

Creationism Left Out of Science Education for Valid Reasons

Richard B Katskee February 10, 2009

Should we teach creationism in public-school science classes? Of course we should—if we want to violate the Constitution, dumb down our students, and make our nation an international laughingstock.

The creationists won't admit it, but the debate is over, and they lost. Every time creationism has been brought into public schools, the courts have found it unconstitutional. It doesn't matter what label is used—"creation science," "intelligent design" (ID), or "the theory of abrupt appearance"—all are cut from the same unconstitutional cloth.

Ironically, creationists keep evolving. First they tried to ban the teaching of evolution outright. The Supreme Court struck down those attempts in 1968. Then creationists tried to mandate the teaching of "creation science" alongside evolution, in what were called "balanced treatment" laws. The Supreme Court rejected that ploy in 1987.

More recently, creationists tried to teach "intelligent design" in the public schools of Dover, Pa. I was one of the attorneys who represented the parent-plaintiffs in that case. We were gratified when U.S. District Judge John E. Jones III sent intelligent-design creationism packing in 2005.

"We have been presented," wrote Jones, "with a wealth of evidence which reveals that the District's purpose was to advance creationism, an inherently religious view, both by introducing it directly under the label ID and by disparaging the scientific theory of evolution, so that creationism would gain credence by default as the only apparent alternative to evolution...."

No matter how they try or what they call their ideas, creationists can't get over this hurdle: They want the Bible to be treated like a science book. Creationist efforts fail in court because creationism begins with a series of set-in-stone conclusions anchored in a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible, and then cherry picks "facts" to back up that religious view. Anything that doesn't fit the scenario is tossed. Call that what you will; but it isn't science.

Real science begins with a question and looks for the answer wherever it may be found. It isn't about dogma; it's about open inquiry. Unlike creationists, real scientists aren't afraid to change their hypothesis if the facts don't support it.

Unable to win in the law courts, creationists these days tend to pitch their case to the court of public opinion. One of their chief arguments is that evolution is anti-God and offensive to religion.

That argument is persuasive only to those who don't know about all the faith communities and religious leaders who long ago made their peace with Charles Darwin. *Voices for Evolution*, a publication of the National Center for Science Education, contains an entire list. Among them are the late Pope John Paul II and current Pope Benedict XVI, both of whom have endorsed evolution heartily; and they are hardly anti-faith fanatics.

Another argument that creationists employ is a misguided appeal to fairness. Why can't we teach both evolution and creationism, they ask, and let the students decide?

One reason we can't do that is because creationism is religion, not science. Introducing it into the public schools under any guise is a violation of the separation of church and state. Tempering it with some instruction about evolution does not change that simple fact.

But there is also a larger concern: We do our young people no favors when we pretend that there are controversies in science, when in fact there aren't. Evolution is accepted by the

overwhelming majority of biologists in this nation. In other developed countries, creationism is considered a bad joke that scientists don't take seriously.

Major advances in medicine, biology, and the study of human origins hinge on evolution. Understanding evolution is thus becoming more important than ever as we look to biotech industries and medical breakthroughs to combat disease and improve our quality of life. Failure to teach evolution properly leaves our children ill-equipped to contribute to this bright future; it is a form of educational malpractice.

Public colleges don't teach creationism; they teach evolution. Exposing our children to discredited, pseudo-scientific ideas in the name of "fairness" is nonsensical. There's a reason why every time a creationism bill is proposed in a state, college professors line up to oppose it: They don't want to have to spend time, money, and effort on remedial education for their students in Biology I.

"Equal time" does not apply when the scales are so uneven. When we teach about the Holocaust, we don't give the deniers equal time. When the germ theory of disease is taught, those who believe that sickness is punishment from God aren't given a platform.

The fact is, creationists have had many decades to put forth scientific evidence for their claims and to publish it in peer-reviewed journals. They have been unable to do so. The reason that their ideas have been expelled from the classroom is not a vast conspiracy or rampant hostility toward religion; it's that those ideas lack scientific value.

What's especially sad about this debate is that it is unnecessary. Lots of devoutly religious people accept evolution, seeing it as part of God's plan. We have learned through bitter experience (think Galileo) that when science and religion are forced to fight, neither side wins. That's because these two concepts aren't enemies and weren't meant to fight. Indeed, we all do better when religion and science work as partners to help us understand, interpret, and appreciate our world and humanity's place in it.

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