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## WEEK IN REVIEW DESK

# IDEAS & TRENDS; For the Anti-Evolutionists, Hope in High Places

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Published: October 2, 2005

EXCEPT for the robes and the fact that each is addressed as "His Holiness," it would be hard to find much in common between Pope Benedict XVI and Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama. Yet both have recently expressed an unhappiness with evolutionary science that would be a comfort to the Pennsylvania school board now in a court fight over its requirement that the hypothesis of a creator be part of the science curriculum.

It's not just fundamentalist Protestants who have difficulty with the idea that life arose entirely from material causes. Look East or West and you can detect the rumblings from an irreconcilable divide between science and religion, with one committed to a universe of matter and energy and the other to the existence of something extra, a spiritual realm.

Sometimes compared to the Scopes "monkey trial" of 1925, *Kitzmiller et al. v. Dover Area School District* opened last week in Federal District Court in Harrisburg with scientists making the usual arguments against intelligent design -- which holds that the complexity of biological organisms is evidence of a creator.

Opponents say they doubt that the theory's supporters, like the Discovery Institute in Seattle, are talking about a smart gas cloud or a 10th-dimensional teenager simulating the universe on his Xbox. The American Civil Liberties Union, which filed suit against the Dover district, considers intelligent design a Trojan horse to introduce religion into public schools.

This time the anti-evolutionists won't be relying on the fundamentalist oratory moviegoers heard from the Fredric March character in "Inherit the Wind." Instead, the arguments may not sound so different from what one would hear if either the pope or the Dalai Lama were called to the stand.

Neither of these men believes that a religious text, whether the Bible or the Diamond

Sutra, should be given a strictly literal reading. Yet they share with evangelicals an aversion to the notion that life emerged blindly, without supernatural guidance. Particularly offensive to them is the theory, part of the biological mainstream, that the engine of evolution is random mutation.

In a new book, "The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality," the Dalai Lama laments what he calls "radical scientific materialism," warning that seeing people as "the products of pure chance in the random combination of genes" is an invitation to nihilism and spiritual poverty. "The view that all aspects of reality can be reduced to matter and its various particles is, to my mind, as much a metaphysical position as the view that an organizing intelligence created and controls reality." Both, he suggests, are legitimate interpretations of science.

Known for his enthusiastic interest in cosmology and neuroscience, the Dalai Lama was offering an opinion, not an agenda. But compare his words to those of the Discovery Institute in its call for the overthrow of scientific materialism -- "the simplistic philosophy or world view that claims that all of reality can be reduced to, or derived from, matter and energy alone." The institute says it hopes "to reverse the stifling dominance" of this perspective and replace it with a "science consonant with Christian and theistic convictions."

Whether whispered from Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama's home in exile, or expounded from the institute's headquarters, such a rejection of a purely physical reality is a proposition that the pope might well be comfortable with. At his installation this spring, he declared: "We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God."

Scientists who have tried to claim the Vatican as an ally against evangelical creationists were taken aback, but this was not a veering to the right by a conservative new leader. Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, the archbishop of Vienna, sought to clarify the church's position in an Op-Ed article this past summer in The New York Times: "Evolution in the sense of common ancestry might be true, but evolution in the neo-Darwinian sense -- an unguided, unplanned process of random variation and natural selection -- is not. Any system of thought that denies or seeks to explain away the overwhelming evidence for design in biology is ideology, not science."

He also quoted Benedict's predecessor, John Paul II, who had been considered particularly receptive to evolution. "The truth of faith about creation is radically opposed to the theories of materialistic philosophy," John Paul wrote. "These view the cosmos as the result of an evolution of matter reducible to pure chance and necessity."

The critics of intelligent design see it as primarily a repackaging of creationism. But the notion that you can embrace science without necessarily buying into the philosophy of materialism is an idea one doesn't find only among graduates of Jerry

Falwell's Liberty University.

Ian Barbour, a theologian who holds a doctorate in physics, has long argued that science can be given a theistic spin. You can accept every detail of evolution through natural selection and still believe in a God who works silently behind the scenes. In his book, the Dalai Lama suggests that the apparent randomness of mutations could be some sort of "hidden causality" -- an argument similar to the ideas of Keith Ward, a divinity professor at Oxford, and John Polkinghorne, a retired Cambridge physicist and ordained Anglican priest.

This kind of metaphysical maneuvering doesn't pose the threat scientists feel from the Discovery Institute. It is an optional interpretation that leaves the foundation of science unchanged.

But the intelligent design movement goes farther, insisting that the existence of a purposeful creator counts as a competing scientific theory. As a lawyer for Dover's schools said in his opening statement, gravity was also once thought to be a supernatural force until it was understood by physics.

So suppose there is a Great Intender, who mapped out the circuitry of living cells with the care an Intel engineer would bring to a new microchip. Where then did the creator come from? Was he created by another creator? Or did he evolve?

Photo: Eye to Eye? -- The Dalai Lama at the Vatican with Pope John Paul II in 1999. (Photo by Arturo Mari/Vatican, via Associated Press)