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The Origin of Life and Public Education:

Stepping Out of Line

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Science Through Science-Fiction

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"The contemporary creationist movement raises a number of social, legal, and philosophical issues: the separation of church and state, who decides what will be taught in our public schools, and what actually constitutes science." -
Walter J. Wilkins

Throughout the existence of humankind, there has been wonder over where everything came from. Today, through various sources, two strong "theories" have developed along with four positions on the subject. As Wilkins points out, there are many educational issues at hand when the beginning of the world is discussed. Which should be taught in our schools? Should each viewpoint be given, or just the ones the community accepts? When all the positions are examined carefully, it can be seen that no view really has much evidence. This is why the subject in its entirety should not be covered in the realm of secondary education.

In the early twentieth century, there were few accepted theories of the beginning of the world. The one that was largely accepted, and found in most high school biology textbooks was the world was created by the Christian God. This held through much of the 1930s, but then the theory of evolution proposed by Darwin began appearing in these texts. The exposure of evolution from the Scopes "monkey" trial began to develop prestige in the scientific community, up until the antievolutionist movement that began in the 1970s (Montagu 306-8).

These events helped to polarize the public into four types. The primary positions are the two extremes, the creationist and the evolutionist. In between these are combinations of the two views, the creation scientist and the evolutionary theologian.

The creationist position itself can even be viewed in two lights. First there are the fundamentalists, who take the Bible literally. These are the people who read Genesis and believe that God created the world in seven days and that the world is no more than 10,000 years old. They believe that anything that science says to be older is simply the creation of God appearing to be older than it is.

The other creationist vantage point is the one typically viewed as creationism. The basis for their beliefs is Genesis, but many are willing to give a little leeway. Since the sun was not created until the fourth day, according to Genesis, many creationists are willing to admit that a day could actually be many years if there were no indicator. The main argument of the creationist is that the world is of "total supernatural origin" (Morris 12).

The evolutionist position is the one typically associated with science. They believe in the "big bang" and the creation of amoebas that, over millions of years, evolved into all the life that exists today. Some creationists deny the evolutionist view "because no one has been present to observe its development from the very beginning and keep a written record" (Steiger). However, the evolutionist compares it to a murder mystery where someone

would "walk into a room and find a body with its hands tied behind it and a gunshot wound to the back of the head"(Steiger). It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that a murder was committed. Evolutionists are just trying to find the rope and wound for proof.

The position of the creation scientist is a little harder to explain. According to Wilkins, "the goal of scientific creationism is to attack Darwinian evolution and offer a scientific alternative"(52). Conversely, many scientists have a problem with their creationist colleagues. "Creationist 'scientists'...practice their 'science' according to the conclusions about human origins that they know they'll reach"(King). Many scientists feel that the "claims of [scientific] creationists are...not only an example of poor science...in fact, examples of *anti-science*" (King). Nonetheless it is the focus of the creation scientist to provide for a scientific alternative to the evolution theory of Darwin.

Evolutionary theologians compose the final faction. Phillip E. Johnson sums up the view using natural selection. He shows that in this view, God created the world and has evolved up until now. These views are not new by any means. Historically, these views have been taken by both members of the church and science, such as Father Teilhard de Chardin and Professor von Heune (Wilder-Smith). Some of these believers feel that the evolution part of the process was also helped along by God, but that it happened nonetheless. Others stretch the science part

further, saying that "the 'big bang' theory seems to lead to a super deity who set the whole thing up in the first nanosecond" (Montagu 152). Still, the view of evolutionary theologians is to have a harmony between the science and the religion of the matter.

The battleground over these views has often been the classroom. Since around 1970, creationists have been asking for fairness in hearing creation-science to the same extent as evolution-science from the political structures of our country (Montagu 23). Richard D. Alexander, Professor of Zoology at the University of Michigan, reminds people that this was never done by the evolutionists.

No laws were ever passed saying that evolution had to be taught in biology courses. The prestige of evolutionary theory has been built by its impact on the thousands of biologists who have learned its power and usefulness in the study of living things. No laws need to be passed for creationists to do the same thing. (Zetterberg 90)

To this day all the views about the beginning of our planet are still not presented in the high school curriculum. The two extremes are taught as a black-and-white issue, but the large gray area is completely ignored. There is no way to properly educate the youth of the country by only presenting half the issue. This is what leads to ignorance and indifference, especially if the individual accepts neither of the given views.

Another reason for not teaching any theory in secondary schools is the separation of faith and fact in discussions over the two theories. Kevin Hollaway, a strong creationist follower, states that "for the most part, belief in either theory must be based on faith rather than fact." A good example of this comes from Loren King. She compares the infamous "Paluxy tracks", a discovery, later proven to be a hoax, of human and dinosaur footprints supposedly found together and Noah's flood. She shows how creationists are quick to accept the scientific evidence against the "Paluxy tracks", but avoid "explaining how a flood could cover the whole earth with water and not leave extensive evidence of such an event" (King). The difference in the acceptance of each story is the faith in the Biblical account of the flood and the lack of faith in the story of the tracks.

Henry Morris, author of Scientific Creationism, shows that calling either creationism or evolution a "theory" is a little hasty in itself. Simply put, the name should not apply because *neither can be tested* (9). It is for this reason that Steiger says that "evolution is not a science; it is merely a system of beliefs". Besides the lack of irrefutable evidence by the evolutionists, there are also many flaws in the logic of their beliefs. By pinpointing the 'big bang' as the beginning of the universe, they imply that there was nothing in existence before that event. This implies that something must have "created" what caused the 'big bang' (Haught 106). John F. Haught, a professor at Georgetown University, makes a very interesting point.

No matter how mathematically ethereal or physically subtle the initial cosmic conditions may seem to have been, metaphysically speaking they still enjoy some mode of being. And it is the sheer being of things...that evokes the true sense of religious wonder (111).

It is this sense that brings up the age-old question of "why?" This is a question that evolution does not even tackle in most cases because the theory says that the universe never needed to exist. However, "once we have asked this question we have already brought science into close contact with theology" (Haught 115). This merging of thought begins to erode at the evolutionist foundation, and is what creates the large gray area between evolution and creationism that our children are not taught.

This creates a question of why our children are being taught things that no one is even sure of in our schools. Since each is much more a belief than a science, it places a bit of religion in each view. The representation of both sides also violates the rights of different ideals. Along with the freedom of speech comes the right not to be subject to some views, especially in a controlled and required schooling atmosphere. Presenting evolution in the classroom violates the rights of fundamentalists (Montagu 138) who have the right to not hear the "theory" of evolution and for their children not to hear it either. On the flip side, evolutionists and members of non-

Christian religions have the right not to hear creationist views. This is what is meant by the separation of church and state.

For some reason, the publishers of biology textbooks feel that the topic is still very important. Richard D. Alexander says that "the human background is a central question in the lives of thoughtful individuals who wish to understand themselves and others" (Zetterberg 91). Is this really true? Gallup polls seem to imply that this is a strictly American phenomenon. The debate is virtually unheard of in Europe. One reason for this may be that only three to five percent of Protestants attend church in Europe as compared to 51 percent (one third of which are fundamentalists) in the United States. However, one would still expect to hear some sort of rumble from that five percent. This may demonstrate that the necessity of human origin is not entirely true. This gives us yet another possibility for not including the subject in biology textbooks at this time.

Another thing to look at is the importance of origin in relation to other aspects of science. In most high schools in the country, the progression of the sciences is biology, chemistry, and physics. When one examines what the students are learning, it can be seen that they are learning about these models of evolution two to three years before learning about Newton's Laws. This seems to imply that human origin is more important than the fact that when you drop something, it falls. Is there too much focus on the possible rather than the known? This situation seems to imply that very strongly. We teach our

children something that is "impossible to demonstrate scientifically" before the basics of motion and forces (Morris 6). This seems drastically out of order. Even further than out of order, it is like the Sesame Street game "Which of these is not like the others?"

The best idea may be to leave these matters for other institutions. The church may continue to teach children the writings of Genesis. Colleges and universities may tackle the issues of either, but the strong background in the fundamentals of science is needed first. Parents may educate their children through talks and readings. There are numerous places that the origin of humanity may be discussed. The high school biology classroom seems to be a far cry from the best place to deal with the issue.

There are many models of human origin, but none is proven by science. Yet the two extremes remain to be taught in high school, often misinforming students of the numerous positions on the matter. The rights of students are also often violated by the presentation of origin in the classroom. Finally, students are being taught faint possibilities years before many of the real world applications of science. These teachings cause many problems that could be solved fairly easily with the elimination of the subject from the high school biology classroom.

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