDs on the 'myth' of evolution, on evolutionist conspiracies, on how the earth is only a few thousand years old, how the Grand Canyon shows a young earth and how science does not know what it is talking about, there were no Scopes Trial-like toys or games. That discrepancy has been rectified. Now we have *Intelligent Design vs. Evolution*. The box art is colorful and professionally executed; the physical design of the game is first rate as is the quality of the attendant parts. Overall it is an attractive package. The game is promoted by Kirk Cameron, the former teen television star of *Growing Pains*, who turned to religious works and has starred in the *Left Behind* movies, a set of eschatological films based on the novels of the same name. His partner in this enterprise is the down-home, self-taught Biblical exegete and Christian convert, Ray Comfort.

The game itself is fairly simple; a kind of religious Trivial Pursuit®. Two players or teams take the sides of Intelligent Design and Evolution respectively. A series of question cards are consulted with correct answers receiving points. Dice casts get the teams – each represented by a little rubber brain – moving around the board and reading off instructions they 'immediately obey'. The first to reach the end of the trail, or accumulate the most points, wins. It is odd that dice are used; I recall dice being tools of the devil.

The heart of the action is in the questions on the 'Brain Teaser' cards. They are an array of the usual theological self-congratulation, statements of scientists taken out of context, proclamations from creationists, snippets from Scripture, and talking body parts. Many of the cards make it clear that when scientists change their minds because new information is discovered this is evidence of the inherently faulty nature of science. Believers, the cards inform, do not have such worries because Scripture never changes. The cards hammer home how silly the very idea

of evolution is and portrays scientists as comically befuddled priests of a secular religion. According to the cards, there is no fossil evidence for human evolution and radiometric dating does not work because it is based on untested assumptions. One of the more telling cards proclaims paradoxically that it was not Christians who perpetrated the Crusades; it was Catholics. Historians of science can have a field day just going through the cards and picking out the obfuscations, faulty understandings of science and history, and simple dim reasoning that abound.

The box set also includes a CD of Cameron and Comfort explaining why evolution is nonsense and that Biblical belief is far more logical and reasonable than science. Cameron then performs a startling duet with a monkey mimicking all the same facial expressions and saying it has nothing to do with evolution. Comfort then makes phony phone calls to various airlines asking if he can bring a primate on the flight with him. When he is told that he cannot he acts puzzled because do not scientists tell us that there is little difference between monkeys and humans? (Cameron and Comfort have also produced a separate video in which they explain how a banana is designed by God to fit the human hand. Portions of that video, which appear on YouTube, has been unintentionally giving bored college students and dorm party goers many moments of laughter.

The strangest irony of this game is that they use Intelligent Design at all. There is a growing rift in the anti-evolution movement between young earth traditionalists, who wear Christianity on their sleeve – the way this game does – and Intelligent Design proponents who have been trying the best they can to distance themselves, at least publicly, from the kind of evangelical, fundamentalism the game rides on. That they use Intelligent Design here is an example of the schizophrenic place this concept holds in the world of creationism. Since its inception in the early 1990s the Intelligent Design Movement has been walking a precarious tight rope: trying to seem scientific to scientists, but religious to religionists. While ID certainly is a form of creationism – the search for proof of a designer is by definition the search for God – it also differs profoundly from Christian young earth creationism that makes up the bulk of anti-evolutionist thought. Traditionalists hold the earth to be no more than 10,000 years old, while ID proponents accept that the earth could be billions of years old and accept that evolution in some form does occur. Christian fundamentalists refuse to accept any creator other than the Biblical Christian God with Jesus as lone savior (Cameron and Comfort's other business enterprise

Corresponding author: Regal, B. (bregal@kean.edu), (brian.regal@gmail.com). Available online 26 July 2008

is a ministry called 'Way of the Master', the master being Jesus). ID believers have publically stated that the designer could be any one of a number of gods or even space aliens. The box art of *Intelligent Design vs. Evolution* states that the Christian God is the Intelligent Designer. The primary corporate promoter of ID, the Discovery Institute, has been disavowing statements like these in an effort to win legal cases and circumvent the US Constitution and its separation clause. Groups like Answers In Genesis have been trying to keep an outward position of equanimity towards ID. At the Creation Mega Conference a Christian Fundamentalist biochemist gave a lengthy and carefully worded exposition on ID, which in essence steered the audience away from it as incompatible with their beliefs in a Biblical view. The attempt at a dénouement between ID and young earth traditionalism has been growing increasingly difficult as the deeper differences and contradictions between ID and traditional Christian belief become more apparent.

Dubious logic aside, it is unclear who the audience for this game is. The reliance on Intelligent Design will put off many in the fundamentalist world and its fundamentalism will make it more difficult for Intelligent Design proponents to publicly argue they are not religious. Cameron and company must be banking on Christians buying it without ever noticing how it undermines their faith. For anyone else the giddy 'holier than thou' attitude of its hosts, and the dark view of science and history the game wallows in will cause either howls of derision and laughter or groans of disbelief. It is easy to laugh at a game like this and wave it off as absurdist nonsense like the stuffed monkeys of the Scopes Trial, but behind Kirk Cameron's appealing smile lays the dark heart of anti-intellectualism and the dogged flight from reason that imperils us all today.

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Corrigendum

Corrigendum to 'Modeling the unknown: how to make a perfect whale' [Endeavour 32 (2) (2008) 58–63]

Michael Rossi

Program in Science, Technology and Society, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 77 Massachusetts Avenue, E51-185, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA

Figure 3 in Michael Rossi's article 'Modeling the unknown: how to make a perfect whale' [Endeavour 32 (2) (2008) 58–63] depicts a blue whale on the flensing deck at Grytviken, Antarctica. It was reproduced with kind

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Corresponding author: Rossi, M. (mrossi@mit.edu).