

Break Down the Wall: A Movie Review of "Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed"

By Douglas Groothuis, [The Constructive Curmudgeon](#)

We should break down the wall of censorship, intimidation, and retaliation that keeps intelligent design theory out of the academy. America has honored and must honor free speech if it is to remain America. That is the message of "Expelled," a controversial new film featuring Ben Stein. That message is communicated through interviews with Darwinists and Intelligent Design (ID) theorists as well as through various scenes, both humorous and somber. A reoccurring theme is that of the Berlin Wall keeping out Western ideas of freedom and keeping its prisoners locked into a dead and deadening ideology--Communism.

Being a bookish soul, I seldom attend films—perhaps two per year at most. Thus, I am not conversant with contemporary cinematic values or customs. (The previews nearly killed me. I keep my eyes shut, but my ears had to hear and bear a monstrous assortment of crashing, thumping, exploding sounds from hell. One preview was of a Batman movie I would not wish on my worst enemy. Amazingly, some ignoramus brought a baby into this sonic inferno.) I found the film's extreme close ups, jump cuts, and rapid scene changes annoying. Often during an interview there would be a cut away to an old black and white scene to illustrate a point. This became cloying and detracted from the debate. I yearned for more cognitive content and fewer special effects. Nevertheless, some important realities—hidden by the mainstream media—come crashing through this significant documentary.

Those who have advocated ID or even allowed its ideas some voice in their classroom or in their journals have been excommunicated by the Darwinian priesthood. That language is strong, but utterly apt. A biology professor's teaching contract is not renewed after she mentions ID in her class. Another professor's web site is censored by Baylor (a Baptist school) because it advocated ID. The editor of a science journal is fired because he supervised the publication of an article by Stephen Meyer defending ID. [Professor Guillermo Gonzalez](#), despite a stellar academic record as an astronomer (he discovered several new planets and wrote a textbook), was denied tenure because his book, *The Privileged Planet*, which argues that earth was designed. A journalist's career is threatened because she didn't use the typical "boilerplate" caricature of ID in a story. Several professors make comments under the protection of secrecy; they rightly fear Darwinist reprisals.

I will not give all the details of this egregious and draconian persecution here, but these stories are true and indicative of the sociology of knowledge at work. The Darwinists control the academy, the grant money, and most of the media. They set the plausibility structure: things taken for granted and things unthinkable. This, by the way, has little to do with actual epistemology: things rational and things irrational. The Darwinists are seldom open to honest give-and-take debate; instead, they typically reject ID as anti-scientific and ban it from public forums. I have observed this for years, and it is heartening to find a major-release motion picture telling this story. Good evidence needs the proper venue to be seen as such. The Darwinist fight like mad to make this impossible.

Neither the scientific case against Darwinism (yes, there is one) nor the scientific case for ID (yes, there is one) are adequately communicated in "Expelled," although ID thinkers such as Paul Nelson, [William Dembski](#), David Berlinski (a brilliant and delightful curmudgeon), Jon Wells,

and, Stephen Meyer are given some (but not enough) time to explain it. It is remarkable how articulate Dembski, Meyer, Wells, and Nelson are and how much intellectual punch they deliver in just a matter of minutes. However, we never hear of “irreducible complexity” ([Michael Behe’s](#) argument concerning the bacterial flagellum and other devices) or “specified complexity” (the indicator of design presented by Dembski). One computer-generated scene shows the complexity of the cell, but little is explained. (For the best DVD available arguing for ID, and against the criticisms of it, see “Unlocking the Mystery of Life.”) Dembski and Nelson briefly comment that one can believe in aspects of evolution and still support ID, since the key claim of ID is that aspects of nature require design to be explained. This does not rule out considerable development after the design has been introduced by an intelligent cause. However, this point needed more emphasis. One hopes that those moved by the film will consult the works of these authors, as well as the ground-breaking writing of Michael Behe, the most important practicing scientist of the ID movement, who, strangely, did not appear in the film.

“Expelled” also explores the philosophical and social implications of Darwinism, arguing that social Darwinism flows from biological Darwinism. Contra [The New York Time’s sneering and unserious review](#), social and biological Darwinism are of a piece. If the material world is all that is (or can be known), then there is no objective morality or moral law that exist outside of it that can be wrong to bear on it to correct it or direct it. (Yes, there are theistic Darwinists, but the film largely explores Darwinism as a naturalistic worldview. This is, in fact, how it is taught in the vast majority of public institutions today.) If so, the struggle to survive is all that matters; it is all that one is left with. Darwinian biologist William Provine makes this basic point in the film to introduce the section on Nazism, although he does not speak to social Darwinism or the Nazi’s appropriation of Darwin. However, Provine denies objective good and evil, since biology is all that counts across the board. As Berkinski says in the film, Darwinism is a *necessary condition* for Nazism, but not a *sufficient condition*. That is, Nazism needed Darwinism for its ideology, but it needed other false considerations (of race and history) as well. However, Darwinism, in itself, does not provide any refutation to Hitlerian ideology, since (again) there is no knowable objective moral law outside of nature. The stronger must prevail—period.

The number of interviews and their brevity obscured some important differences between those within the Darwinian camp and between those who oppose Darwinism. It was briefly pointed out that Dawkins disagreed with Darwinists (represented by Eugenie Scott) who say that religion and Darwinism are compatible. He claimed that Darwinism explains religion away and leads toward atheism. Although the line was not used in the film, he is famous for saying that Darwinism allows one to be “an intellectually fulfilled atheist.” My take is that if Darwinism is true—the entire biosphere can be explained on the basis of undirected, natural causes (or by chance and necessity)—then theism is much less likely to be true. This is because biology is denuded of any evidence for a designer, when, in fact, Christianity (and other forms of theism) claim that evidence for God can be found precisely there (see Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:18-21).

While Alister McGrath was interviewed making comments against Dawkins’s atheism, it was not mentioned McGrath does not support intelligent design. In fact, he endorses methodological naturalism and is a theistic evolutionist. This is the chief reason why the debate between Dawkins and McGrath did not go well for McGrath. He could not argue from nature itself for a designer, thus ceding tremendous too much ground—the entire universe!—to Dawkins. Professor John Lennox (a brilliant and charming man I met in Hungry last summer, who holds three earned doctorates), who also appears in this film, did a far better job of handling Dawkins in a debate. The reason was that he deftly employed ID arguments against atheism.

Near the end of the film physicist John Polkinghorne said something out of sync the ID perspective by claiming that science has one view of the world and religion another; and we need to put them together. What that means, essentially (from what I know of the man's work), is that science explains the empirical and religion explains the spiritual. But ID claims that *nature itself*, when properly interpreted, shows signs of a designing intelligence. Evidence for intelligent causation in nature lends some intellectual and empirical support to theism, although it by no means gives us all the details of a religion. Polkinghorne and McGrath hold to a kind of "two domains" approach to science and religion. Science and religion cannot be at war because they speak of two different things. The leading ID thinkers, on the other hand, hold to more of an "interactive approach"--science and religion both make truth claims about reality that need to be assessed according to the best canons of evidence. On this, see J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, chapter seven.

A few comments are in order about Ben Stein's interview style. I know little about this man, except that he has been both an academic and in movies. Strange combination, that. He took a rather droll approach, and the interviews are highly edited and too short. His interview with Dawkins wastes time by asking him if he disbelieves in all gods ("the Jewish God, the Hindu gods...?") and trying to pin him down as to what the exact percentage is that there is no God. This got laughs when I saw the film, but was intellectually pointless. Dawkins gets the best of him. Stein, however, did help reveal the absurdity of Michael Ruse's idea that life began by riding on the back of crystals by simply repeating the bizarre idea several times in an incredulous tone of voice. Without a designer, the unliving, unthinking, unplanning universe must become enormously creative and lucky beyond belief.

While the major news outlets are viciously attacking "Expelled" as creationist propaganda (and they didn't have to actually see it to say that), the fact is that the film reveals a systematic, unfair, and deeply un-American suppression and distortion of ID thought in the academy. (For example, Eugenie Scott claims that ID thinkers have produced no peer review work. This is flatly false. Just go to <http://www.discovery.org/> to find a list of peer-review work.) The Darwinian inquisitors make Joseph McCarthy look like a girl scout. In fact, there were Communists deeply embedded in the academy and the motion picture industry (something young Ronald Reagan fought against) during the Senator's day, and Communists were genuinely dangerous to the American experiment. McCarthy was not entirely wrong, although he has become a whipping boy of the sound-bite crowd. ID thinkers, however, are no threat to science or to any American ideal. Yet they are a threat to Darwinism, which has become a largely unchallengeable orthodoxy in America.

I say, "Break down the wall."

For a brief case for ID and its place in the university, see my essay, ["Intelligent Design and the State University: Accepting the Challenge."](#)