

See No Evolution...

There are countless creationist web sites out there, creatively proclaiming the evils of evolution. And yet, I figured, fearing for the opposition, things may not be as grave as all that, since, speaking of grave, a site dedicated solely to the truth of evolution would seem about as likely and lively as one devoted to gravity. Until rather recently, one wouldn't have thought it necessary to make a case for it at all, much less an entire web site. Or so I thought. In reality, the Darwinists have risen, or sunk, admirably to the occasion, once again battling "creation science," which, to borrow a phrase, has "adapted with modifications." Creationism has *evolved*. And now it wants to go to school.

Why, for example, if I can wax sarcastic for a second, is no one calling for curricula putting forth the proposition that $e = mc^3$? After all, Einstein's idea is only a "theory" too. And, really, what with a name like Relativity, you'd think its absolute truthiness would have been trashed a long time ago. Or how about the circular reasoning leading to the belief that the Earth is—revolutionary notion!—*round*? Even if we don't want to begin pulling from the classroom all those glib little globes, couldn't we at least start hinting to students that that band around them is a halo? I mean, what could it hurt?

The reason such fanciful claims do not have the impetus of creationism is that they don't involve God in so fundamental (or *fundamentalist*) a way. The theory of evolution, to such believers, undermines the ultimate aspect of His identity, that of Creator. In the opening chapter of His all-time bestseller, He is said to have assembled the world single-handedly in what by most accounts is considered a fairly short period of time. The question is how much creative license was used in the construction. The majority of Christians are not literalists, though. And most people who attempt to rest on Sunday come to realize it's all "relative." But seriously, although nearly no one takes everything in the Bible at face value, and the examples of why not to do so are many and often funny, this reality somehow does not deter the determined creationist.

The jargon of creationism may sound "scientific," but the actual agenda is moralistic. The "Institute for Creation Research" in southern California states that those who believe in evolution "must ultimately be consigned to the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." As the current joke might have it, we're not (just) in Kansas anymore! Although creationists like to complain that, by not being represented in science courses, they are being "censored," the real censorship is the de facto downgrading of genuine scientific thought by putting it on par with theistic mythology. James Kennedy lays out a clever argument in which he calls it "exceedingly ironic" that the ACLU, etc. are "in the forefront of this attempt to censor information." He dwells heavily on concepts like "science," "facts," and "evidence," but I believe this is James Kennedy, the *televangelist*, talking here.

In response to such demagoguery, Eugenie Scott and Henry Cole conducted a literature search that uncovered not a single creditable paper showing evidence for creationism submitted to or accepted for publication in a scholarly journal. Nevertheless, the squeaky reinvented wheel is finally getting some grease. In a rather unctuous turn around last year, a body no less invested than the National Association of Biology Teachers revised their longstanding statement that "the diversity of life on earth is the outcome of evolution: an unsupervised, impersonal, unpredictable, and natural process" to omit the

words “unsupervised” and “impersonal.” Leaving open the possibility (which, to some, will seem the probability) of a divine plan. Or, less religiously put, an “intelligent design”—itself a recycled euphemism from the 19th century; “creationism” was similarly created in 1880.

My sister swears she recalls a similar equivocation in her college biology textbook (the last sentence of the intro saying something like: That couldn’t have been all there was, however; there had to have been some creative force behind it). She says she felt sort of reassured by that sentiment, though I’m not sure whether more by the good odds of God, or in the hopes that this silly standoff might be resolved by such a truce. While some evolutionists do not feel that God and Science can legitimately coexist, most are willing to try and have it both ways. (See William Provine and Eugenie Scott for a good articulation of this question.)

Despite such compromising, scientists and science teachers are feeling the pressure to surrender more ground. School boards are being shanghaied by stealth candidates. And legislation has been introduced in several states to give “equal time” to the teaching of creationism in school. This union of church and state may, in fact, reflect public opinion, with polls that show over half of all Americans giving educational credence to creationism. There are reportedly teachers who believe it is “illegal” to teach evolution, and, absurdly enough, it actually *is*, in Alabama, to students under the age of fourteen. Disclaimers are turning up in textbooks, and teachers are tip-toeing around the topic. To wit, a young relative was instructed to read “that” chapter over winter vacation; there was no discussion of it in the classroom when school resumed.

An updated stage version of “Inherit the Wind” is currently in theaters (including Albany’s own Capital Rep, which stated in the playbill that a nearby school is now teaching creationism alongside evolution, according to one of the young actresses in the play) and history appears poised to repeat itself. The state of Tennessee, where the “Scopes Monkey Trial” took place in 1925, was also party to the “Scopes II” decision, which was overturned by the Supreme Court in 1987. Apparently things have gotten so bad there that the University of Tennessee now sponsors a remedial, mandatory “Darwin Day” for freshmen, complete with film festival, information booths, speakers, and the like.

The problem seems to be that as a nation we are more fiction than science, and famously susceptible to the influence of political and religious zealots. When creationists tried to ban Darwin in Richland, Washington, a few years ago, even the engineers at the local Hanford nuke quickly forgot everything they knew about the age of the Earth in order to rally ’round. And now the State School Board of Kansas has passed a ruling, sort of unrequiring teachers to teach evolution. (It won’t be on the test!) They aren’t mandated, mind you, *not* to teach that rude, crude, controversial, and godless theory—but the floodgates have opened, and it’s pretty clear that if you want to survive, you’d better get on board. Two by two, please.

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