

RESPONSE TO BOOK REVIEW

Book: *The Triumph of Evolution and the Failure of Creationism* by Niles Eldredge.

In the book review in *The Ohio Journal of Science*, Volume 101, No. 3/4, June/September, 2001, regarding *The Triumph of Evolution and the Failure of Creationism*, S. Edinger agrees that we should avoid a "culture war." He then says, "The problem is how?" I will offer a suggestion.

I accept evolution as a "given," proven beyond all doubt. Bacteria are evolving resistance faster than we are making new antibiotics. The matter of "creation" (in my view) is an unrelated issue. Evolution is changing the "stuff" after it is present. Creation is explaining where the "stuff" came from in the first place. I do not think that question has been resolved by science. Big Bang? Several Big Bangs? Energy can become matter ($e = mc^2$), but if matter came from energy, where did the energy come from? This question (to my knowledge) is unanswered and perhaps will remain so.

Science could make the first gesture toward avoiding a "culture war" by conceding that until we do, perhaps it is a proper topic for religion. Science could even agree to include in the school curriculum a statement that the origin of the "stuff" is, at present, beyond the understanding of science. Creation would then be a proper topic for religion, which each religion could present in any manner desired. Since different religions might have different and perhaps conflicting views, it would be properly taught in the various religious facilities rather than part of science education.

I am not so politically naïve as to expect this approach to be applauded by both camps. But it might be a start.

Respectfully,

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Dr. Davidson's attempt to find a peaceful accord between science and religion on the topic of the origin of life and the universe is well meaning, but misses the point and makes one classic error. It appears to suggest where we lack scientific knowledge we should rely on God to "fill in the gaps." So, for example, Dr. Davidson says, "Science could even agree to include in the school curriculum a statement that the origin of the 'stuff' [matter and energy] is, at present, beyond the understanding of science. Creation would then be a proper topic for religion, which each religion could present in any manner desired." What happens to religion when scientists someday have a scientific explanation on how matter and energy came into existence? The question is not strictly rhetorical since particle physicists, cosmologists, and other scientists inch a little closer to explaining the origin of matter each year. In the year where they finally succeed do we give up our belief in God or gods? A theology based on human ignorance is a theology that shrinks each year!

The solution, as has been proposed by others, is to recognize that science consist of investigating the natural, observable universe, and explaining how it operates (e.g., constructing theories). Religion consists of personal beliefs and feelings that are not open to scientific investigation. These beliefs include beliefs about the purpose of life, the meaning of death, morals to live by, and many other things of great importance to humans, but that are *not* part of science or open to scientific investigation, thank goodness! The thoughts, feelings, writings, and beliefs about life, death, how to live, and their meanings are not going to disappear if physicists discover how matter came into existence, or if biologists and biochemists discover how living things arose from non-living chemicals (commonly called biogenesis). With hard work and a little luck we will probably discover these things, and after we do we will still be asking, "Why am I here? What is the meaning of my life?" And we will still be turning to philosophy and religions to seek personal answers to those questions, questions which are important to all of us but which fall outside the realm of science. Recognizing the separate realms of science and religion is a big step toward avoiding a "culture war."

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