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## TEACHING THEORIES ON ORIGINS WITHOUT CONTROVERSY

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### ABSTRACT

Thirty years of intensive efforts by creationists have produced little substantive progress in bringing about open academic inquiry in the teaching of origins theories in public schools because the opposition has convinced the courts that this would violate the First Amendment. The author has developed a secular approach to origins teaching that avoids all possible objections on constitutional grounds. It informs students about the true nature of the relevant scientific data which reveal great difficulties with evolution theory and show that all basic types of life first appeared abruptly on Earth. "Key words: Abrupt appearance, censorship, evolution, origins, science teaching."

### INTRODUCTION

After three decades of tireless efforts, what progress has the creation-science movement made in obtaining open academic inquiry in public education's treatment of theories on origins? Has there been any significant net progress and if not, why not? Have we perhaps been using the wrong approach? Unfortunately, we must admit that, although good groundwork has been laid and some temporary advancements have been realized, formidable censorship forces have usually been able to nullify the progress. Few public school students are better able to hear all relevant scientific evidences relating to origins than in the 1960s.

This paper gives a brief summary of some of the progress made by the creation-science movement through informing the public, generating books and reference materials, getting legislation passed, and battling in the courts. Then it outlines an approach to public education that is effective and beyond challenge on First Amendment grounds.

### SOME PROGRESS

Certainly there are many excellent books and audio-visual aids now available to teachers and students--if not through schools and libraries, at least through private sources. And the numerous creation-evolution debates, lectures, and publications have equipped people in each community with valuable scientific information that was not available 30 years ago. Of particular significance to public education are materials that have been specially edited to emphasize scientific evidences without promoting religious doctrine. A wide variety of these materials is available from distributors such as the Bible-Science Association and the Institute for Creation Research.

Also, temporary progress was made in Texas and California when, as the two largest textbook markets, they required less dogmatism on evolution and forced publishers to tone down their presentation of evolution somewhat--although the textbooks still included only evolution and presented it in a positive manner.

### TEXAS LOSES CITIZEN CONTROL

In Texas even this small gain was wiped out in 1985 when Norman Lear's humanist organization, People for the American Way, persuaded the legislature to abolish the citizen-elected State School Board and replace it with a board appointed by the governor.

The new board is not responsive to the vast majority of the public (86%) who want creation taught. Instead, it sympathizes with the 8% who, according to a 1981 AP-NBC nationwide poll, want only evolution taught. In the guise of improving education, Texas has opted for a return to the Dark Ages with superstition and pseudo-science being taught as science.

## CALIFORNIA REQUIRES MORE EVOLUTION

In California, although the Reagan-appointed State School Board had required science books to be less dogmatic regarding evolution, the Brown-appointed Board later reversed this gain and in 1985 the Board rejected all 66 new science books submitted for adoption and forced the publishers to include more pages on evolution. The 700 pages on evolution already in the books were not enough to satisfy the evolutionists. And the Board even had the unparalleled brazenness to vote for censorship of all negative evidence for evolution. They voted down a motion that would have required each science book to include at least one piece of negative evidence for evolution out of literally volumes of such evidence that are available.

The new science books that were finally adopted in California in 1985 present evolution only in a positive way. In addition, the millions of existing textbooks that are currently in use are filled with much dogmatism in their treatment of evolution. Yet, a 1981 Superior Court order, resulting from the Creation-Science Research Center lawsuit (the Segraves case), requires that the state desist from presenting speculation on origins theories as fact. It orders:

That, on the subject of discussing origins in the Science textbooks, the following editing be done prior to execution of a contract (with a publisher):  
1. That dogmatism be changed to conditional statements where speculation is offered as explanation for origins.(1)

Yet, the state and local California school boards are flippantly violating this antidogmatism court order because they know that the only recourse to creationists is an expensive lawsuit, which can be dragged on for many years, and they think that creationists will not be concerned enough to donate the necessary funds for the case. Hopefully, this is a miscalculation and concerned citizens will donate generously to the CSRC Textbook Defense Fund (Box 23195, San Diego, CA 92123) so a lawsuit can be filed to force California to abide by the existing law. The results of such a suit will undoubtedly affect textbooks in every state. California is the largest single purchaser of school textbooks and its Board of Education is effectively writing the books for the entire country since publishers cannot afford to offer a different edition for each state.

## NEW YORK

In New York we made what, for a time, promised to be significant progress, but very little has resulted. On March 10, 1975, Counsel and Deputy Commissioner for Legal Affairs at the New York State Education Department, Robert Stone, wrote in a letter to Helen Wistrom that the teaching of creation was not a violation of New York State or federal laws, including the Constitution and its Amendments. He also stated that a student could not be penalized for questioning the validity of the theory of evolution. Then he added:

I should emphasize, however, that we believe strongly that both versions should be presented to the students as theories, rather than as dogma. The role of the public schools in this area, as in many other areas, is to teach about theories and concepts, and not espouse them.

This was an excellent policy, which, if implemented, would have satisfied those concerned about the pervasive evolutionary indoctrination throughout public education. But absolutely nothing was done to even inform anyone in the state (except Mrs. Wistrom) about this policy, much less to implement it.

At this point, the author entered the scene, carrying on extensive correspondence and attending several meetings with the New York State Board of Regents and other Education Department officials.

On December 17, 1978, the Chancellor of the Board of Regents ordered a study of the legal and academic aspects of teaching theories on origins in which the author was invited to participate. The legal study was completed first, and on March 23, 1979, the author received the following letter from Deputy Commissioner for Elementary, Secondary, and Continuing Education, Robert Spillane:

Counsel Stone has advised me that he would not presently offer an opinion prohibiting the discussion of a creation model for origins in classrooms. Therefore, I have instructed Mr. Edward Lalor of the Bureau of Science Education to initiate a formal review of your materials. . .

In June 1980, the author received phone calls from Mr. Harold Newcomb, Chairman of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee on the Board of Regents, and from Mr. Lalor, giving the substance of a three-point policy just adopted by the Regents. Later, on July 28, 1981, Regent Emlyn Griffith described the policy in a letter to the author:

I seek the truth in science education, to borrow your expression; so do my colleagues on the Board of Regents.

(I had told the Regents that I sought only "truth in science education," not the teaching of religion in public schools.) The letter continued:

Evidence of that commitment is clear. I remind you that, following a systematic review of the biology curriculum last year, the Regents concurred in staff recommendation that: (1) Evolution be taught as theory, not absolute fact, supported by most scientists and science teachers; (2) Other theories be mentioned, but not taught, as a syllabus requirement; and (3) The curriculum bibliography include 'representative and objective' materials on the other theories. You know what I have done, as ESC Committee chairman, to monitor these policy directions. (2)

Unfortunately, the only thing the New York State Education Department has done to carry out this policy has been to enclose a very biased letter with the new Biology Syllabus disparaging against religious concepts being taught. The new Syllabus presents only positive evidences for evolution and censors the abundant negative evidence that discredits evolution theory. They published a test bibliography, containing 17 creation-science or antievolution books, to 25 selected schools in 1981, but when the final Biology Syllabus was published in 1982, it contained no bibliography. Although the Education Department has repeatedly assured the author that such a bibliography would be issued, in 1986 they are still dragging their feet about issuing one, claiming lack of funds.

Would such a bibliography have any practical value--could students obtain books by creationist authors in their library? To explore this question, the author surveyed 16 school systems in New York State to determine if their libraries contained any of the books on the state's test bibliography. Also, a statewide computer search was conducted. This revealed that not one library, including the state library in Albany, contained a single antievolutionist book on the list, except where books had been donated. Of course, virtually all libraries, even elementary school libraries, contained piles of books on occult science, witchcraft, evolution, religion, and astrology.

#### NEW APPROACH NEEDED

So there is a big job ahead for those who are concerned about this solid wall of censorship in libraries and in public education in general. An Education Department official in the White House advised the author to concentrate our attack on the censorship issue for it is the Achilles' heel of the liberal establishment.

This advice is proving to be effective, for the anticreationist Committees of Correspondence have been forced to say in print that they support the stocking of creationist books in school libraries. They said this grudgingly, suggesting that shelf space limitations and the poor quality should be used as excuses to "accept only a few creationist books." But they felt compelled to say: "The scholarly community must oppose censorship." (3)

#### STATE LAWS

Laws have been passed by the legislatures of Tennessee, Arkansas, and Louisiana requiring balance in the teaching of origins theories, but all these have been declared unconstitutional by the courts. There is still some hope in Louisiana, however, where that state's Balanced Treatment Act is being appealed to the United States Supreme Court.

This rather gloomy report is not meant to suggest that no progress has been made toward open academic inquiry in the public school classroom; a few individual teachers present open discussion of both theories on origins. But, in general, students are being educated in 1986 behind a solid wall of censorship that has been erected against all scientific data that contradict evolution theory. Since the present approach has produced so little, isn't it time that we step back and re-examine our methodology to see if there is not a more effective way to achieve our goals?

#### GOAL IN EDUCATION

First, what should be the goal? Should it be as the proponents of censorship contend that we want the Bible taught in science classes? So far, no legislative initiative has sought that. It is only a strawman put up by the opposition so that they could easily convince the public and the courts to reject our initiative as unconstitutional. It would be folly, of course, for the state to require its many atheist, agnostic, and humanist teachers to teach the book of Genesis, even though teaching about the Bible has already been ruled constitutional by the United States Supreme Court. If the Bible can be legally taught in history and social science classes, there is no constitutional reason it could not be taught in science classes because the Constitution does not say one word about protecting science.

The one citizen right that it does single out for protection is the free exercise of religion. There can only be room for argument about whether or not the state establishes a particular religion.

Until the issue is clarified by the United States Supreme Court, the approach that should be taken to teaching theories on origins is a purely secular approach that avoids any legitimate challenge on First Amendment grounds. Such an approach is already used by many individual public school teachers throughout the United States. For example a number of high school and college teachers use the 35-mm slide presentation "Scientific Evidences on Origins: What Do the Fossils Say:" produced by and available for \$30 from L.D. Sunderland, 5 Griffin Drive, Apalachin, New York 13732. A filmstrip version, aimed at a slightly lower grade level (7-12) is produced by Sci-Tech Presentations, 9231 White Oak Avenue, North Ridge, CA 91325 for \$51.50. A reference book for use with this teaching approach is Darwin's Enigma: Fossils and Other Problems by this author and published by Master Books, P.O. Box 1606, El Cajon, CA 92022 for \$6.95.

A brief summary of this approach is as follows:

1. Begin by explaining that man has been able to think of only two general explanations--hypotheses, models or theories--of how the universe and all life in it originated: evolution or abrupt appearance.
2. Neither concept completely meets any of the requirements of a scientific theory, i.e., repeatability, observability, testability, falsifiability, and tentativeness. But it is perfectly legitimate to evaluate the two theories or models by comparing their predictions against the scientific data.
3. Define the two theories:
  - a. Evolution is not just change but the idea that all life came from a common ancestor. There are three possible explanations for it: mechanistic, theistic, or unknown. The mechanistic idea starts with an explosion in a vacuum, forming the universe spontaneously. Then the first cell spontaneously forms on Earth. Damages to its DNA cause mistakes in reproduction, but nature throws away the bad mistakes, keeping the good ones, and eventually forms all life including man. That is the old-fashioned idea. Then explain the modern idea, punctuated equilibria, which is propounded by many well-known establishment scientists. This theory says that new species were formed in big lucky jumps or rapid bursts of evolution.  
  
Theistic evolution only allows God to start a ball of gas and establish some laws before stepping back and letting everything happen by random processes, exactly as the mechanistic idea postulates.
  - b. Abrupt appearance holds that the first life forms appeared on Earth complete and fully formed in every way. Life could have been shipped here from somewhere else in the universe (panspermia), originated theistically, or formed by some unknown mechanism.
4. Explain the hypothetical geologic column, how it was formed by creationists, and that rocks in that sequence have never been found anywhere. Dating the rocks and fossils is highly speculative.
5. Describe what is found in the fossil record in detail using only the testimony of evolutionists for documentation. Start with the deepest rocks containing fossils and point out that there is no evidence of the assumed transition from single cell to man. End by reading Colin Patterson's 10 April 79 letter stating there is not a single intermediate form, either fossil or living.(4)
6. Discuss the indirect evidences of homology, embryology, genetics, thermodynamics, and dating of fossils.

A detailed description of this approach is given in the paper by this author entitled, "Teaching Theories on Origins: An Approach That Works" printed in this proceedings.(5)

This secular-scientific, nonresolution-of-final-cause approach is forcefully argued for by the state of Louisiana in their brief, filed March 12, 1986, with the United States Supreme Court. Even with the words "creation" and "creator" in the state's Balanced Treatment Act, they have shown persuasively--at least enough to convince the strong seven-judge minority on the Appellate Court--that this approach is not inherently religious and is, in fact, scientific. The impassioned seven-judge dissent specifically finds that creation-science is scientific and nonreligious:

The statute which concerns us today is quite different: it has no direct religious reference whatever and merely requires that the whole scientific

truth be taught on the subject if any is . . . my summary of the statute indicates that neither evolution nor creation be presented as finally established scientific fact and that when evolution is taught as a theory, the scientific evidence . . . for the sudden appearance of highly developed forms of life be given equal time (and vice versa).

Although the closely divided (8-7) court denied the state's request for a trial without offering any explanation for its decision, the minority forcefully put their stamp of approval on the Louisiana legislature's statute:

They did not seek to further their aim by requiring that religious doctrine be taught in public school. Instead, they chose a more modest tactic--one that I am persuaded does not infringe the Constitution.

It follows that the Louisiana statute requires no more than that neither theory about the origins of life and matter be misrepresented as fact, and that if scientific evidence supporting either view of how these things came about be presented in public schools, that supporting the other view must be--so that within the reasonable limits of the curriculum, the subject of origins will be discussed in a balanced manner if it is discussed at all. I see nothing illiberal about such a requirement, nor can I imagine that Galileo or Einstein would have found fault with it.

The seven judges were dismayed to learn that their eight brethren felt that it was unconstitutional to teach the truth:

I should have thought that requiring the truth to be taught on any subject displayed its own secular warrant, one at the heart of the scientific method itself. Put another way, I am surprised to learn that a state cannot forbid the teaching of half-truths in its public schools.(6)

The United States Supreme Court has decided to hear the Louisiana case and rule on it late in 1986. They could send it back to the lower court for a full trial--something the American Civil Liberties Union has unfortunately been successful in preventing, so far.

#### CONCLUSION

Since the creation-science movement has made such meager progress in effecting changes in the way public education teaches theories on origins, a new approach should be considered. Our inability to pass laws requiring a balanced treatment of origins theories that could withstand the test of our humanist-oriented federal court system indicates that a more secular approach should be taken. Perhaps someday a favorable United States Supreme Court decision will be rendered permitting a balanced treatment approach, but, in the meantime, there is no reason why we should permit millions of innocent school children each year to be indoctrinated in evolution, which is the basic tenet of several religions. This can be stopped immediately through the use of the approach described in this paper.

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