

Notes on the Powerpoints

As always with off the shelf resources, teachers should feel free to modify them as they see fit to meet the needs of their students and the time constraints and syllabus requirements they face. With Powerpoints, the deletion of slides or the reordering of material is a straightforward matter.

In general it is wise for teachers to have studied the supporting essay RS1 carefully before attempting to present material in the Powerpoint presentations. There are no notes as such on every slide, but the attempt has been made to make the slides as self-explanatory as possible and the kind of resource which could be printed off should this be seen to be useful.

More detailed background can be found by following up on the comprehensive annotated resources sheet RS2.

Intelligent Design

The diagram on Slide 3 is worth spending time on. It sets the ID discussion in a wider context and shows clearly that issues of choice in this field are a function of more than one concern. Clearly particular readings of Scripture will shape the commitment of some to a Special Creationist perspective and allow other theists to not reject an evolutionary account on first principles. How we read Sacred texts does drive a great deal here. ID is clearly Intelligent Design. RD stands for Richard Dawkins, who can serve here as a well known representative of Naturalistic Evolutionism.

Slides 7 to 14 outline the Intelligent Design movement's use of the notion of Irreducible Complexity and are an attempt to summarise fairly what, in the literature, can be a very complex and technical discussion.

Slides 15 to 21 outline some of the most frequently cited problems with ID and 21 to 23 show something of the Wedge Strategy, which had undermined the claim that ID is an alternative science with no religious agenda. This is not to say that you can be neutral in these matters. Refer back to slide 1 and this is clear. But, mindful of Bob Dylan's "There ain't no neutral ground", it is not the case that simple categorisations of religious equals anti-evolution or science equals anti religion will do. There is a spectrum of views and it should be remembered that whatever ID says about the inability of evolutionary science to explain the irreducibly complex, many within

the ID camp accept the basic evolutionary story as an explanatory framework for much of life on earth.

God-of-the-gaps

Given the widespread myth of the Conflict thesis in science and religion, the slides that open the sequence attempt to indicate the nature of the mythical account of science gradually taking over territory once dominated by religious thought [slides 2-9].

This is a historically unsupportable myth however. It has its roots in a number of issues which range from deliberate revisionist history writing, through the legitimate desire for scientists to be independent of ecclesiastical power brokers, to the frequent black and white confrontational style of the media who often portray 'science' and 'religion' as enemies locked in battle. The former are characterised as the 'modern' good guys and the latter as 'out of touch' obscurantists. This is not helped by the persistent, supposed antithesis between faith and reason, which fails to see the subtle interaction of both in scientific and religious discourse. There is a comprehensive range of material on these and related matters in Units 1,2 and 3 of the 16-19 srps guide.

At the core of the misunderstanding mentioned above is the issue of explanation. Many students will have done some preliminary work on this when studying Aristotle and the Four Causes, which is a core topic for many at Advanced level in Religious Studies. The rest of the Powerpoint explores the issue of explanation with particular reference to common fallacies. In this there is a discussion of reductionism in explanation, which should demonstrate both the validity of many different kinds of explanation and the irreducibility of one to another. We need a range of explanations to have a more complete understanding of complex realities, and in this the sciences (plural) and religious insights (plural) have much to teach us. 'Compatible' or 'complementary' are watchwords here.

Note: Slide 21 is attributing to God the language of mathematics in his creation of light. The equations are Maxwell's famous equations describing the behaviour of electromagnetism. Light is of course a particular, though small, part of the electromagnetic spectrum which ranges from gamma rays to radio waves.