

# **CANADIAN SCIENTISTS** **WANT OUT OF DARWIN'S** **'RUT'**

Tom Blackwell, National Post  
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A handful of Canadian scientists are speaking out against evolution as an explanation for all of life as we know it, saying the complexity of living things simply cannot be attributed to biological chance.

Nine university professors and others with science or engineering PhDs have added their names to an American petition that voices skepticism about the theory of evolution. The list was posted on the Internet this week.

At least two of the scientists teach at Christian universities, while another runs an organization dedicated to the links between Islam and science.

Some of those contacted yesterday acknowledged their doubts about Darwinism coincide with their religious beliefs, and espoused the controversial idea of "intelligent design" -- that some guiding hand was behind life on Earth. But one molecular biologist said he is convinced that science is stuck in an evolutionary "rut" and must seek better explanations for the existence of elaborate biological structures.

"I look at biology as being a very complicated computer code," said Stephen Cheesman, a geophysics PhD and software developer who compares genetic systems to languages created by humans.

"There is no way I could create a code like this..... In the DNA, you have a novel, a long novel, spelled out, which produces us."

The scientists' public positions against evolution mark perhaps the first time the issue has arisen recently in Canada, despite a raging debate in the United States over the teaching of evolution in public schools.

The petition was established by the Discovery Institute in Seattle, an organization dedicated to promoting intelligent design. The document has previously been cited by anti-evolutionists as evidence that the scientific community is not united in its belief in evolution.

"We are skeptical of claims for the ability of random mutation and natural

selection to account for the complexity of life," the preamble says. "Careful examination of the evidence of Darwinian theory should be encouraged."

Dr. Cheesman said he believed in creationism as a young man but developed doubts after he started studying geology, which he admits conclusively shows the world is billions of years old.

But his perusal of biological evidence has convinced him that evolution and the idea of natural selection and mutation of living organisms is not the key to all of life.

Tony Jelsma, a Burlington, Ont., native with a biochemistry PhD from McMaster University, said he teaches evolution to his students at Dordt College, a Christian university in Sioux Center, Ind., but points out what he believes are its flaws.

For starters, it cannot explain how the whole process of life on Earth began, he said.

"If you look at the research into the origin of life, there isn't a single, plausible hypothesis or even proposed mechanism [within evolution] that would have worked," he said.

"That is the biggest shortcoming in the whole evolutionary scenario."

Marvin Fritzler, a professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at the University of Calgary medical school, said he does not believe intelligent design is the answer to such questions. But he is convinced science must look beyond evolutionary theory.

"I would rather we think a little bit outside the Darwinian rut," he said.

"Significant paradigm shifts and new ways of looking at things take place in pretty controversial circumstances, where someone is willing to look beyond the theory of the day. And that goes for Darwin back in the mid-1800s. I am concerned we get ourselves a little tunnel-visioned and can't make those paradigm shifts."

The other Canadian names include Rene Boere, chairman of the University of Lethbridge chemistry department; Braxton Alfred, professor emeritus of anthropology at the University of British Columbia; and A.D. Harrison, emeritus professor of biology at the University of Waterloo.

Also named are Curtis Hrischuk, an electrical engineering PhD who works for IBM, and Paul Brown, an assistant professor of environmental studies at Trinity Western University, a Christian college in Langley, B.C. Muzaffar

Iqbal, who has a doctorate in chemistry from the University of Saskatchewan, is the Alberta-based head of the Centre for Islam and Science.

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