

# Expelled, and the Trouble Ahead for American Science

K E N N E T H R . M I L L E R

AMERICAN SCIENCE IS IN TROUBLE, AND IF you'd like to see one of the reasons why, all you have to do is to go to the movies. The popular culture of this great nation, which has led the world in research, is gradually turning against science. I can think of no better example of why this is so than Ben Stein's new movie, *Expelled*.

Ben Stein is supposed to be a funny guy—and a smart one, too. I laughed at him in the movie *Ferris Bubler's Day Off*, learned from his financial columns in the *Wall Street Journal*, and even pretended to compete with him every time I watched *Win Ben Stein's Money* on television. But now he's just killing me.

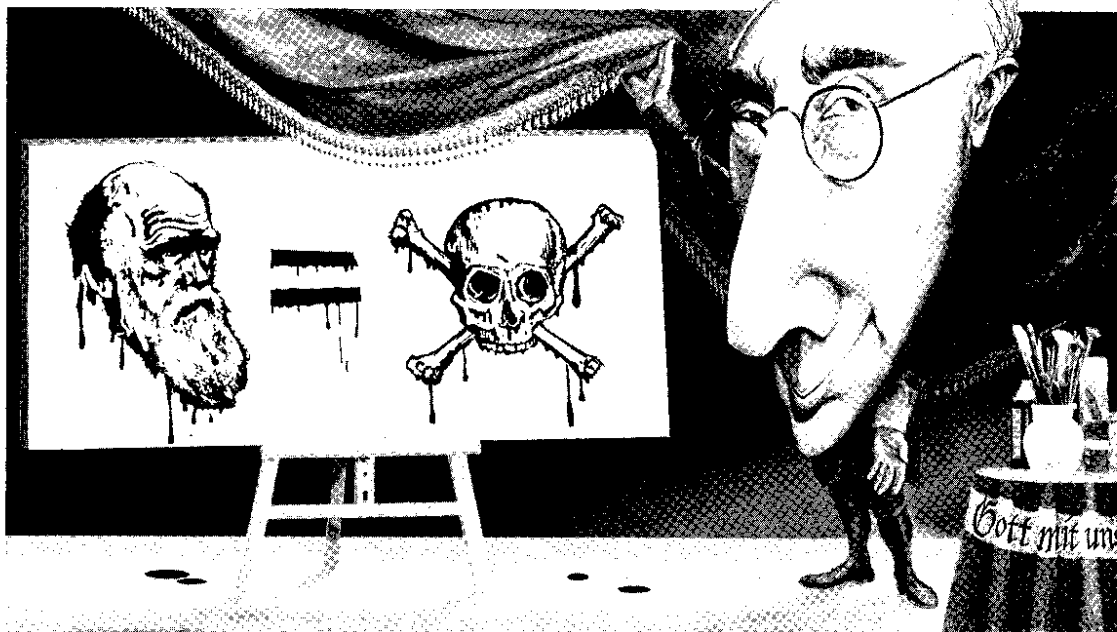
"Intelligent Design" (ID), the relabeled, repackaged form of creationism that has been popular in the U.S. for a decade or so, has always had a problem. It just can't seem to produce any evidence. Teachers in Ohio looking for an ID curriculum found nothing except a collection of arguments against evolution. Lawyers trying to defend a Pennsylvania school district's ID policy learned, much to their chagrin, that even the idea's most fervent advocates couldn't produce a single scientific paper supporting ID. To scientists, the reasons for this are obvious. To conservative *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer, ID is nothing more than a "phony theory." No data, no science, no experiments, just an attempt to sneak a narrow set of religious views into American classrooms.

So the advocates of ID need a story—a narrative—to explain why this idea has been a non-starter within the scientific community, and with Ben Stein's help, they've found it. The story line is that ID has gone nowhere because its advocates are persecuted and this great idea is being suppressed. *Expelled* tells theatergoers the story of this terrible campaign against inquiry and free expression, and mocks the pretensions of the closed-minded scientific elite supposedly behind it.

There are so many things wrong with this so-

called documentary that one hardly knows where to begin. One example: viewers of the movie are told that Dr. Richard Sternberg lost his job at the Smithsonian Institution and his editorship of a journal because he helped to publish a paper favorable to ID. Wrong. Dr. Sternberg was n't even employed by the Smithsonian (hence, he had no job to lose), and he had resigned his unpaid position as journal editor six months before the paper was published. Apparently, the worst thing that actually happened to Dr. Sternberg was that fellow scientists spoke harshly to him after he bypassed normal editorial channels to be sure the ID paper was published. In fact, the irony is that neither Sternberg nor any of the other people portrayed as martyrs in *Expelled* actually lost jobs because they advocated ID, while some who have spoken in support of evolution have. In 2007, for example, Chris Comer, the director of science education for Texas schools was fired for having done nothing more than forwarding an e-mail announcing a seminar to be given by a pro-evolution college professor.

Continuing its deception, *Expelled* uses interviews with avowed atheists like Richard Dawkins, best-selling author of *The God Delusion*, to argue that evolution, like the scientific establishment itself, is vehemently anti-God. Never mind that according to a study published in the prestigious journal *Science*, 40% of the members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the country's largest scientific organization, profess a belief in a personal God. Mr. Stein, carefully ignoring these 50,000 people (AAAS has 120,000 members), tells his viewers that "Darwinists" don't allow scientists to even think thoughts of God. Knowing how common religious faith is among scientists, the editors of *Scientific American* asked Mark Mathis, the film's co-producer, why he didn't interview such scientists as Francis Collins (head of the Human



Genome Project), Francisco Ayala, or myself. Mathis cited me by name as someone he didn't want on screen. "Ken Miller," he explained, "would have confused the film unnecessarily." In other words, showing a scientist who accepts both God and evolution would have dashed their story line by confusing it...with the truth.

Despite these falsehoods, by far the film's most outlandish misrepresentation is its attempt, from beginning to end, to link Charles Darwin to the Nazi Holocaust. A concentration camp tour guide tells Stein that the Nazis were practicing "Darwinism," and that's all the proof Stein needs. Never mind those belt buckles worn by members of the S.S. and other Nazi officials proclaiming *Gott mit uns* (God is with us), the toxic anti-semitism of Martin Luther, the ghettos and murderous pogroms in Christian Europe centuries before Darwin. No matter. It's all the fault of evolution. Such libelous nonsense has been sharply denounced by everyone who truly understands the Holocaust. The Anti-Defamation League called this claim "outrageous," noting that Stein's movie "trivializes" the real causes of this horrific chapter in European history.

So why is all this misleading nonsense a threat to science? The answer was given by Stein himself. The conclusion he draws from this, one he shares with his audience, is that science is genuinely evil. Consider this: in an April 21 interview on the Trinity Broadcast

Network, Stein said that the murder of young children in death camps was "horrifying beyond words." Indeed. But what led to such horrors? Stein explained: "that's where science—in my opinion, this is just an opinion, that's where science leads you. Love of God and compassion and empathy leads you to a very glorious place. Science leads you to killing people."

According to Ben Stein, science leads you to "killing people." Not to cures and vaccines, not to a deeper understanding of nature, not to technical wonders like computers and cell phones, and certainly not to a better life. Nope. Science leads you to murder.

I can think of no surer recipe for the destruction of science in the United States than the viewpoint expressed by Stein. *Expelled* is a shoddy piece of propaganda aimed at propping up the scientific failures of ID by playing the victim card. It deceives its audiences, libels the scientific community, and contributes mightily to a climate of hostility not just to evolution, but to science itself. Ben Stein is doing nothing less than helping turn a generation of American youth away from science. If we actually come to believe that science leads to murder, as Ben Stein clearly does, then we deserve to lose world leadership in science. In that sense, the word "expelled" may have a different and far more tragic connotation for our country than Stein intended. ▼