

The Evidence Left Outside the Frame

On Expelled, Intelligent Design, and the Stories That Shape What We Believe

By Daniel Robert Mazur

I have spent much of my life trying to understand how people come to believe what they believe. Not simply why one person accepts an explanation while another rejects it, but how those explanations become part of us in the first place. How they influence our judgments, our relationships, our understanding of ourselves, and eventually the choices we make. I have become particularly concerned with the influence of authority, especially when those exercising it possess information that the people relying upon them do not.

My interest in these questions grew from experiences I explored in my memoir, *COR Values*, and continued examining through fiction in *Beyond the Morning Light* and my most recent novel, *WATCH*. Although different in form and subject, these books share a concern that has become increasingly important to me: How much of what we regard as our own understanding of reality has been shaped by circumstances we never knew to question?

That concern is one reason I find the 2008 documentary *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, starring Ben Stein, so troubling. The film presented Intelligent Design as a scientifically legitimate explanation that had been unfairly excluded by scientists, educators, academic institutions, and others unwilling to consider conclusions that might challenge their convictions. Viewers were encouraged to see its advocates as courageous dissenters confronting an establishment determined to protect evolutionary theory from examination. Scientists and atheists appeared as defenders of an orthodoxy, people whose attachment to their own beliefs prevented them from considering alternatives.

It was a compelling narrative. But what concerns me is not simply whether the film persuaded its audience. It is how that audience was persuaded, what information was withheld, and whether those watching understood the circumstances through which their judgments were being formed.

There is a personal connection that makes this examination particularly meaningful to me. Kevin Miller, one of the writers of *Expelled*, served as the editor of all three of my published books. His involvement in those projects has been valuable, and I appreciate the care and attention he brought to my writing. In 2024, Kevin published an account of his experience making *Expelled* in *Skeptic* magazine. He described deceptive practices employed during production, acknowledged his own participation, and explained how his understanding of Intelligent Design changed over time.[1]

His account brought together two subjects I had spent years examining from different directions: the formation of belief through selective presentation, and the responsibility we bear when we recognize that we have influenced others through an incomplete or misleading account of reality.

I do not approach this subject because I wish to discredit Kevin personally. His willingness to examine his earlier involvement gives me reason to appreciate an important part of what he has done since. But appreciation for a person and concern about that person's conduct are not mutually exclusive. One of the questions running through my writing is how people capable of genuine good can also cause harm, sometimes without fully recognizing the forces influencing their decisions. Understanding the good does not require denying the harm, just as recognizing harm does not make everything good a person accomplished imaginary.

To understand why *Expelled* troubles me, it is necessary to return to a federal courtroom in Pennsylvania, three years before the film's release. In 2005, eleven parents challenged a policy adopted by the Dover Area School District directing ninth grade biology students toward Intelligent Design as an alternative to evolutionary theory. The resulting case, *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District*, became one of the most consequential examinations of Intelligent Design in American history. Over six weeks of testimony, scientific experts, educators, historians, philosophers, and Intelligent Design advocates presented arguments concerning the scientific standing of the proposed explanation and the religious purpose alleged to underlie the school's policy.[2]

On December 20, 2005, Judge John E. Jones III issued a 139 page decision concluding that Intelligent Design was not science and that Dover's policy violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The court examined the movement's arguments concerning irreducible complexity, its reliance on supernatural causation, its objections to evolutionary theory, and its lack of a demonstrated scientific research program capable of establishing the claims made for it. The court also examined the historical relationship between Intelligent Design and creationism, finding substantial evidence that the former developed from the latter.[2]

One fact about this decision deserves particular attention. Judge Jones was himself a Christian, a practicing Lutheran, a Republican, and a federal judge appointed by President George W. Bush. This does not make his ruling correct because of his religious affiliation. Evidence and reasoning, not personal faith, must determine the credibility of a judicial decision. But his background challenges the suggestion that Intelligent Design was rejected because atheists and secular institutions were determined to exclude religious believers. A Christian judge examined the evidence and concluded that Intelligent Design did not qualify as science. He did not need to abandon Christianity to reach that conclusion. Nor was he alone among religious individuals who opposed Intelligent Design's scientific claims. Kenneth Miller, the biologist who testified against Intelligent Design, was a practicing Catholic who had written about the compatibility of religious belief and evolutionary science.[3]

This distinction matters. Science does not require scientists to be atheists. It requires explanations that can be investigated through evidence and scientific methods. A person may believe that a creator exists, that the universe has purpose, or that intelligence ultimately underlies natural reality. Such beliefs do not automatically become scientific explanations, nor does declining to recognize them as such constitute persecution. The Dover court did not rule on whether God exists. It examined whether the particular claims and school policy before it met scientific and constitutional standards.

I find the distinction between being denied a hearing and failing to persuade after receiving one especially important. Intelligent Design was not excluded from examination at Dover. Its proponents presented witnesses and arguments. Their evidence was considered, and the court explained why it found the claims inadequate. Advocates remained free to disagree with the decision, criticize the reasoning, publish their arguments, and continue seeking scientific acceptance. An unfavorable conclusion does not establish that an inquiry was dishonest. Sometimes it means an inquiry took place and the evidence failed to support the claim.

Yet *Expelled* presented the controversy through a narrative of exclusion. The documentary discussed legal challenges to Intelligent Design, questioned whether scientific disputes should be addressed through litigation, and portrayed judicial involvement as an impediment to intellectual freedom. The film even presented the accusation that Intelligent Design was an attempt to introduce creationism into science classrooms. But it did not meaningfully examine the documentary evidence supporting that accusation. The available dialogue transcript contains no identification of the Dover trial, no explanation of Judge Jones's findings, and no meaningful account of the evidence considered during those proceedings.[4]

This omission is consequential because the trial directly challenged the film's central portrayal. The audience was encouraged to view judicial resistance as evidence that Intelligent Design had been denied fair consideration, while receiving no adequate account of the most significant hearing in which its claims had been examined. The filmmakers could have presented the ruling and disagreed with it. They could have interviewed witnesses from both sides, challenged the judge's interpretation, and allowed viewers to evaluate the competing arguments. Instead, the film supplied a narrative of unfair treatment without the historical context most relevant to evaluating that accusation.

Nor was the information difficult to obtain. The trial and decision were matters of public record. In November 2007, before *Expelled* reached theaters, PBS broadcast *Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial*, a detailed documentary examining the proceedings and evidence. The record existed. Its absence from *Expelled* was not the consequence of information becoming available only after the film was completed.[5]

This raises a question that has occupied much of my writing. What happens when people are given enough information to reach a conclusion, but not enough to recognize why that conclusion may be mistaken? The information they receive need not be entirely false. It may contain accurate statements, genuine testimony, and events that actually occurred. Yet if material facts are omitted, or if those facts are arranged to support a preferred interpretation, the resulting understanding can be profoundly misleading.

In *The Choices We Inherit*, an essay explaining the ideas behind *WATCH*, I wrote that a story does not have to be false to be deceptive. Sometimes it need only leave out the truths that would change its meaning. That concern emerged partly from my own experience of being understood by others through accounts of my life that were not entirely imaginary, but were incomplete in ways that mattered.

I grew up within a religious environment in which my father was also my pastor. His particular interpretations of religious belief influenced how our family and religious community understood authority, loyalty, obedience, and separation. These beliefs did not remain abstract theological propositions. They affected relationships. They influenced whose questions were acceptable, which disagreements could be tolerated, and when withdrawing from another person could be regarded as necessary or even righteous.

As a child, I was not examining these beliefs from a position of independence. They were part of the world through which I learned about family, morality, belonging, and my own place among others. Their authority came not only from what I was taught, but from the people I loved, the relationships I depended upon, and the consequences associated with questioning what was accepted.

Over time, family division and estrangement contributed to a period of profound personal crisis that eventually resulted in my involuntary commitment to a psychiatric hospital. My psychological deterioration was real. I do not deny that, nor do I regard it as the consequence of one event or one person's actions. But within the religious community from which I had become separated, my crisis could be understood as evidence of what happened when someone questioned established authority or departed from the beliefs that sustained the community.

That interpretation did not require anyone to invent the hospitalization. It happened. What could be missing were the years of family conflict, rejection, isolation, conflicting explanations, and increasingly desperate attempts to understand experiences I could no longer reconcile. Those who knew the outcome did not necessarily know the circumstances that contributed to it. The event could therefore appear to confirm an existing belief, even though a fuller understanding might have complicated that conclusion.

This experience contributed to what I now think of as the architecture of belief: the relationships, expectations, fears, rewards, loyalties, and explanations through which ideas come to feel self-evident. People may sincerely believe they have reached a conclusion independently while remaining unaware of how much of the information shaping that conclusion was supplied or withheld by others.

My concern is not that people should be protected from uncomfortable conclusions. It is that they should have the opportunity to examine the evidence necessary to reach their own.

The history of Intelligent Design offers a particularly revealing example of how the presentation of an explanation can influence its acceptance. In 1987, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Edwards v. Aguillard* that a Louisiana law requiring creation science instruction whenever evolution was taught violated the First Amendment because its purpose was to advance a particular religious belief.[6] In the development of the textbook *Of Pandas and People*, later recommended to Dover students, references to creationism and creationists were systematically replaced with Intelligent Design terminology. The Dover court examined successive manuscript drafts, documenting approximately 150 substitutions and finding that the underlying explanation remained substantially unchanged.[2]

One transitional manuscript contained the peculiar expression *cdesign proponentsists*, apparently produced when the replacement of *creationists* with *design proponents* was incomplete. The editorial error provided a visible trace of the transformation in language. The court concluded that Intelligent Design was a successor to creationism rather than an independent scientific explanation emerging from new research.

The significance of this history is not that religious individuals were interested in science. Many religious people have made important scientific contributions, and personal convictions can inspire legitimate questions. The concern is whether a religious proposition was being presented as scientifically independent of its origins without the evidence necessary to justify that claim. Replacing religious terminology with scientific language does not automatically transform a religious explanation into a scientific one.

The Discovery Institute's own history adds to this concern. Its 1998 *Wedge Document* outlined a strategy for challenging scientific materialism and promoting a theistic understanding of nature. The goals extended beyond scientific investigation to cultural influence, public education, media activity, and the advancement of design arguments.[7] The Institute has defended those objectives, maintaining that Intelligent Design is a scientific proposition rather than a religious doctrine. It also opposed the Dover school board's mandatory policy, while advocating greater consideration of criticisms of evolutionary theory in science education.[8]

That distinction matters. We cannot responsibly assign the conduct of the Dover board to every individual or organization supporting Intelligent Design. But neither can the movement's documented religious objectives, the rewriting of *Of Pandas and People*, and the court's findings be ignored when evaluating claims that Intelligent Design developed independently of efforts to introduce religious explanations into public school science instruction.

The distinction between a movement's stated purpose and its demonstrated purpose was central to the Dover decision. The school board described its policy as encouraging critical thinking and improving science education. Yet the court found that the board's claimed secular purpose was a pretext for advancing religion. That conclusion arose from testimony, documents, and the conduct of those responsible for the policy, not simply from their religious affiliations.[2]

Here again, the language through which an idea is presented matters. A proposal described as encouraging critical thinking may sound reasonable. But if its purpose is to introduce a religious explanation as scientific knowledge, the reassuring description can conceal information essential to evaluating the proposal honestly.

This is where I see a particularly important connection to *WATCH*. The novel follows a young man whose life becomes increasingly influenced by an organization known as the Order. Its philosophy, expressed through *The Creed of the One Story*, speaks of unity, responsibility, trust, and preserving a common understanding. These values are not inherently objectionable. Communities need trust. People need belonging. Shared explanations can help individuals live together. But the Creed gradually reveals a troubling priority. Preserving the accepted story becomes more important than examining whether the story remains true.

The Order does not require everyone within it to understand that information is being manipulated. In some respects, its authority depends upon people not knowing. Those who act within it may sincerely believe they are protecting others. They may provide genuine assistance, establish meaningful relationships, and accomplish considerable good. The danger emerges when possessing information is treated as permission to determine what others may know and when they may know it.

I did not write *WATCH* to suggest that every person exercising authority is knowingly deceptive or that every relationship influenced by someone else's intentions is artificial. I wanted to examine how genuine care can coexist with harmful decisions, how people inherit explanations they never fully question, and how easily the desire to protect others can become permission to choose for them.

Kevin Miller's account of *Expelled* illustrates some of these difficulties in a real production that publicly defended intellectual freedom. Kevin explains that he initially agreed with the film's agenda. During the two and a half years he worked on it, however, his understanding changed. He encountered arguments from both sides, questioned aspects of the Intelligent Design movement, and became increasingly uncomfortable with the producers' intentions. He remained involved, hoping to provide some balance, but recognized that those financing the film ultimately controlled its point of view.[1]

The documentary was not produced by the Discovery Institute, and its production company should not be confused with the organization advocating Intelligent Design. Yet prominent Discovery Institute figures appeared in the film, and the Institute publicly promoted its release. The connection was therefore more than an abstract similarity of beliefs. The film gave substantial attention to advocates with an institutional interest in gaining greater recognition for Intelligent Design, while withholding important evidence challenging that movement's claims and history.[4][9]

Kevin's account also confirms that misleading practices were used to obtain interviews. Richard Dawkins, Eugenie Scott, P. Z. Myers, Michael Shermer, and others said they had agreed to participate in a project called *Crossroads*, described as an examination of the relationship between science and religion. That was not the film they ultimately appeared in. Kevin later acknowledged that the production created a misleading company identity, including a website featuring fictional film projects, to encourage prospective interviewees to believe they were participating in a more objective investigation than the filmmakers intended.[1]

The ethical problem begins before any interview is edited. A person who believes he is participating in an open discussion may respond differently from someone who knows the interviewer intends to construct an argument against him. He may explore hypothetical possibilities, acknowledge uncertainty, or offer qualified answers without anticipating that those qualifications may later be used to suggest intellectual weakness.

Michael Shermer described how an exchange concerning the alleged dismissal of Intelligent Design advocates was presented within the film's narrative of persecution. Shermer had questioned the premise and asked for specific examples, explaining that he knew of no

demonstrated instance fitting the accusation. In the finished film, however, his responses were placed among stories intended to persuade viewers that systematic mistreatment was occurring. The distinction is consequential. Questioning whether an accusation has been established is not equivalent to accepting the accusation while admitting ignorance of its examples.[9]

Richard Dawkins's interview illustrates another problem. Asked to consider whether life might have originated through intelligent intervention, Dawkins entertained a hypothetical possibility involving an advanced extraterrestrial civilization. He was not claiming that such an event had occurred or that a supernatural creator had been demonstrated. He was considering a conceivable explanation that, if supported by evidence, could be examined scientifically. The film used the exchange to suggest that Dawkins might accept intelligent design, provided the designer was not God. The distinction between considering a possibility and endorsing it was blurred in a way that encouraged the audience toward a conclusion not established by his answer.[4]

These examples matter because the willingness to consider possibilities is part of scientific inquiry. Scientists routinely investigate explanations they do not believe are established. They acknowledge uncertainty, examine alternatives, and distinguish what evidence demonstrates from what remains unknown. Such practices do not reveal weakness in scientific reasoning. They are among its strengths. When a documentary uses these qualities to suggest that an interviewee has been caught in a contradiction, intellectual openness becomes material for discrediting the person who displayed it.

Kevin's article describes another revealing production decision. Hundreds of extras were hired to form an audience for Stein's speech at Pepperdine University. The sequence created the appearance of enthusiastic public support for the film's message. There is nothing inherently objectionable about using extras in a staged production. But when a documentary presents an audience without explaining that the gathering was constructed, its reaction can become an argument of its own. Applause suggests agreement. A crowded auditorium suggests momentum. Viewers may infer that they are witnessing genuine public enthusiasm without knowing how that impression was created.[1][9]

The irony is difficult to overlook. A film accusing scientific institutions of manufacturing consensus used a constructed audience to reinforce its own message.

The documentary also employed emotionally powerful associations between evolutionary theory, Nazism, and the Holocaust. The historical misuse of scientific ideas is a legitimate subject for investigation, but demonstrating that a political movement invoked an idea does not establish that the idea caused its crimes or that the underlying scientific explanation is false. Evolutionary biology describes biological processes. It does not prescribe a moral system or establish that some people possess greater human worth than others. Kevin recounts that members of the production team were uneasy about this direction, recognizing the difficulty of holding evolutionary theory responsible for its misuse while ignoring similar abuses involving religious or political ideas.[1]

What connects these practices is not necessarily the invention of facts. An interviewee may have spoken the words shown on screen. A scientist may have expressed uncertainty. A legal dispute

may have occurred. An audience may have occupied an auditorium. Yet the meaning viewers assign to these events depends upon circumstances they may not have been told.

That is the connection to *WATCH* that matters most to me. The central injury is not always the removal of a person's ability to choose. Sometimes it is the concealment of the circumstances necessary for a more informed choice.

But the novel raises another question that I believe must also apply to this essay. What happens when someone who has experienced manipulation begins using comparable methods because he believes his purpose is justified? In *WATCH*, the protagonist eventually faces the uncomfortable recognition that his own desire to protect others and expose wrongdoing can lead him to withhold information they have a right to know. The intention may be honorable, but it does not automatically make the conduct right.

This was essential to the novel because I did not want the discovery of wrongdoing to become an excuse for repeating it. The ability to recognize manipulation when we are its victims does not guarantee that we will recognize it when our own convictions make manipulation seem necessary.

Kevin reaches a related recognition in his account of *Expelled*. He reflects on how those making the film believed their cause justified the methods used to advance it. For me, this may be the most important part of his article. The problem is not simply that deceptive practices occurred. It is that people who believed they were defending intellectual freedom could come to accept methods that compromised the very freedom they claimed to protect.

This makes the timing of Kevin's account worth considering. The film reached audiences in 2008. His detailed public reflection appeared in *Skeptic* in 2024, roughly sixteen years later. Why did so much time pass before that acknowledgment appeared?

I do not know the complete answer, and I would not pretend to. Kevin describes a continuing change in his views, a later apology to Shermer, and the invitation that led to publication. He also acknowledges the professional opportunities the film provided. It is reasonable to wonder whether professional relationships, loyalty, the gradual development of his understanding, or reluctance to revisit an earlier decision influenced the timing. But those remain possibilities, not established explanations.

What concerns me more than the precise reason for the delay is its consequence. The documentary reached its audience years before Kevin's detailed account of its production became available. Some viewers may have developed lasting impressions of the scientists interviewed, the legitimacy of Intelligent Design, or the alleged hostility of scientific institutions. They may never encounter the later acknowledgment. A correction can become part of the public record without becoming part of the understanding of those influenced by the original message.

This does not diminish the value of Kevin's decision to speak. His willingness to acknowledge his involvement deserves recognition. Revising an earlier conviction and publicly acknowledging one's participation in a troubling enterprise can require considerable intellectual

honesty. But sincerity does not eliminate responsibility, and acknowledgment cannot erase consequence. An apology can be genuine and overdue. A person can change and remain accountable for choices made before that change. Both propositions can be true.

I have had to consider a comparable distinction in my understanding of my father. Over time, I became dissatisfied with explanations that treated him as either entirely good or entirely harmful. I had witnessed genuine generosity, dedication, and care for others. I had also experienced the consequences of beliefs and decisions that damaged relationships and contributed to family separation. To accept one account while excluding the other would have required me to disregard part of what I knew.

During the final period of his life, I spoke with him about a food pantry he had helped establish. I was proud of what he had accomplished. People had been fed. Families had benefited. Those were real achievements. But I also wanted him to consider the costs borne by people affected by decisions made within the religious world he had helped create. The good accomplished did not erase those costs, just as the harm did not make the good imaginary.

That experience helped shape the character of Salvatore in *WATCH*. Salvatore provides genuine assistance, establishes meaningful relationships, and influences lives in ways that are not entirely harmful. Yet he also exercises authority through decisions that affect people who do not always possess the information necessary to understand what is being decided for them. To portray him as entirely malicious would have made his character easier to condemn, but less revealing. I wanted to examine how a person capable of real care could also become capable of denying others the freedom to make informed choices.

The more difficult part of that inquiry was recognizing how comparable tendencies could exist within me. I could not examine the forces that shaped my father without asking what I had inherited from him. Nor could I condemn the manipulation of others without considering whether my own desire to protect people or pursue a worthwhile objective might lead me to withhold information they had a right to know.

That is why I resist an easy conclusion that would divide the people involved in *Expelled* into villains and victims, believers and atheists, honest scientists and dishonest religious advocates. Such categories may identify meaningful differences in conduct or evidence, but they can also bring an inquiry to an end before we have understood the people involved. Some Intelligent Design advocates may sincerely believe their scientific claims deserve greater consideration. Some scientists may respond to those claims with unnecessary contempt. Some filmmakers may convince themselves that presenting a misleading argument is justified by the importance of exposing what they regard as a greater wrong. None of those possibilities removes the obligation to evaluate evidence honestly.

Nor does treating people with respect require pretending that competing claims possess equal scientific support. Intelligent Design proponents are entitled to present their arguments. They are not entitled to have those arguments accepted as science merely because they are sincerely held or because rejection is uncomfortable. Scientific inquiry must remain open to correction, but openness does not require abandoning the standards through which claims are examined.

The Dover trial demonstrates that distinction. Its outcome was not a declaration that religious believers should remain silent. It was a judgment reached after extensive testimony, accompanied by an examination of the scientific evidence offered for a proposed explanation. The Christian faith of the judge and of witnesses opposing Intelligent Design further complicates the film's suggested division between religious believers and secular opponents.

The history of *Of Pandas and People* demonstrates why an explanation's origins and purposes matter when someone seeks to introduce it into a public school science classroom. The *Wedge Document* establishes cultural and religious objectives that viewers of *Expelled* would reasonably have needed to understand when evaluating claims about the movement's independence from religion. And Kevin's account of the film's production provides evidence that the documentary itself did not consistently practice the intellectual honesty it demanded from others.

These findings do not require assuming that every Intelligent Design advocate was knowingly deceptive or that every participant in the documentary shared identical intentions. They depend upon evidence that can be examined. The filmmakers could have included that evidence and argued against its significance. Instead, their audience received a presentation in which much of the context necessary to evaluate the claims of persecution was missing.

I find this important because the danger is not confined to documentary filmmaking, religious movements, or scientific controversies. We encounter the same problem whenever an institution, family, political movement, religious community, or individual becomes more committed to preserving an accepted account of reality than to examining whether that account remains true. Information that challenges the prevailing explanation may be withheld, minimized, or interpreted through language that makes it appear less threatening. Those receiving the explanation may sincerely believe they have reached a conclusion independently, never recognizing the limits imposed upon the information available to them.

In *WATCH*, the Order does not survive merely because powerful people issue commands. It survives because belonging, loyalty, security, and shared understanding make its authority meaningful to those who accept it. People remain not simply because they are afraid to leave, but because much of what they value is connected to the world they would be questioning. The structure provides genuine benefits, and those benefits can make its underlying assumptions more difficult to examine.

That complexity matters in real life. People may defend beliefs not only because they think those beliefs are true, but because they are connected to people they love, communities they trust, and explanations that have helped them understand their experiences. When challenged, they may feel that more is at risk than the accuracy of a proposition. Their sense of belonging and identity may also be threatened.

I recognize these difficulties from my own past. I also recognize that my understanding of that past has changed as I have learned more. I do not regard every conclusion I reached during my earlier years as necessarily correct simply because it arose from genuine suffering. One of the most important parts of my recovery was learning to distinguish what I could establish from

what I feared, inferred, or imagined. I needed to examine my own explanations with the same care I wished others had given to theirs.

That obligation remains important to me in writing this essay. If I criticize *Expelled* for presenting speculation as evidence, I must not present my speculation about Kevin's motives as established fact. If I criticize the filmmakers for withholding context, I must acknowledge the arguments and distinctions that complicate my own position. If I object to people being mischaracterized through selective presentation, I must take care not to mischaracterize those whose conduct I am examining.

The ethical question applies to the author as much as to the subject.

Kevin's work as the editor of my three books adds a dimension I would not have anticipated when I began examining *Expelled*. He helped refine writing concerned with belief, authority, withheld information, and the difficulty of recognizing when our own intentions lead us to repeat conduct we condemn in others. I cannot say precisely how he understood every aspect of that work or how he connects it to his experience with the documentary. Those are questions only he can answer.

But I find the relationship meaningful because it reminds me that people cannot always be understood through a single period of their lives or one consequential decision. Kevin participated in a film whose methods he later came to question. He subsequently wrote about those methods, apologized to someone affected by them, and helped edit books examining related moral questions. I can appreciate what he contributed to my writing while continuing to question his earlier participation. I can recognize the value of his public acknowledgment while wondering whether it might have come sooner. Neither position requires the other to disappear.

Perhaps that is part of what it means to take truth seriously. We must be willing to let new information complicate our judgments, including our judgments of people we respect and people whose actions have harmed us.

I did not write *WATCH* to persuade readers that all authority is corrupt, that every act of kindness conceals an ulterior motive, or that discovering an influence makes every choice unreal. I wanted to explore how our lives are shaped before we understand the forces shaping them, and what responsibilities emerge once we begin to recognize those forces. The novel does not offer the comfort of a complete explanation. Discovering how we were influenced does not erase those influences or determine every choice that follows.

What becomes possible is a more informed examination of what we have inherited, what we are willing to accept, and what we may choose not to pass along.

That is also what I hope this examination of *Expelled* can encourage. My purpose is not to persuade religious believers to abandon their faith, nor to suggest that atheists and scientists are beyond criticism. It is to ask whether we are willing to examine how our convictions were formed, what evidence we have been given, what evidence may have been withheld, and whether the explanations we continue defending deserve the confidence we place in them.

The documentary's deepest failure was not that its makers supported Intelligent Design or challenged evolutionary science. They were free to do both. Its failure was more fundamental. A film demanding intellectual honesty from others did not consistently practice that honesty itself. It presented a controversy over evidence while withholding essential context, used misleading practices to obtain interviews, and constructed impressions that encouraged viewers toward conclusions the available record did not justify.

That failure matters because the audience's judgments were real. Viewers were free to believe the story they were shown. Yet many did not know how carefully parts of that story had been arranged or what lay beyond the frame.

In *The Choices We Inherit*, I described the central idea behind *WATCH* in these words: We choose, but we do not choose everything that teaches us how to choose.

That recognition does not make our choices meaningless. It makes our responsibility to examine them more important.

The question is not whether we can free ourselves from every influence that shaped us. We cannot. Nor can we expect to possess every fact relevant to every judgment. But we can become more attentive to what has been omitted, more willing to question what feels self-evident, and more careful about the information we withhold from others.

I cannot determine what someone reading this essay will ultimately believe about Intelligent Design, the Dover trial, Kevin Miller, or *Expelled*. Nor should I want to. What I can do is present the evidence that influenced my own conclusions, acknowledge where that evidence has limits, and give readers an opportunity to examine it for themselves.

That is the responsibility I believe the filmmakers owed their audience.

And it is the responsibility I owe mine.

Sources and Endnotes

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