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Letters

Creationism Series Continues To Draw Response

Dear Editor:

Randy Moore's factual comparison of the movie *Inherit the Wind* and the "real trial" brings out some interesting differences. The picture he paints of William Jennings Bryan, however, differs significantly from the one Clarence Darrow describes in his 1932 autobiography *Clarence Darrow: The Story of My Life*.

I've always been impressed by the similarity of newsreel footage and the movie. Many points in Darrow's description are also very similar to the movie. Darrow provides a very readable account of Bryan's role in trying to stop the teaching of evolution. His autobiography also explains why he is an agnostic. He raises basic questions that make one think about the usefulness of simple answers to difficult questions. Creationists are much easier to deal with if one shows how little help they offer to people who want to think about religious questions. The great majority of traditional religious groups oppose them. For these reasons, creationists generally will not permit the subject of religion to enter the debate. They often play the role of reasonable nice guy in conflict with angry scientists. Was Bryan one of the originators of that role?

If one of our goals as teachers is to develop critical thinking, we should encourage investigation of religious questioning by our students. Many of the biological and religious questions are the same, e.g. where did we come from, what is time, etc. Values questions overlap many disciplines and can be raised by social science and humanities teachers as well. *Inherit the Wind* demonstrates that religious values which are produced by intimidation are not comforting or enlightening. One would think that any help we can give our students in dealing with the big questions we are all perplexed by would be welcomed by them. We can probably communicate with them better about these questions than we can about biology. Teaching is as much about questions as it is about answers.

Don Igelsrud
Calgary, Alberta

Categorization of Evolution Meanings Is Proposed

Dear Editor:

It is important that we understand "why students think something [educators] are teaching is inaccurate." (Brian J. Alters, "What is Creationism," February *ABT*, p. 103). The article, an attempt to analyze opposition to evolution by classifying and characterizing Christian thought, was certainly helpful in this regard. However, one reason why students say they think evolution is not true is because there is confusion about what evolution is. Part of that confusion is because the word, *evolution*, means several things.

I submit a categorization of some of these meanings, in the forlorn hope that such a scheme, or one like it, will be adopted, and different words will be used for different meanings:

1. *natural selection*—a mechanism which makes some types of evolution possible.

2. *secular change*—descendants of some organism vary slightly from the parent population, due to a selective process. (Example—bacterial resistance to antibiotics.)
3. *speciation*—descendants of some organism vary, due to a selective process, sufficiently from the parent population, or two or more descendant populations vary sufficiently from each other, that they are classified as belonging to different species, or genera, or families.
4. *phylogeny*—as speciation, but the populations are sufficiently different to be classified as belonging to different orders, classes or phyla (Divisions, in plants).
5. *origin of life*—the first living things arose by *purposeless and undirected processes* from nonliving matter. Although some sort of natural selection might have been involved in bringing this about, it is not certain that there was any such selection, or, if there was, that it was by the same sort of mechanisms that might have been responsible for, say, speciation.
6. *origin of everything*—the universe exists as a result of *purposeless and undirected processes*.

There are, of course, Christians (and others) who believe that all or most of the types of evolution listed above did not happen. As Alters pointed out, there are also many who don't reject all of these types of evolution.

Why, then, is "people's acceptance or rejection of evolution generally [reported at] close to a 50% rejection rate?" (Alters, p. 103). One reason is exactly that all six definitions are lumped together as one phenomenon, described as evolution, or *Darwinism*.

Unfortunately, lumping all of the categories together as if they were one phenomenon makes clear communication difficult or impossible. Christians, scientists, educa-

tors and reporters have all done this. Usually they do it because they don't know better, or haven't thought about it. Sometimes, it appears that lumping all these phenomena together as one has been a deliberate attempt to deceive.

Alters says that *Christianity Today* selected *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, by Michael Behe (New York: Free Press: the use of "Darwin's" in the title is an example of unfortunate lumping) as its book of the year for 1997, and wonders why the book of the year was not about a subject such as "... how to get to Heaven, how to live a better Christian life, or about witnessing. . . ." (p. 103). If evolution, encompassing all of the meanings listed above, is taken as a fact of science, then Christianity has a serious problem with that science. *If the universe came about solely by natural processes, undesigned and unguided by any supernatural being or beings, then either God (or gods) is not very important, and can be ignored, or there is no such God (or gods). Furthermore, the claim that the universe arose in that way is not a falsifiable (or verifiable) scientific claim, but a belief statement.* If the usual presentation of evolution claims that the universe, and life, came about by solely natural processes, it is no wonder that Christians are not comfortable with the ideas of evolution, or that a book criticizing that claim was selected as book of the year by a Christian magazine.

Actually, Behe has no quarrel with much of the usual presentation of evolution:

... I have no reason to doubt that the universe is the billions of years old that physicists say it is. Further, I find the idea of common descent ... fairly convincing, and have no particular reason to doubt it. (p. 5)

What he does quarrel with, and the fundamental reason that many Christians have problems with evolution as too often presented, is

the claim that the initial conditions, and all the processes, that led to the present state of living things were entirely undirected and unguided. Behe's thesis is that some of the biochemical mechanisms that make life possible are so complex, and portions of them are so interrelated, that chance, alone, could not have brought all of them into existence. He believes that some of them were *designed*. Most Christians believe in a designer, and reject paradigms that exclude one, or seem to.

Martin LaBar
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Reactions to Creationism Series Vary

Dear Editor:

It may be argued that the creationists are taking a new course in their activities; they are now

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