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## Who won the Intelligent Design debate?

Is the debate on Intelligent Design over and did the evolutionists win?

PARTICIPATING AUTHORS: J. SCOTT TURNER



**J. Scott Turner** is Associate Professor at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse. He is also the author of two Harvard books: *The Extended Organism: The Physiology of Animal-Built Structures* and most recently (January 2007) *The Tinkerer's Accomplish: How Design*

### *Emerges from Life Itself*

It is tempting to answer this question with yes, and yes, the debate was won about 150 years ago. Intelligent design theory, at least if one takes its core texts at face value, is essentially modernized Natural Theology: William Paley equipped with a computer and electron microscope. Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace decisively put paid to that idea, and thankfully so: by the mid-19th century, Natural Theology and the centuries of Platonic obscurantism it engendered had nearly choked natural history to death. It's hard to imagine why anyone would want to bring it back.

And yet, here we are, a century-and-a-half later, and some want to do precisely that. So it seems the debate is not as over as we might wish. The signs are everywhere: the Discovery Institute is alive and well; Intelligent Design and Evolution Awareness clubs are springing up on campuses worldwide; ID conferences are being organized; its advocates buzz away in a busy corner of the blogosphere; Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box* has an amazon.com sales rank that's better than mine!

So, the really interesting question is not so much is the debate over, but why *isn't* it over? This new question evokes another dangerously tempting answer: what else could it be but recalcitrant stupidity or political cynicism, mere "stealth creationism?" It's imperative that we not yield to that tempting answer, though. Not only is it demonstrably wrong, but relying on it as our only answer to the ID challenge will make it very likely that we evolutionists will lose the debate.

We are in danger of losing because the well-founded confidence in Darwinism's truth has led us to imagine that we scientists are the sole owners of the issue. We are not: Darwinism is more than just a well-established scientific principle; it is also a radical philosophy of nature. To many, this philosophy's most troubling aspect is its seeming denial of the living world's most obvious trait--its apparent design and purposefulness. Natural theology, despite its many problems, was attractive because it seemed to provide a reasonable explanation for these attributes. It seems to still, as attested by the persistence of ideas such as Intelligent Design. Arguably, we have not made the case as well as we think we have, and until we do, the issue will not go away.

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