

Random Walking

Creationism and the *Wall Street Journal*

The dispute between evolution and creationism erupted into the correspondence column of the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) on December 15, 1993. WSJ had published, December 6, an article by Stephen Meyer headed "A Scopes Trial for the 90s." The article carried a boxed headline "DANGER, Indoctrination." Meyer teaches history and philosophy of science at Whitworth College in Spokane, Washington. His article dealt with the woes of Dr. Dean Kenyon, a professor at San Francisco State University, who had been told by the head of his department, John Hafernik, to stop teaching biblical creationism in his elementary course, Biology 337. According to Meyer, Kenyon's rejoinder was that he discussed "problems with the dominant view and that some biologists see evidence of intelligent design." More perceptive than most of the faculty, the students had protested that Kenyon's teachings were unscientific.

Kenyon is an unusual, although not a unique case, of a scientist who heard the call of creationism. He is unusual in that he had an excellent series of scientific publications until 1977. He has published, for example, in *Journal of Molecular Evolution* (6:253–270, 1975 and 7:245–251, 1976). His protagonists point to his earlier scientific record, but this is out of date; he has not published in a peer-reviewed journal for 16 years. In 1992, he was invited to speak on his chosen topic of Empirical Indications of Intelligent Design in the Origin of Life before the local chapter of the American Chemical Society, to the astonishment of some of its members, who were frankly critical in *The Vortex*, the chapter's publication. Kenyon responded to them in its pages, and actually includes his response in his list of publications! Kenyon is co-author of a creationist book *Of Pandas and People*, which misrepresents the evolution of cytochrome *c*, and says "life is like a manufactured object, the result of intelligent shaping of matter."

The issue of "academic freedom" was raised on Kenyon's behalf. The predominantly nonscientific faculty at SFSU rallied in a vote of 25 to 8 to Kenyon's support. *Science* (December 24, 1993) says that all but one of Kenyon's defenders are nonscientists.

On December 15, 1993, WSJ published 35 column inches of correspondence on the Kenyon issue.

Eugenie Scott, William Thwaites, and I wrote letters opposing the teaching of religion in science classes. Phillip Johnson, the Berkeley criminal lawyer who opposes evolution without understanding it, praised Meyer and Kenyon. He also criticized the National Academy of Sciences for its negative attitude toward "something other than purposeless material processes." Forrest Mims (*Journal of Molecular Evolution* 33:1, 1991; 34:1, 1992) again recited his version of mistreatment by *Scientific American*, which was scarcely relevant.

The concept of "intelligent design" is incompatible with science, because intelligent design can be pulled out of the hat any time a factual answer is not available. There are many observations and phenomena for which science does not have the explanations. The search for these is part of the function of science, and miracles are excluded as explanations. Aristotle said that "no-one can perceive the truth wholly, nor miss it entirely. But each can add a little to our knowledge of nature." The supporters of Kenyon at SFSU who "determined that a clear breach of academic freedom had occurred" (Meyer loc. cit.) must belong to C. P. Snow's "other culture" of nonscientists. The breach is not of academic freedom, but of the principle of excluding miracles as explanations for natural phenomena in teaching science to undergraduates. Kenyon has complete academic freedom to publish his views where they will find an outlet. "Bible Science Newsletter" may be receptive.

Wall Street Journal published another "DANGER indoctrination" article on December 22, 1993. This was by George Marsden, who some years ago called evolution "antisupernaturalistic mythology" (*Nature* 305:571, 1983). Marsden is a professor of history at the University of Notre Dame. Marsden proposes that "institutions that claim to serve the whole public and to be internally diverse should be challenged to apply the principle of diversity by openly allowing responsible religious perspectives in classrooms," but he doesn't say *which* classrooms, and this is what the argument is all about.

Thomas H. Jukes
Associate Editor