

Evo Edu Outreach (2010) 3:675–676
DOI 10.1007/s12052-010-0283-4

BOOK REVIEW

A Specialized Reference and Then Some: Chronology of the Evolution-Creationism Controversy

Chronology of the Evolution-Creationism Controversy, by Randy Moore, Mark Decker, and Sehoia Cotner. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2010. pp. xx+455. H/b \$85.00.

Lawrence S. Lerner

Published online: 24 September 2010
© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010

Keywords Evolution · Natural selection · Paleontology · Creationism · Intelligent design creationism · Chronology · Eugenics · Science education

When the authors set out to compile this chronology, they must have had in mind a reference work for a specialized audience—namely, persons with a more-than-casual interest in the history of the evolution-creationism conflict and the way that conflict is embedded in the historical development of our understanding of life on Earth. The authors have succeeded very well, with a list of events from ca. 2700 BCE (early Egyptian creation myths) to 2009 CE (17 entries including, inter alia, the Darwin bicentennial/sesquicentennial, creationist science teacher John Freshwater's countersuit against his dismissal for preaching, teaching creationism, and branding students with a Tesla coil, and the government seizure of imprisoned tax-evader Kent Hovind's creationist theme park.) Each event is given a paragraph, most of them less than ten lines, but with some longer ones as well.

As the authors point out, such a chronology enables the reader to put individual events into a broader context: “Readers may be naturally interested in learning about the major events that have occurred during the [evolution-creationism] controversy. ... We ... suggest that you examine at least two decades before and after any particular year you're interested in to better understand the context of particular events.” Making this easy is a strong point of the book.

Also of note are an extensive index and bibliography and a separate chronology of significant U.S. legal decisions from the Scopes trial (1925) to *Kitzmiller v. Dover* (2005), with its dramatic exposure of the many failings of intelligent-design creationism.

But in evaluating the book as a reference, I found to my surprise that it is a good read as well. Though the authors have made no explicit attempts to pull the individual entries together into a comprehensive history, the chronology itself results in a highly readable flow. It was a delight, for instance, to read at one sitting from the first discussion of Hutton's work (1785) through the contributions of Cuvier, Paley, Lamarck, and Humboldt to the early works of Lyell (1829 ff). In doing so, I learned for the first time of the extraordinary fossil hunter Mary Anning (1799–1847), of whom I should have known a long time ago. And it was interesting to discover that Joseph Jackson Lister, the father of the famous surgeon Joseph Lister, had made significant contributions to microscope optics. Other readers will of course pick up other intriguing tidbits of knowledge.

There is a fine exposition (pp. 65–66) of the fact that natural selection had been proposed by several others, including Rousseau, Herder, Hutton, and Matthew, before it was incorporated comprehensively into evolutionary theory by Darwin.

In our own times, the chronology becomes still more useful. Even the most dedicated student of the evolution of creationism finds it difficult to stay au courant with every newsworthy event. I had not known, for instance, that the anthropic principle was christened by an Australian physicist in 1973, or that creationist Henry Morris traced the invention of evolution back to a discussion between Satan and King Nimrod of Babylon at the Tower of Babel (1982). It was interesting, too, that Biblical literalist Morris

L. S. Lerner (✉)
College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics,
California State University, Long Beach,
Long Beach, CA 90840, USA
e-mail: lslerner@csulb.edu

did not go along with Martin Luther's literal Biblical mandate for a flat earth (1541). And I had a good chuckle over fundamentalist Jasper Masee's claim (1922) that acceptance of evolution “makes Jesus Christ the bastard son of illegitimate intercourse between Mary and Joseph,” because I knew of no other writer who had questioned the legitimacy of their marriage.

As part of the chronology, this book gathers together some of the more remarkable assertions of various creationists. It's worth mentioning just a few here:

“Our unified premise is that observation and theory should always be subservient to a proper understanding of the Word of God.”—Larry Vardiman of ICR, 2000

“On the issue of evolution, the verdict is still out on how God created the earth.”—George W. Bush, 2000

“...there is a Creator, and that this Creator is Jesus Christ, who is our Savior.”—AiG Creation Museum, 2007 (This is an example of the idiosyncratic theological position called Christomonism, held by many creationists, which shifts the role of Creator from God the Father to emphasize Christ over the rest of the Trinity.)

“[Evolution is not a science] because it contradicts biblical revelation.”—John C. Whitcomb, Jr., 2008

One may complain about small matters. Figure 5, a photograph of a statue of Giordano Bruno, does not make clear that the facial features are entirely imaginary, as no portrait of him from life exists. Steno's conversion to Catholicism, ordination as a priest, and eventual beatification are described, but not his consecration as a bishop. In the discussion of anthropologist Earnest Hooton's racist views, no mention is made of the fact that he was also a notorious misogynist. *Inherit the Wind* had a successful three-year run on Broadway, but it certainly was not “the most successful and longest-running drama in Broadway's history.” The namesake of the “Red Queen” hypothesis is a chess piece not in *Alice In Wonderland* but in *Through the Looking-Glass*. The creationist who writes under the pseudonym John Woodmarrappe is not identified as the Chicago elementary-school teacher Jan Peczkis. It's Luis (not Louis) Alvarez, and the possessive plural of his (and his son's) name is Alvarezes', not Alvarezs'. Vesalius's magnum opus is titled *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (not *Favrica*.) Francesco Redi's path-breaking 1668 work on spontaneous generation was on insetti, not insetfi. Charles Lemoine de Longueuil, who first discovered fossils in the U.S. in 1739, surely did not die in 1729. In the same vein, the unfortunate African pygmy tribesman Ota Benga, who was exhibited in the Bronx Zoo in 1906, could not have committed suicide in 1916, after his release 16 years earlier. Alfred Russel Wallace was undoubtedly born in 1823 “in

what is now Wales,” but surely it was Wales then as well. On the positive side, however, the entire book contains only three typos and one grammatical gaffe.

A few topics that could well have been included in the book were omitted. The tension between the young-earth and intelligent-design creationists is mentioned briefly in a reference to a 1998 publication of John Morris. But the conflict between the political usefulness of a united front against science and the serious theological differences is not followed in any detail, from the original uneasy alliances of the 1990s to the decamping of the young-earthers after the discrediting of intelligent design in *Kitzmiller v. Dover*.

The main focus of the book is on the long-standing evolution-creationist conflict in the U.S. This makes good sense, since the U.S. has been the focal point of the conflict since the early twentieth century. But some significant developments elsewhere are missing. There are two entries concerning the Turkish Moslem creationist Harun Yahya (the pen name of Adnan Oktar), but the creationist leanings of many ultra-orthodox Jews are not covered, except for a brief reference to the writings of Israeli physicist Nathan Aviezer. The travails of University of Melbourne geology professor Ian Plimer in a drawn-out lawsuit involving Noah's Ark (1997) are not mentioned. Neither is the defamation suit that forced Australian Catholic-school educator Barry Price to withdraw *The Creation Science Controversy*, a book critical of creationism (1991). There are no entries concerning the various efforts to promote creationism in Canadian schools, especially in Alberta. The controversy in the UK over the fundamentalist-driven schools founded by automobile sales magnate Peter Vardy is cited only in the context of the approval they gained from then-Prime Minister Tony Blair (2002). Cardinal Schönborn's op-ed in *The New York Times* (2005) is discussed but not the fact that it was largely drafted by the intelligent-design creationist Discovery Institute.

One practice employed throughout the book was annoying. It's best described in terms of an example. The first time the American Museum of Natural History is mentioned (1869), Figure 30 displays a photo of the lintel above a door, engraved with the museum's name. Not very helpful, but no big deal. But subsequently, each of the many times the Museum is mentioned, there is a reference to Fig. 30. If one has forgotten that the figure contains little information, he finds himself leafing back through the book to find it, with a guarantee of frustration when it is found.

In spite of these cavils, *Chronology of the Evolution-Creation Controversy* is a valuable reference as well as an educational and refreshing read. I recommend it to anyone with more than the most casual interest in the creationism phenomenon.