

KCFS Response to IDnet Proposal for Draft 6

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Kansas Citizens for Science February 12, 2001

www.kcfs.org

A Response to the Intelligent Design Network's Proposals to Include "Intelligent Design" in the Kansas Science Standards

The Intelligent Design network (IDnet) has repeatedly argued that "intelligent design" (ID) should be included in the Kansas science standards.

The IDnet's proposals to insert ID into the standards have been based on two main beliefs: that science embraces the philosophy of Naturalism and that "intelligent design" is a valid "competing hypothesis" to the theory of evolution.

The IDnet's main beliefs are not accepted by the scientific community. They are in fact considered wrong. On that basis alone, the IDnet's proposals should not be included in the state science standards.

Both the nature of science and the specific scientific content described in the 2001 Kansas science standards represent essential, mainstream science as practiced worldwide.

It is not the responsibility of the state BOE to decide what is and is not verified science. If the ideas put forward by the IDnet ever become an essential part of mainstream science, then they may earn a place in the public school science curriculum. At this time, however, the IDnet's quarrel is with the scientific community, not with public education. The IDnet should not be allowed to use the public school curriculum as a means of bypassing the accepted ways for establishing scientific knowledge.

From their two main beliefs, the IDnet concludes that science has atheistic implications, that science has contributed to the moral and cultural decay of society, that the evidence for "design" is censored, and that there are Constitutional reasons why design should be given consideration in the science curriculum. These conclusions, being based on false premises, are also wrong.

"Naturalism" and the Nature of Science

The IDnet believes that science, by limiting itself to "natural" explanations, as stated in Draft 6, inherently embraces philosophical Naturalism [their capitalization], the philosophical

belief that “all phenomena result only from natural causes - chance and necessity.” (page 1)

The IDnet is wrong: science neither embraces nor endorses philosophical Naturalism. Science is purposely limited to seeking natural explanations for observable phenomena. Science does not attempt to offer theological explanations for such phenomena. Neither does science attempt to explain our moral, aesthetic, or spiritual experience: these fall outside the realm of science.

Seeking natural explanations has proven to be highly successful in building a universally accessible body of knowledge about how the world works. Explanations involving non-natural causes cannot be investigated empirically with the tools of science, and have not successfully contributed to science.

Nowhere in the practice or teaching of science is there a commitment to the belief that what science studies is all that exists, or that the methods of science are the only valid human ways of seeking knowledge. Science is not a dogmatic philosophy about either the ultimate nature of the world or the full nature of human beings.

It is true that some individuals within the scientific community have used evolution as a vehicle to promote a true “philosophical Naturalism.” However, it is equally true that many scientists who accept the evidence for evolution are also committed and outspoken theists. Both groups of individuals see our current scientific understanding of the universe as supporting their philosophical position. However, neither position is an inherent implication of that scientific understanding. Science itself is neutral on issues of the ultimate nature of reality.

Design

The IDnet claims that natural processes are not sufficient to have produced some features of life, and that an additional type of cause, “design,” the action of “a mind or some form of intelligence,” is necessary to scientifically explain those features. The IDnet writes as if “design” is an obvious and accepted alternative to natural causation, and that a scientific “theory of intelligent design (ID)” exists to compete with the theory of evolution. Neither of these claims is true.

There is no theory of intelligent design. First, ID proposes no testable hypotheses to explain how the alleged design happens - there is no proposed mechanism for design. Second, although ID claims that the identity of the designer is unknown, leaders of the ID movement make it clear the designer is God: the logical alternative to natural causation is obviously supernatural causation. In fact, both William Dembski and Phillip Johnson have recently identified the Word of God as the source and mechanism of “intelligent design.”

ID does not explain how to determine precisely when design has taken place, or how to distinguish between what has been designed and what has evolved. ID writers have proposed

vague philosophical concepts for use in detecting design (“irreducible complexity” and “complex specified information”), but they offer no empirical means for applying these concepts to actual reality.

There is no ID research. There are no published scientific papers on ID-based experiments that test any specific aspect of the theory of ID nor produce any new, usable knowledge. There just isn’t any “theory of ID.”

The theory of evolution is truly a scientific theory: “a well-substantiated explanation of some aspect of the natural world that incorporates observations, inferences, and tested hypotheses.” (Draft 6) ID, on the other hand, is not even a hypothesis because it makes no testable claims about the world. It is non-empirical speculation.

The IDnet continually calls ID a “competing hypothesis,” but this is a claim without merit. The theory of evolution and ID are not remotely equal in their status as scientific explanations. The IDnet’s repeated argument that ID should be given equal time throughout the standards is unjustified.

The “evidence for design” and “censorship”

ID relies on gaps in our knowledge for its “evidence,” pointing to aspects of the natural world which currently have inadequate scientific explanation. However, since science has a reliable history of narrowing such gaps, this type of design argument is forced to continually emphasize new areas of uncertainty. Dependence on such negative evidence does not establish the claim that a supernatural intelligence must be considered in scientific explanations.

IDnet claims that design, and evidence for it, is “censored” because of science’s adherence to Naturalism. The truth is that the propositions of ID and the purported evidence for it have been rejected, not censored, because ID offers neither useful hypotheses nor productive research.

The claim of “censorship” is unfounded. The repeated use of the word, much like that of “competing hypothesis,” is a rhetorical tactic meant to elevate ID to a status that it does not have. It is the nature of the scientific enterprise to evaluate new ideas. At this point, ID has made little progress in being accepted as valid science. To acknowledge this lack of acceptance by excluding ID from the science standards is not censorship.

Religious and Cultural Implications

The IDnet believes that science, by embracing Naturalism, is consistent with, and therefore promotes, atheism, while design is consistent with and promotes theism. They conclude that science’s adherence to Naturalism has important negative moral and cultural consequences

such as the “Naturalistic” belief that people’s “ethics and morals can be based on whatever they decide or whatever the scientific elite tells us about nature.” The IDnet is wrong about both of these points.

As explained above, science does not embrace Naturalism. Science does not declare that other types of knowledge are invalid, and it also does not presume to add to those other types of knowledge.

All people reach conclusions about morals, values, and spiritual reality by drawing on such non-scientific sources as religious faith, philosophical belief, and personal choice. They may integrate scientific knowledge into their larger belief system, but scientific knowledge itself forces no inherent moral or spiritual conclusions.

The IDnet incorrectly concludes that, in the interest of fairness, a theistic “theory of ID” is needed to balance the atheism they believe is implied by evolution . The appeal to fairness here is misplaced. Religion and science are complementary ways of looking at the universe, not antagonistic ways of knowing between which people must choose. True fairness involves acknowledging and honoring the interrelated complexity of human knowledge, which demands both scientific and other types of knowledge.

ID attempts to drive a wedge between scientific and religious understanding. If anything is unfair, it is the IDnet’s insistence that accepting the evidence for evolution is incompatible with both a belief in God and a commitment to moral standards.

Draft 6 presents a religiously neutral science. It is ID that inserts theistic considerations into science. The IDnet places too great a value on scientific explanations as an ultimate arbiter of truth. They make the very mistake they claim others are making: trying to find empirical explanations for truths which must be reached in other than scientific ways. It is they who act like “philosophical Naturalists” as they seek to establish an empirical basis for all aspects of the world, including our beliefs about God and morality.

Constitutional issues

The IDnet claims that Constitutional issues arise because the theory of evolution promotes atheism and the theory of ID promotes theism. However, as we have shown, the theory of evolution does not promote atheism and has no inherent religious implications. Therefore, there are no Constitutional issues of the kind mentioned by the IDnet.

The true Constitutional issue here is that ID, if fully articulated to include the nature of the Designer and the undetectable nature of His interventions, is clearly a religious belief, and thus has no place in the science curriculum.

Conclusion

State standards should reflect science that is considered essential and fundamental worldwide. ID does not meet this criteria. The IDnet's incorrect beliefs about science and its relationship to religious and cultural issues have no place in the Kansas science standards. It is wrong for the IDnet to try to use the public school system as the vehicle to establish these beliefs.

Therefore, for all the reasons outlined in this paper, the proposals made by the IDnet should be rejected, and "intelligent design" ideas should not be incorporated into the Kansas science standards.

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Last updated September 7, 2003