

Creationism Should Not Be Taught in Public Schools

Religion and Education, 2005

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The primary difference between [science](#) and religion is that science must depend on rational [evidence](#) and observation of natural events, while religion depends on the belief in forces beyond human understanding and often relies on texts that must be considered infallible. [Creationism](#) is argued as if it were a religious doctrine, not a scientific theory—it is based on "infallible" texts and cannot be disproved on its own terms based on any new evidence. Educators are under no obligation to treat religious doctrines as science; to do so would require them to teach astrology as part of astronomy courses and teach witch doctor rituals in medical school. By treating religious doctrines such as creationism as if they were scientific theories, educators would weaken the already lagging science literacy of American students and hamper their ability to understand how science works.

Scientific literacy is in short supply among American students. This problem makes controversial proposals to teach creationism in science classes, along with astronomy, geology, and the theory of [evolution](#), all the more disturbing. The most important questions in this debate are: "What are the differences between science and religion?" "Is creationism science?" and, "Does fairness require that creationism should be taught alongside the theory of evolution?"

Defining Science and Religion

Science and religion are different. Scientific explanations are based on human observations of natural processes; these explanations may be changed or abandoned as additional facts are discovered. Science does not claim that [God](#) does not exist. However, whether or not scientists believe in God, by the very definition of science, they cannot offer God's intervention as the explanation for whatever they seek to explain.

Scientists who investigate the past must proceed in the same way that detectives work when solving crimes without witnesses. In such cases, detectives must assume that no supernatural forces were involved. Suppose you are accused of a murder and you have overwhelming evidence to prove that you were 3,000 miles away from the scene of the crime when the murder was committed.

But the prosecutor ignores this rational evidence, and claims that you made yourself invisible, flew at the speed of light to commit the murder 3,000 miles away, and returned an instant later. How could you defend yourself? Could you prove that you did not have these powers? No—it is impossible to prove or disprove something outside the realm of rational investigation.

Any judge who heard a prosecutor accuse a defendant of using supernatural powers to commit a crime would immediately rule that the accusation is inadmissible in court. In just the same way, the

explanation of material facts by supernatural forces is not admissible in science.

Religious explanations of the [universe](#), in contrast to science, are based upon belief in certain forces that are beyond the realm of human understanding. Many religions also depend on a faith that certain documents are infallible.

Is Creationism Science?

"Creationists" are fundamentalist Christians who believe that the account of creation in the Book of Genesis is literally true. According to creationists, the Earth is only about 6,000 years old, Adam and Eve were the actual ancestors of all living people, and Noah's flood occurred exactly as described in the Bible.

Creationists ignore the basic premises of science. For example, the public school edition of Henry Morris' textbook, *Scientific Creationism*, published by Creation-Life Publishers, states: "It is precisely because Biblical revelation is absolutely authoritative and perspicuous that the scientific facts, rightly interpreted, will give the same testimony as that of Scripture. There is not the slightest possibility that the facts of science can contradict the Bible." This principle directly contradicts the requirement that scientific explanations must be modified when new facts are discovered.

Similarly, the textbook *Earth Science for Christian Schools*, published by Bob Jones University Press, states: "For the Christian, earth science is a study of God's creation. As such, it is subject to God's infallible Word, the Bible. The final authority of the Christian is not man's observation but God's revelation." Yet scientific explanations depend on human observation of natural processes, not on supernatural revelation.

These statements are objectionable from the scientific and religious points of view. Who knows who has the correct interpretation of the Bible? Many Christians accept the theory of evolution, but these statements imply that the only true Christians are those who interpret the Bible in exactly the same way as their authors do. They also imply that the fundamental scientific procedure—human observation—is wrong and useless when it contradicts the creationist interpretation of the Bible. These and many other creationist statements unmask creationism for what it is: not a science, but a narrow-minded religious belief, immune to evidence or potential correction.

Only a Theory

Creationists often insist that since evolution is a "theory," it is only a guess, no better than any other. But in science, a theory is a statement of general principles that explain many facts by means of natural processes. The proposition that the planets revolve around the sun (Copernican theory) explains a great many astronomical facts and also is considered true beyond a reasonable doubt. In the same way, geological examination of rocks demonstrates beyond a reasonable doubt that the earth is extremely old. The theory of evolution explains a tremendous number of biological and paleontological facts, and it, too, is true beyond a reasonable doubt. Nevertheless, all these theories could be altered or replaced if new observations yielded new scientific evidence that contradicted

predictions of these theories. Creationism, on the other hand, is not *even* a theory because its proponents have decided in advance that no amount of evidence will change their beliefs.

Does fairness demand that creationism should be taught alongside evolution? Creationists argue that, "You can't prove that evolution is true (you weren't there, it's just a theory) and you can't prove that creationism is false, so it's only fair to teach both." By this argument, astrology, which is based on supernatural forces, should be taught alongside astronomy. And witch doctors, who use supernatural forces to explain disease, should be taught in our medical schools. This is a mistaken notion of fairness.

The fact is, our students are taught science so they can learn to accurately observe facts and to understand how scientific theories are developed. Bringing in religious creeds and supernatural explanations can only impair their ability to understand how science works. Our children deserve to gain scientific literacy so they can solve the scientific and technological challenges of the 21st century.

It's only fair.

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