

Jonathan Wells (intelligent design advocate)

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John Corrigan "Jonathan" Wells (born 1942) is an American molecular biologist, author and advocate of intelligent design.^[1] Wells joined the Unification Church in 1974, and subsequently wrote that the teachings of church founder Sun Myung Moon, his own studies at the Unification Theological Seminary and his prayers convinced him to devote his life to "destroying Darwinism." The term *Darwinism* is often used by intelligent design proponents to refer to the scientific consensus on evolution.^{[2][3][4]} He gained a PhD in religious studies at Yale University in 1986, then became Director of the Unification Church's inter-religious outreach organization in New York City. In 1989, he studied at the University of California, Berkeley, where he earned a PhD in molecular and cellular biology in 1994. He became a member of several scientific associations and has published in academic journals.

Jonathan Wells	
Born	John Corrigan Wells 1942 (age 72–73) USA
Alma mater	University of California, Berkeley, Unification Theological Seminary, Yale University
Occupation	Author
Known for	Intelligent design advocate and anti-evolution activist
Title	Senior Fellow, Discovery Institute
Religion	Unification Church

In his book *Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth?* (2000), Wells argues that a number of examples used to illustrate biology textbooks were grossly exaggerated, distorted truth, or were patently false; he said that this shows that evolution conflicts with the evidence, and so argued against its teaching in public education.^{[5][6][7]} Some reviewers of *Icons of Evolution* have said that Wells misquoted experts cited as sources and took minor issues out of context, basing his argument on a flawed syllogism.^{[6][8]} Wells's views on evolution have been rejected by the scientific community.^{[4][5][9]}

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Biography

Wells was born in New York City in 1942 and grew up in New Jersey, and was brought up as a Protestant

Christian. He studied geology at Princeton University, where he dropped out in his junior year. Following a brief stint as a taxi driver, he was drafted into the United States Army and spent two years serving in Germany. After his discharge in 1966, he attended University of California, Berkeley, where he publicly refused to report for reserve duty. This resulted in him being arrested and being incarcerated for eighteen months at the Leavenworth military prison. Upon his release, Wells returned to Berkeley where he completed his studies with a major in geology and physics and a minor in biology.

In 1974, Wells joined the Unification Church of the United States.^[10] He graduated from the church's Unification Theological Seminary in 1978 with a master's degree in religious education.^[11] Wells continued his studies at Yale University, earning a PhD in religious studies in 1986, focusing on historical reactions to Darwinism.^[12] During this time he wrote extensively on Unification theology and taught at the Unification Theological Seminary.^[11] Wells was on the Board of Trustees of the Unification Theological Seminary until resigning in 1997 to return to teaching.^[13] He also acted as the director of the International Religious Foundation, a Unification Church affiliated organization which sponsors interdenominational conferences.^{[14][15]}

Wells has written on the subject of marriage within the Unification Church and has been called a "Unification Church marriage expert" by church sources.^{[16][17][18]} Wells defended Unification Church theology against what he said were unfair criticisms made in 1977 by the National Council of Churches.^[14]

In 1994, Wells earned another PhD in molecular and cellular biology at UC Berkeley.^[12] After receiving his doctorate, he worked at a position he described as "a post-doctoral research biologist at Berkeley, writing articles critical of Darwinism."^[3] Shortly after that Wells joined former UC Berkeley law professor Phillip E. Johnson, father of the intelligent design movement, at the Discovery Institute.^[11] He now serves as a fellow at the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture,^[19] the hub of the intelligent design movement, and at the International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design,^[20] which also promotes intelligent design.^[21]

Opposition to evolution

Of his student days at Unification Theological Seminary (1976–78), Wells said, "One of the things that Father [Reverend Sun Myung Moon] advised us to do at UTS was to pray to seek God's plan for our lives." He later described that plan: "To defend and articulate Unification theology especially in relation to Darwinian evolution."^[22]

Wells stated that his religious doctoral studies at Yale, which were paid for by the Unification Church, focused on the "root of the conflict between Darwinian evolution and Christian doctrine" and encompassed the whole of Christian theology within a focus of Darwinian controversies.^{[3][23]} He said:

...I learned (to my surprise) that biblical chronology played almost no role in the 19th-century controversies, since most theologians had already accepted geological evidence for the age of the earth and re-interpreted the days in Genesis as long periods of time. Instead, the central issue was design.^[3]

Wells said that "destroying Darwinism" was his motive for studying Christian theology at Yale and going on to seek his second PhD at Berkeley, studying biology and in particular embryology:

Father's [Rev. Moon's] words, my studies, and my prayers convinced me that I should devote my life to destroying Darwinism, just as many of my fellow Unificationists had

already devoted their lives to destroying Marxism. When Father chose me (along with about a dozen other seminary graduates) to enter a Ph.D. program in 1978, I welcomed the opportunity to prepare myself for battle.^[3]

Wells's statement and others like it are viewed by the scientific community as evidence that Wells lacks proper scientific objectivity and mischaracterizes evolution by ignoring and misrepresenting the evidence supporting it while pursuing an agenda promoting notions supporting his religious beliefs in its place.^{[24][25][26][27][28]}

He has written articles for the Discovery Institute, *WorldNetDaily*, *Origins & Design*, and other sympathetic publications attacking evolution and defending intelligent design.^[29] In 1997, he presented a paper entitled "Evolution by Design" at the Unification Church sponsored International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences in Washington, D.C.^[30]

In 1999, Wells debated with the New Mexicans for Science and Reason.^[31] He was one of the contributors to *Natural History* magazine's 2002 debate between intelligent design advocates and evolution supporters.^[32] In 2005, he debated Massimo Pigliucci on the PBS talk show *Uncommon Knowledge*.^[33] Pigliucci said that Wells "clearly lied" during his debates and misrepresented his agenda and science, as well as not understanding some of the theories he tried to attack.^{[34][35]}

Wells is one of the signatories of the Discovery Institute's "A Scientific Dissent From Darwinism," a petition which the intelligent design movement uses to promote intelligent design by attempting to cast doubt on evolution.^{[36][37]} He is also the author of "Ten questions to ask your biology teacher about evolution" for high school students, which is published by the Discovery Institute.^[38] The National Center for Science Education has issued a list of answers to the questions.^{[38][39][40]}

Icons of Evolution

Wells is best known for his 2000 book *Icons of Evolution*, in which he discusses ten examples which he says show that many of the most commonly accepted arguments supporting evolution are invalid.^[41] The book is rejected by many members of the scientific community and has received much criticism by those opposed to his views.^{[6][42][43][44][45][46][47][48]} There have been 12 detailed reviews of *Icons*, from scholars familiar with the subject matter, which have come to the consensus that the book's claims are a politically motivated extreme exaggeration and misrepresentation of a scattering of minor issues.^[8] Scholars quoted in the work have accused Wells of purposely misquoting them and misleading readers.^{[49][50]} Biology Professor Jerry Coyne wrote of *Icons*, "Wells's book rests entirely on a flawed syllogism: ... textbooks illustrate evolution with examples; these examples are sometimes presented in incorrect or misleading ways; therefore evolution is a fiction."^[6]

Kansas evolution hearings

In 2005, Wells participated in the Kansas evolution hearings, which were boycotted by mainstream scientists. There Wells testified:

I became convinced that the Darwinian theory is false because it conflicts with the evidence. ... I think the earth is probably four-and-a-half billion or so years old. But I'll tell you this, I used to-- I would have said, a few years ago, I'm convinced it's four-and-a-half billion years old. But the truth is I have not looked at the evidence. And I have become increasingly suspicious of the evidence that is presented to me and that's why at this point I

would say probably it's four-and-a-half billion years old, but I haven't looked at the evidence. ... There are already scientists-- respected scientists in this country who do experiments on things that most people consider supernatural, such as prayer. When Newton proposed the theory of gravitation it was dismissed as supernaturalism because it was action at a distance. What constitutes supernaturalism in today's science may very well not be supernatural in tomorrow's science.^[51]

Prior to the evolution hearings, in December 2000 after the Pratt County, Kansas, school board revised its tenth-grade biology curriculum at the urging of intelligent design proponents to include material that encourages students to question the theory of evolution, *The Pratt Tribune* published a letter from Jerry Coyne challenging Wells's characterization in an article of his work on peppered moths, saying that his article appended to the *Pratt* standards was misused and being mischaracterized:

Creationists such as Jonathan Wells claim that my criticism of these experiments casts strong doubt on Darwinism. But this characterization is false. ... My call for additional research on the moths has been wrongly characterized by creationists as revealing some fatal flaw in the theory of evolution. ... It is a classic creationist tactic (as exemplified in Wells' book, "Icons of Evolution") to assert that healthy scientific debate is really a sign that evolutionists are either committing fraud or buttressing a crumbling theory.^[50]

The Politically Incorrect Guide to Darwinism and Intelligent Design

In 2006, Wells published his second major book, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Darwinism and Intelligent Design*, which was part of a series published by Regnery Publishing. The book was praised by Tom Bethell, author of *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Science*,^[52] but was described by Dr. Reed A. Cartwright of *The Panda's Thumb* weblog as being "not only politically incorrect but incorrect in most other ways as well: scientifically, logically, historically, legally, academically, and morally."^[53] Cartwright also edited a chapter-by-chapter critique of the book.^[53] A quote from the book linking evolution to eugenics, abortion and racism appeared on Starbucks paper cups in 2007.^[54]

AIDS denialism

In 1991, Wells and his mentor Phillip E. Johnson signed an open letter which said in full:

It is widely believed by the general public that a retrovirus called HIV causes the group [of] diseases called AIDS. Many biochemical scientists now question this hypothesis. We propose that a thorough reappraisal of the existing evidence for and against this hypothesis be conducted by a suitable independent group. We further propose that critical epidemiological studies be devised and undertaken.^{[55][56][57]}

Wells and Johnson have been criticized, along with others, for their questioning of the scientific and medical consensus that HIV causes AIDS.^[57] In the *Washington University Law Review*, critics Matthew J. Brauer, Barbara Forrest, and Steven G. Gey faulted Wells, Johnson, and others for denying the HIV/AIDS connection and promoting denialism via a petition designed to garner publicity but without any scientific support.^[58]

Publications

Articles in peer-reviewed journals

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Books

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See also

- Unification Church and science

Notes

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2. Gishlick, Alan D. (November 23, 2006). "Icon 4 — Haeckel's Embryos" (<http://ncse.com/creationism/analysis/icon-4-haeckels-embryos>). *National Center for Science Education*. Berkeley, CA: National Center for Science Education. Retrieved 2008-12-17.
3. Wells, Jonathan. "Darwinism: Why I Went for a Second Ph.D." (<http://www.tparents.org/library/unification/talks/wells/DARWIN.htm>). *True Parents Organization*. Denver, CO. Retrieved 2013-12-12.
4. Forrest, Barbara (March 2000). Dembski, William A, ed. "The Rise and Fall of Baylor University's Michael Polanyi Center" (http://www.designinference.com/documents/2007.12.MPC_Rise_and_Fall.htm). *DesignInference.com*. William Dembski. Retrieved 2013-12-12. "As I stated earlier, Johnson, Dembski, and their associates have assumed the task of destroying 'Darwinism,' 'evolutionary naturalism,' 'scientific materialism,' 'methodological naturalism,' 'philosophical naturalism,' and other 'isms' they use as synonyms for evolution." |chapter= ignored (help) Quoted in "Rebuttal to Reports by Opposing Expert Witnesses" (http://www.designinference.com/documents/2005.09.Expert_Rebuttal_Dembski.pdf) (PDF) by William A. Dembski (May 14, 2005).
5. Wells, Jonathan. "INTRODUCTION to ICONS of EVOLUTION: Science or Myth? Why much of what we teach about evolution is wrong" (<http://www.iconsfevolution.org/intro/>). *Icons of Evolution*. Seattle, WA: Discovery Institute. Retrieved 2013-12-12. "Biological evolution is the theory that all living things are modified descendants of a common ancestor that lived in the distant past. It claims that you and I are descendants of ape-like ancestors, and that they in turn came from still more primitive animals.
[...]
...much of what we teach about evolution is wrong. This fact raises troubling questions about the status of Darwinian evolution. If the icons of evolution are supposed to be our best evidence for Darwin's theory, and all of them are false or misleading, what does that tell us about the theory? Is it science, or myth?"
6. Coyne, Jerry (April 12, 2001). "Creationism by stealth" (<http://chem.tufts.edu/AnswersInScience/Coyne-IconsReview.htm>). *Nature* (Book review) (London: Nature Publishing Group) **410**: 745–46. doi:10.1038/35071144 (<https://dx.doi.org/10.1038%2F35071144>). Retrieved 2006-12-24.
7. Wells, Jonathan (June 12, 2002). "Critics Rave Over *Icons of Evolution*: A Response to Published Reviews" (<http://www.discovery.org/a/1180>). *Center for Science and Culture*. Seattle, WA: Discovery Institute. Retrieved 2007-08-13. "Several of them grossly exaggerate or distort the truth, while others are patently false. Yet they are found year after year in almost all textbooks dealing with evolutionary theory, and they invariably accompany other material promoting that theory. When someone points out that the textbook examples misrepresent the facts, Darwinists don't rush to correct them. Instead, they rush to defend them."
8. Forrest & Gross 2004, p. 98. Reviews specifically cited include those by David Ussery, Massimo Pigliucci, Kevin Padian and Alan Gishlick.
9. Humburg, Burt (August 26, 2006). Cartwright, Reed A., ed. "The Politically Incorrect Guide to Darwinism and Intelligent Design Review: Why Should Words Have Meanings? (Chapter 1)" (http://www.pandasthumb.org/archives/2006/08/the_politically_1.html). *The Panda's Thumb* (Blog). Houston, TX: The TalkOrigins Foundation, Inc. Retrieved 2007-02-04. "In order to advance his thesis, Wells has to convey the idea that 'Darwinism' pits itself against traditional Christianity: to allow pupils to learn it is to give them up to atheism, decadence, liberalism and to lose the culture war.
Note that Wells does not wage war against evolution. In fact, he is at pains to make it (somewhat) clear that he wages war against 'Darwinism', which in context might sound like the sort of thing any sensible Christian would want to guard against. Unfortunately, Wells isn't exactly clear what he means by Darwinism as opposed to evolution.
[...]
Easily, one of the prominent faults of Wells's screed is a pervasive confusion between terms. Words, like 'Darwinism' and 'Traditional Christianity', seem to mean whatever Wells wants them to mean for that specific sentence. In many cases words are used without regard for his own stated definitions and usually without regard to usage elsewhere in his book. There are several possible reasons for this confusion in terms. First, Wells confusion may be by design. I have argued elsewhere that creationists intend to confuse their audiences when they argue. Second, if you review the acknowledgements page, you'll read how Wells used many authors to help him prepare this text. It is possible that Wells's editorship was so insufficient that he allowed a term that makes up part of the book's very title to have a flexible meaning. My suspicion is that there was both disparity between the understanding of key terms by different authors *as well as* an intention to confuse."
10. Cashill 2005, p. 174
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12. Numbers 2006, p. 381

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34. Pigliucci 2002, pp. 44–45

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External links

- Jonathan Wells biography (<http://www.discovery.org/p/41>) from the Discovery Institute
 - Articles by Wells (<http://www.discovery.org/scripts/viewDB/index.php?command=submitSearchQuery&query=Jonathan%20Wells&orderBy=date&orderDir=DESC&searchBy=author&searchType=all>) from the Discovery Institute
- Articles by Wells (<http://www.arn.org/authors/wells.html>) from the Access Research Network
- "Icons of Evolution FAQs" (<http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/wells/>) from talk.origins
- Wells's testimony (<http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/kansas/kangaroo2.html#p681>) at the Kansas evolution hearings
- "Icons of Evolution? – Why much of what Jonathan Wells writes about evolution is wrong" (<http://ncse.com/creationism/analysis/icons-evolution>) by Alan D. Gishlick



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- "10 Answers to Jonathan Wells's '10 Questions'" (<http://ncse.com/creationism/analysis/10-answers-to-jonathan-wellss-10-questions>) from National Center for Science Education
- Chapter by chapter analysis of Wells's *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Darwinism and Intelligent Design* (http://www.pandasthumb.org/archives/2006/08/the_politically.html) by Dr. Reed A. Cartwright, *The Panda's Thumb*

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