

Introduction

Imagine that you are driving down a narrow road with a cliff on one side and a precipice on the other, when you find that a huge, thick log blocks the way forward. The log is too heavy to lift, and there is no way around it. If you are going to proceed, you must find some way to split the log into segments, so you can move the barrier out of the way. Fortunately, this can be done. The log seems solid, but there are bound to be cracks, some of which penetrate deep into the interior. What you need to do is insert the thin edge of a wedge into the most profound crack and gradually drive the broader parts of the wedge into the log until the crack widens and the log is split.

The log in this metaphor is the ruling philosophy of modern culture, a philosophy called naturalism or materialism or physicalism or simply *modernism*. Under any of those names this philosophy assumes that in the beginning were the fundamental particles that compose matter, energy and the impersonal laws of physics. To put it negatively, there was no personal God who created the cosmos and governs it as an act of free will. If God exists at all, he acts only through inviolable laws of nature and adds nothing to them. In consequence, all the creating had to be done by the laws and the particles, which is to say by some combination of random chance and lawlike regularity. It is by building on that philosophical assumption that modernist scientists conclude that all plants and animals are the products of an undirected and purposeless evolutionary process—

and that humankind is just another animal species, not created uniquely in the image of God.

This philosophy controls academic work not only in science but in all fields, including law, literature and psychology. It is promulgated throughout the educational system and the mainstream media, and government backs it. Superficially it seems as immovable as that great log that bars your progress on that mountain road. But on closer examination, the log is marked by cracks. The most important crack in the modernist log is the difference between two distinct definitions of science. On the one hand, modernists say that science is impartial fact-finding, the objective and unprejudiced weighing of evidence. Science in that sense relies on careful observations, calculations, and above all, repeatable experiments. That kind of objective science is what makes technology possible, and where it can be employed it is indeed the most reliable way of determining the facts. On the other hand, modernists also identify science with naturalistic philosophy. In that case science is committed to finding and endorsing naturalistic explanations for every phenomenon—*regardless of the facts*. That kind of science is not free of prejudice. On the contrary, it is *defined* by a prejudice. The prejudice is that all phenomena can ultimately be explained in terms of purely natural causes, which is to say unintelligent causes.

The Wedge of my title is an informal movement of like-minded thinkers in which I have taken a leading role. Our strategy is to drive the thin edge of our Wedge into the cracks in the log of naturalism by bringing long-neglected questions to the surface and introducing them into public debate. Of course the initial penetration is not the whole story, because the Wedge can split the log only if it thickens as it penetrates. If we are raising the right questions after a long period in which those questions were suppressed, then new avenues of inquiry should be suggested, and thinking will go off in new

directions. A new body of research and scholarship will gradually emerge, and in time the adherents of the old dogma will be left behind, unable to comprehend the questions that have suddenly become too important to ignore.

The first steps in the thickening of the Wedge deal with its core proposition that intelligence is a real phenomenon which cannot be reduced to material causes and which can be identified scientifically. The biochemist Michael Behe has described the irreducible complexity of organisms at the molecular level and explained why the neo-Darwinian mechanism of random mutation and natural selection does not produce irreducibly complex adaptations. William Dembski has taken our intuitions about intelligent design and formulated them rigorously both in philosophical and mathematical terms.* Works in progress will explain how Darwinist prejudice has distorted scientific evidence from the fossil record, embryonic development, origin of life studies, and genetics. Other work that is just beginning to take shape will sketch an agenda for research and writing in subjects like history, where Enlightenment rationalist triumphalism has long defined the problems and prescribed the conclusions. The path-setting thinkers of the twenty-first century will not merely build on the twentieth century's accomplishments; they will set off in new directions that will require reconsideration of much that we have taken for granted. It will be an exciting century—and probably a dangerous one.

This book is not about the thicker parts of the Wedge, although I will describe some of them. The scientists and scholars who are

*In particular, readers who want to understand the Wedge as a whole should read William Dembski's book *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science & Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), and the essays he has collected in *Mere Creation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998). Another particularly helpful resource is the special double issue of *Touchstone* magazine (July-August 1999) devoted to the intelligent design movement, which may be ordered from the *Touchstone* Web site at <www.fsj.org>.

doing that work should have the opportunity to speak for themselves, and so I will write of what is coming only briefly, leaving the reader to go on for further details to the books and collections as they become available. My own continuing work is with the thin edge, which continues to burrow into the log as the thicker parts open up the crack. I want to explain the basic thinking behind the Wedge strategy to the public—especially the Christian public. In particular, it is time to set out more fully how the Wedge program fits into the specific Christian gospel (as distinguished from a generic theism), and how and where questions of biblical authority enter the picture. As Christians develop a more thorough understanding of these questions, they will begin to see more clearly how ordinary people—specifically, people who are not scientists or professional scholars—can more effectively engage the secular world on behalf of the gospel. People are continually asking me, “What is going on and what can we do to help?” This book is an answer to that question.

At the outset there is one thing above all others that readers (whether Christian or not) need to understand. In my mind the most important thing is to get people to ask the right questions, not to try to tell them how to *answer* the questions. In a sense, all who are willing to address the right questions are participants in our program regardless of what answers they want to give. For example, any person who is willing to focus on the problem of genetic information, to understand what it is and how it may be created, is on the right track whether or not he or she is ready to give up on the prospect of a naturalistic solution to the problem. Dogmatism thrives by obfuscation, especially by giving the impression that the really important questions should not be asked. When those questions are clearly placed in public view, the truth has a chance to speak for itself.

This basis defines the Wedge as an intellectual movement, not a

confessional movement with an official creed or statement of faith. At the beginning stage, the right question has been whether science and naturalism are really the same thing, or whether scientific evidence may be moving away from the materialist answers. If someone thinks that this is a good question which deserves fair-minded investigation, he or she is traveling side-by-side with us—even if he or she thinks that naturalistic science will eventually solve its problems and provide answers that will even more thoroughly discredit the claim that God took an active role in creation. The naysayers are not our enemy. On the contrary, they are an essential part of the dialogue, to help us make sure that we are testing our own ideas as we should. If we in the Wedge have an enemy, it is not those in open and honest opposition to our proposals but rather the obfuscators—those who resist any clear definition of terms or issues, who insist that the ruling scientific organizations be obeyed without question and who are content to paper over logical contradictions with superficial compromises.

This emphasis on finding the right questions will continue, and so the Wedge will continue to pursue a broad-based program that welcomes the participation of persons who disagree with each other over many details. What will change are the questions, for the first question we are asking will not be the last one. That metaphorical log is merely one obstacle, and in getting past it we will not have arrived at our destination but will have simply made it possible to continue the journey.

Already a new kind of question has surfaced, and a major purpose of this book is to address it. Suppose the critics of Darwinism and materialism are right. Suppose there is no macroevolutionary mechanism capable of generating the new genetic information required for biological creation. How could the vast scientific enterprise, dedicated by definition to the pursuit of truth, have been so thoroughly

misled on a point of such immense importance? It may seem impossible that not only scientists but also philosophers and other scholars could have overlooked for so long the contradictions and evidentiary difficulties that are so apparent once they are brought into the light. It is not at all impossible, and when we recognize what has happened we will be led to a deeper understanding of human nature and of the fundamental problems of the human condition.

I'll start that process of understanding by telling the true story of a man who lost his faith at Harvard in the 1920s.