



Origins Instruction

Overview

One of the more controversial issues in public schools continues to be over what theories of origin will be taught. The theory of evolution has been taught almost exclusively in schools since the Supreme Court first protected it in 1968. However, many school board policies have become friendlier toward teaching the challenges to and weaknesses of evolutionary theory. There is still strong opposition against actually teaching alternative theories in public school classrooms, such as Intelligent Design, but many policies do not prohibit teaching them.

There are three main theories in the origin-of-life debate: evolution, intelligent design and creation science. According to the Arizona State Science Standards, students are required to “analyze how patterns in the fossil record, nuclear chemistry, geology, molecular biology, and geographical distribution give support to the theory of organic evolution through natural selection over billions of years and the resulting present day biodiversity.”¹ Darwinian evolution is atheistic, as it asserts that life arose and evolved by *unguided and random forces*: Thus, evolution is a philosophy of materialism, which presupposes that natural and physical laws can explain all phenomena, completely dismissing the possibility of supernatural involvement.

Darwinism, Design, and Public Education, edited by Stephen C. Meyer and John Angus Campbell, defines intelligent design as, “the theory that certain features of the physical universe and/or biological systems can be best explained by reference to an intelligent cause (that is, the conscious action of an intelligent agent), rather than an undirected natural process or a material mechanism.”² Intelligent design draws on the natural world for explanations for the formation of life, not necessarily on the Biblical account. Hence, it does not specify any particular designer as the intelligence behind the design that is observed in nature through science.

Creation science is defined by the American Heritage Dictionary as “the effort to provide scientific evidence supporting the account of the creation of the universe related in the Bible.”³ It does make a claim as to the source of the design found in nature – the God of the Bible. Creation science bases its claims on the Biblical account found in Genesis.

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Background

Since 1968, when the United States Supreme Court struck down an Arkansas law prohibiting the teaching of evolution (*Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97), public schools seem to be operating under the mistaken belief that discussion of origin theories other than evolution are forbidden by a “separation of church and state” requirement in the First Amendment.

In *Epperson*, the Court stated, “The First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and non religion.” It also quoted a previous Supreme Court opinion (*Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, 385 U.S. 589), which says that the “First Amendment ‘does not tolerate laws that cast a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom.’”

Unfortunately, evolution has become the de facto orthodoxy of public schools, and no neutrality exists between it and competing theories of the origin of life, such as intelligent design.⁴ By teaching evolution to the exclusion of other theories, public schools clearly favor non-religion over religion.

A June 2007 USA Today/Gallup Poll revealed that 44 percent of Americans have rejected evolution as a theory of origins. The poll also found 66 percent of the public believes that God created people in their present form within the last 10,000 years.⁵ The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life published poll results in August 2005 that 64% of people believe that creation science should be taught with evolution in schools, while 38% said it should be taught instead of evolution.⁶

Arizona Standards and Laws

Clearly, Arizona public school teachers are allowed, and even encouraged, to present all aspects of origin of life theories to students. The Arizona Science Standards, developed by the State Board of Education, provide the framework for the Arizona classroom.⁷ The standard for grades six through eight, for example, has a performance objective of recognizing that “scientific knowledge is subject to change as new information and/or technology challenges prevailing theories.” Using molecular biology’s discovery of irreducibly complex cell structures, which cannot be explained by evolution but can be explained by intelligent design,⁸ is an example of how scientists debate the merits of controversial theories.

The Arizona Science Standards for high school call for students to be able to “describe how scientists continue to investigate and critically analyze aspects of theories,” and to be able to “explain the process by which accepted ideas are challenged or extended by scientific innovation.” Both objectives would be well served by an objective presentation of the current debate over origins.

Thus, the Arizona Science Standards allow for the teaching of alternate theories of origin along side of evolution and encourage the teaching of evolution’s weaknesses. A teacher can teach intelligent design, for example, without violating any standard as long as evolution is taught as well.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 addresses this issue through an attached report sponsored

by former Senator Rick Santorum: “Where topics are taught that may generate controversy (such as biological evolution), the curriculum should help students to understand the full range of scientific views that exist, why such topics may generate controversy, and how scientific discoveries can profoundly affect society.”

Arizona’s parents currently have the right to withdraw their children from public school classes that are hostile to their religion. (A.R.S. 15-102) Since a dogmatic presentation of evolution can challenge the beliefs of many students and their parents, it qualifies as harmful learning material. Parents also have the right to look at the learning materials and curriculum used in science courses to see if objectionable material will be taught to their children.

Other States

The ACLU sued Cobb County, Georgia, schools after the county school board required biology textbooks to bear a sticker stating, “This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully, and critically considered.”⁹ The stickers were ordered removed after a federal judge found that they constituted a state endorsement of religion. In December 2006, the schools gave up the court battle, and agreed not to use similar language on stickers in the future.¹⁰

The ACLU filed a suit against the Dover Area School Board in Dover, Pennsylvania for requiring ninth grade biology teachers to read a statement regarding evolution to their classes. The statement says, “Because Darwin’s Theory is a theory, it is still being tested as new evidence is discovered. The Theory is not a fact. Gaps in the Theory exist for which there is no evidence.” It goes on to say that, “...intelligent design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin’s view.” *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* was decided on December 20, 2005 by Judge John E. Jones III in the Middle Pennsylvania District Court. Judge Jones ruled that merely notifying students about intelligent design theory is an unconstitutional violation of the Establishment Clause.¹¹ While the merits of this decision have been widely criticized,¹² it is not legally binding on other federal or state courts. Even still, evolutionists in Ohio and California have already cited the case in their arguments against teaching intelligent design in schools.¹³

In December 2004, in Grantsburg, Wisconsin, the Grantsburg School District voted to clarify its policy of allowing science teachers to “teach the controversy” surrounding evolution. It adopted a policy stating, “Students are expected to analyze, review and critique scientific explanations, including hypotheses and theories, as to their strengths and weaknesses using scientific evidence and information.”¹⁴

The Kansas state Board of Education voted on November 8, 2005, to change the Kansas Science Standards to allow criticism of evolutionary theory. The Board also expanded the definition of science given in the Standards to include more than a search for only naturalistic explanations of phenomena.¹⁵ In a February 2007 vote, the Board repealed the 2005 Standards, and returned to the previous definition of science.¹⁶

The Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based organization committed to helping schools “teach the

controversy,” by teaching both intelligent design and evolution in science classes, suggests that a different approach needs to be taken when dealing with school boards. They advise a “critical analysis” of Darwinian theory. By not actually including intelligent design in science standards, lawsuits can likely be avoided. Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Minnesota, New Mexico, and local boards in Louisiana and Wisconsin have adopted standards that encourage teaching this critical analysis of Darwinian theory. To date, not one of these has faced a court challenge.¹⁷

¹ Arizona Department of Education. (2005, March 10). Retrieved from <http://www.azed.gov/standards/science/articulated.asp>

² Weyrich, P. M. (2005). Intelligent Design-A Scientific, Academic and Philosophical Controversy. *Discovery Institute*. Retrieved from <http://www.discovery.org/scripts/viewDB/index.php?command=view&id=3076>

³ *The American Heritage Dictionary*. Retrieved from <http://www.answers.com/topic/creationism-1?cat=entertainment>

⁴ Behe, M. (1996). *Darwin's Black Box*. New York: Touchstone Rockefeller Center.

⁵ *USA Today*. Retrieved January 16, 2008, from http://www.usatoday.com/news/politics/2007-06-07-evolution-poll-results_n.htm

⁶ *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*. (2006). Retrieved from <http://pewforum.org>

⁷ Arizona Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.azed.gov/standards/science/articulated.asp>

⁸ Behe, M. (1996). *Darwin's Black Box*. New York: Touchstone Rockefeller Center.

⁹ Textbook Warning Draws Lawsuit in Ga. (2004, November 8). *USA Today*, p. 3A.

¹⁰ Gross, D. (2006, December 19). *CBS News*. Retrieved January 16, 2008, from <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/12/19/ap/national/mainD8M450080.shtml>

¹¹ Staff. (2005, December 20). Dover Intelligent Design Decision Criticized as a Futile Attempt to Censor Science Education [Article]. Message posted to Discovery Institute

¹² Discovery Institute Press. (2005, December 20). Traipsing Into Evolution, Intelligent Design and the Kitzmiller v. Dover Decision. *Discovery Institute Press Press Release*.

¹³ Cooper, S., & Brown Iii, L. G. (2006). A Textbook Case of Judicial Activism. *Discovery Institute*. Retrieved August 22, 2006, from

<http://www.discovery.org/scripts/viewDB/index.php?command=view&id=3706&program=DI%20Main%20Page%20-%20News&callingPage=discoMainPage>

¹⁴ Wisconsin Board Revises Policy on Teaching Creationism. (2004, December 8). *Duluth News Tribune*. Retrieved from www.duluthsuperior.com/mld/duluthsuperior/news/politics/10363621.htm

¹⁵ Kansas Education Board Downplays Evolution. (2005, November 8). *MSNBC.com*.

¹⁶ Evolution of Kansas science standards continues as Darwin's theories regain prominence. (2007, February 13). *International Herald Tribune*. Retrieved January 16, 2008, from

<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/02/13/america/NA-GEN-US-Kansas-Evolution-History.php>

¹⁷ Bergin, M. (2007, July 21). Teach the Controversy. *World*, 13-14.