

# Creation

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

As we return to reading the Biblical story of creation, the battle over what should be taught in American schools rages on. According to The Washington Post, George Bush wants school science classes to teach Intelligent Design as an alternative to Darwinian or neo-Darwinian evolution. He said:

“Both sides ought to be properly taught . . . so people can understand what the debate is about. . . Part of education is to expose people to different schools of thought. . . . You’re asking me whether or not people ought to be exposed to different ideas, and the answer is yes.”

The trouble is that ID isn’t an alternative. It’s comparing apples to codswallop!

Science involves examining the world we live in experimentally. Usually you come up with a theory and then you test it. If the results come out as expected you confirm your theory. If not, you scrap it and try again. Many theories have appeared to work reasonably well until another theory emerged that explained things even better. So Isaac Newton’s view of the world and gravity was the best in its time, but years later Einstein’s proved much more accurate.

Science has a track record of achievements in discovering things that were always there but we humans hadn’t learnt how to understand them or harness them, like bacteria or electricity. In ancient days they called these things “sprites” or “devils” or in Jewish literature “sheydim” (spirits) or “ruach raah” (evil air). Now we understand a little more, and look at what has been achieved as a result for our modern world, where medicine, technology and biochemistry have produced unimaginable benefits and advances.

None of this would have been possible had we relied only on Holy Texts as the Catholic Church did in trying to refute Galileo or as Jewish, Christian and Muslim Fundamentalists do in trying to refute Darwin. All of science is based on trial and error and theories that are often no more than the basis of further experiments and debate.

Scientists will argue about how old the universe is and about its origins. In science classes you will teach those theories that can be shown to have some experimental basis, even if there is still much to be learnt, gaps to be filled in and possibly totally contradictory evidence to be found. Honest teaching will always provide caveats and conditions and limitations, and good school teachers will always try to present different points of view. I agree too often teachers allow their own scientific fundamentalist dogmas to dictate the curriculum so there is certainly room to look at how science is

taught. But that's altogether a different issue.

Regardless, you are not going to teach in science a theory which says that science is wrong without any evidence. If you teach reproduction in biology you are not going to go in to the moral laws of whether to use contraception or not, because then, in an open multi-cultural society you'll have to teach Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Tao and, arguably, Humanist variations too. Or if you explain how to do a caesarean operation you are not going to go into the moral issues of abortion. That is for an ethics class or a religion class. And once again I agree a good curriculum will have both.

Science does bear a lot of the blame for this campaign. In Britain medical experts on child death have been shown recently to have been catastrophically wrong and struck off as a result. Two recent books have just appeared about medical experts in the USA responsible for horrendous crimes in performing lobotomies and other procedures on mental patients that were based on crazy theories (*Madhouse: A tragic tale of Megalomania and Modern Medicine* and *The Lobotomist: A Maverick Medical Genius and His Tragic Quest to Rid the World of Mental Illness*). Scientists have lot to answer for.

It is incumbent on a good science teacher to highlight the problems, deficiencies and limitations of the evolution theories. I would agree to a law that insists that science teachers or textbooks actually declare that theories are theories, in case they do not already. However what can be said is that a great deal of evolutionary work is based on empirical evidence and examples of how species evolve, even though, as we know, there are lots of missing links, and at this stage we only have constantly changing theories to cover the gaps.

But belief in Intelligent Design (or God) has no experiments to support it whatsoever. It only says creation cannot be explained any other way, but it doesn't bring evidence as to how it actually happened or whether it was what we call God or little men from space who did it. The only "evidence" that Intelligent Creationists have is the old and irrelevant chestnut about finding a clock in the prairie and assuming it got there by accident!

Religion occupies the regions of faith not scientific fact. There are some holy men, even in our religion, who still insist you can prove God's existence. Well good luck to them. No philosopher I know worth his salt would take those claims very seriously.

To insist on teaching religion as science is dishonest. It is animated by antagonism to Western liberal values, which I can sympathize with up to a point, but I do not agree that this is the way to combat them. Science does not give us a moral framework for living, which is precisely why so many turn to fundamentalist religion to give them the certainties honest science cannot.

It is, indeed, the role of religion to offer something extra to the role of government legislation, whose function it is to protect us from harming each other and create a free and honest climate in which individuality and interaction of all sorts can flourish. To do this effectively one needs

honesty. All generalizations are dishonest. To say that all of Western Society is corrupt or all scientists are anti religious is as patently rubbish as to say that all religion is good.

The only safeguard of freedom is indeed the open exchange of different ideas. But science lessons are for teaching science not religion. I wouldn't want a rabbi learned in Gemara or a priest with no science training to teach me biology, any more than I'd want him to perform brain surgery on me.

So let's keep teaching about God and science separate. They both have essential things to say, but once religious thought-police start insisting that they are right and everything else is wrong, or that they have a right to stick their noses where their noses do not belong, then we bring into our lives the very Mullahs that George Bush professes to despise, or the very Christian Crusaders that the Mullahs detest.

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