

9-17-1999

Evolution and Creationism: Some Paradoxes of Political Advocacy

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Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (1999) "Evolution and Creationism: Some Paradoxes of Political Advocacy," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 7 : Iss. 11 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol7/iss11/2>

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Title: Evolution and Creationism: Some Paradoxes of Political Advocacy

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Volume: 7

Issue: 11

Date: 1999-09-17

Keywords: Creationism, Evolutionary Theory

Abstract. This article describes some surprising paradoxes behind political advocacy for teaching creationism along with or instead of evolutionary theory in public schools within the United States of America.

As just one example of the ongoing discourse on the appropriateness of teaching creationism along with or instead of evolutionary theory in United States public schools, the Board of Education in the state of Kansas has removed evolutionary theory from its recommended curriculum and from standardized tests. This removal has been hailed by many advocates of teaching creationism in the public schools and by virtually all advocates of not teaching evolutionary theory in these schools. Yet logical inferences from such advocacies point in interesting directions.

First, advocates for teaching creationism most often have the agenda of inculcating sound moral and ethical values in the context of one interpretation of a Judeo-Christian text. Success, however, sets a precedent for other textual interpretations as well as for other texts and their interpretations. Is the Kansas action but a pyrrhic victory leading to a multicultural defeat?

Second, the advocates refute the possibility that creationism and evolutionary theory are textually and interpretively compatible. Certainly, there are many evolutionary theorists who believe that they are trying--albeit with human imperfect faculties--to elucidate God's work, not reject it. And cannot God's work--if one believes in God's work--be even further glorified as at least some aspects are identified through the scientific method via reason, empiricism, and experimentalism?

Third, the creationist advocates also are deadly adversaries of cultural relativism and variants of postmodernism. In many ways, so are scientists engaged in research based on evolutionary theory. The latter are finely honing epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical concepts based on scientific data that severely constrain at least the more extreme contentions of creationists' relativistic foes.

Fourth, theory and data derived from evolutionary theory has fostered significant health, nutrition, and security benefits that are enjoyed by creationist advocates. Impeding or preventing further benefits might not be a preferred choice of these advocates but may be a consequence of successful advocacy.

From whence the paradoxes and belief systems from which they stem? Some cognitive psychology research suggests that children without formal educational training on evolutionary theory exhibit views on the origins of species that include aspects of creationism, Lamarckian views, spontaneous generationism, and essentialism. Are there cognitive susceptibilities and constraints bearing on what people can believe about speciation? Other research suggests that religious beliefs may impede the understanding of evolutionary theory. Incompatibilities may, then, involve not content incongruencies but the proactive and retroactive interferences of one belief system on the development of another. In addition, a search for spiritual and existential meaning may impede understanding the flaws of various belief systems.

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In any case, if creationists continue to successfully advocate for educational policy changes, they may find their creation a plague of biblical proportions. In fact, they may find themselves at an evolutionary dead-end. (See Lane, C. (September 13/20, 1999). Devolution. *The New Republic*, p. 6; McManus, F.E. (1993). Constructionists and creationists. *American Psychologist*, 48, 57-58; Samarapungavan, A., & Wiers, R.W. (1997). Children's thoughts on the origin of species: A study of explanatory coherence. *Cognitive Science*, 21, 147-177; Sinclair, A., et al. (1997). The relationship between college zoology students' beliefs about evolutionary theory and religion. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 30, 118-125.) (Keywords: Creationism, Evolutionary Theory.)