

Establishing Academic Freedom As an Important Part of Science Education

Introduction

One of the great issues of our day is how we should teach science to the next generation of public school students. There really should be no question about the content of such science and science-related topics as physics, chemistry, and mathematics, since there seems to be little reason to try to bring various competing ideologies and worldviews into such matters as the study of gravity and the chemical table of elements. A very extensive study of the biological sciences could also be done based on direct observation and experimentation, using only the classical scientific method, without any philosophical overlays.

However, in this area of the biological sciences, there is great controversy as to the assumptions and philosophies to be applied when searching for greater meanings and patterns beyond the directly observable facts. Much of what we would like to know about biological topics happened in the distant past, and today we have only relatively indirect methods of assessing, analyzing, and ordering that long history.

One group of biological researchers has traditionally assumed that a supernatural being had some hand in how our current 10 million species came into being. Other groups are adamant that there is no God, and therefore all of biology must have developed from random chemical processes.

Obviously, neither group can prove either that there is a God who took such actions, or that there is not a God who took such actions, but only chemicals, so we are left to decide for ourselves how life began.

Biological science could certainly be studied without taking into account whether there is a God or there is not a God, but apparently very few can disentangle themselves from that issue and just proceed using the facts before them. Each side has created its own unprovable creation myths, and may continually try to impose on others those assumptions during any interpretations of historical biological information.

The pendulum of prevailing assumptions has moved from one side to the other in recent decades, and the atheist interpretation of biological science has received federal court approval. However, that seems premature. It is far more sensible to assume for education purposes that we have two competing philosophies and two competing religions, and neither should receive the imprimatur of the federal government along with the full budgetary resources of government.

The fairest point of balance, and a possible truce in this conflict, is to emphasize academic freedom processes which can examine the facts without necessarily accepting the dogma promulgated by either side of this essentially religious dispute. The atheist side of the debate has cleverly been able to successfully argue that they are not a religion and therefore are not subject to the establishment clause of the First Amendment. However, there are many indications that they should be treated as any other worldview and religion as far as government policy is concerned.

In many cases, atheists have been recognized as a religion for purposes of the "free exercise" clause of the First Amendment.* It is rather inconsistent for them to accept these benefits, while also claiming to not be a religion for purposes of the establishment clause. It is time that this dual interpretation and ambiguity be resolved in favor of treating atheists as members of a unique worldview and value system.

The existing state laws which emphasize academic freedom seem like the perfect way to enhance the science education of students in Utah. It should be noted that, although there was a flurry of court cases striking down state laws which attempted to bring in various forms of creationism as a check on the absolutist claims of the atheism-based science texts, the newer academic freedom statutes of Louisiana

and Tennessee have remained completely unchallenged in the courts since Louisiana's first statute in 2001. Attempts have been made to reverse those laws in the normal political process in the legislatures using revocation, but the federal courts have not been brought into the question, apparently indicating that the forces for atheism-based presentations of biology believe they would lose in the federal court system as things stand today, and so have avoided any more court challenges. This situation requires every state to battle through that process one at a time. Utah should also take this fairly simple route to improve science education.

Supposedly, the most honest and effective way to handle science is to remain agnostic as to whether there is a God or not, and just accumulate and review the evidence. However, today's scientists and discussions about science education are almost all strongly polarized.

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footnote:

*Courts and government agencies have recognized atheism as being a religion in its own right, including granting prison inmates the right to form religious study groups as members of other religions are commonly allowed to do, recognition of the need to supply military chaplains to atheists in the Army, and various articles arguing that conscientious objectors who are atheists should receive the same consideration as those who are members of traditional faiths.

We have other situations where atheists have combined forces to promote their beliefs by putting up billboards during the Christmas season denying that there is a God, or organizing to contest Christmas manger scenes on public property, etc. In Tennessee, atheists have requested the opportunity to place books describing their beliefs in state-owned cabins in state parks along with the ubiquitous Gideon Bible. There are probably many more cases of atheists acting as other religious organizations might do, but this is a useful sampling.

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Christianity is pro-freedom and therefore pro-science

It is clear to most people who study history, that Christianity has been a major force in promoting freedom in societies, and the United States, founded on Judeo-Christian principles, and currently the most Christian country of all, has probably done more than any country in the history of the world to promote freedom for itself and other countries. There are other countries which currently do as well or better on issues of economic freedom, but none have the overall levels of freedom that the United States enjoys. Unfortunately, the overall levels of freedom within the United States seem to be declining.

This worldwide positive relationship between freedom and good science should be obvious to atheists, but perhaps we can say in general that atheists, certainly those atheists dealing with science education, have little knowledge of or interest in the legal and social history of our country, or any country, for that matter. They are not likely to realize that the only places in the world that have enough freedom to allow good science to be developed is in the West, as in the United Kingdom and the United States, where freedom is taken as a very important issue. It is only where scientists have freedom to explore ideas that progress can be made. Even at that, in the United States there are many forces, especially today, that are working hard to thwart the advance of science, unless it follows a very specific path advantageous to specific interest groups.

Many atheists are anti-freedom and anti-science

Atheistic evolutionists are generally against academic freedom. While carefully avoiding perfect clarity of meaning, the atheists in essence say that "It hurts our cause if you accurately teach the scientific method along with other science topics." How can you be for the teaching of good science, and against teaching the scientific method? That is irrational. How can that be a good way to start an argument for atheistic philosophies to have complete control of science education in the public schools?

Only one in 16 of the textbooks submitted to the state of Texas for consideration for use in its schools made any serious attempt to present the actual state of current biological science on important points,

including pointing out any controversies, ambiguities, or holes in the data. The other books just presented all aspects of biological science as being completely and thoroughly settled, even though that is far from correct, as the practitioners would readily admit among themselves.

It may seem strange for a group of science educators to be against academic freedom, but many science educators wish to present their proposed principles of biological evolution as absolute fact which must be learned by students as though they were part of a religious catechism. In this way, the evolutionists are committing exactly the same educational fallacy concerning dogma which they claim has been committed by creationists in the past.

Many areas of science are constantly changing as new experiments reveal new facts, and so the important thing for a serious science student to learn is the scientific method itself by which hypotheses are continually generated and tested, and experiments evaluated, as the boundaries of known science are pushed wider and wider.

It is extremely inconsistent to claim to want to develop a generation of better science students, while completely rejecting the scientific method they need to become successful as scientists. Most of the textbooks used in biological science present the various elements of the theory of evolution as absolute fact rather than theories which need to be continually re-examined and retested as our knowledge of biological science expands its scope.

As an example, the claim is typically made that the fossil record completely supports the theory of evolution because a very large number of the transitional forms have been found. However, the actual data shows that very few potential transitional forms have been identified, and none are considered correct beyond dispute. A statistical survey of the work of paleontologists and science museums shows that these proposed transitional forms are still very rare. This, of course, does not prove that there never were any transitional forms, but it is not good science to assert that there is experimental data for a point, and then not be able to supply that data. Students should understand the exact level of data which scientific theorists are using to support their theory. If more data is needed to fully support some portion of a theory, then plans ought to be made to seek out that data, not merely incorrectly assert that it already has been found. (For example, see *Evolution: The Grand Experiment*.)

Someone might argue that children in public schools and even non-science majors in universities don't have time to learn the scientific method by asking questions about existing data, and then seeking out more data through experimentation and evaluating the results. However, if students view biological science as just another set of facts to be memorized and regurgitated at the right time, they will never become productive scientists, and will not even understand the scientific process which affects their world and their society so much.

The Dover Pennsylvania School Board case

The Dover Pennsylvania case shows the extremes to which the advocates of atheistic evolution are willing to go to control the dialogue about science in the public schools. At issue in the case was the directed five-minute reading once during the school year of a few sentences which suggested that the theory of evolution had not been exhaustively proven, and suggesting that there were other ways to view the biological data and the origins of life. The title of a book was mentioned which might be used for individual readings outside the classroom. This tiny cautionary comment was taken to be the equivalent of the state of Pennsylvania, in the form of its local school board, establishing a complete state religion. I view this as a completely hysterical overreaction to the simple statement that there are other possible legitimate views about the origins of life. I also take this to be an extreme case of resistance to even the tiniest fragment of academic freedom concerning issues of biological science. This level of extremism and fanaticism about any particular philosophical viewpoint should not find a place in the public schools, regardless of the contents of those views.

The First Amendment contains two important clauses, the "free exercise" clause and the "establishment" clause. The free exercise clause is generally taken to mean that anyone can believe and practice any

religion they wish to at any time, as long as there is no damage to anyone else. The establishment clause means that the federal government cannot require any particular religion to be supported by tax monies.

In the Dover case we have this bizarre situation where the evolutionists wish to use the establishment clause as an absolute bar to the slightest whispers of any free exercise words or activities by students and teachers. One might imagine that a strict application of the Dover rule could mean that if a student inadvertently mentioned the name of God or creation during a biology class, they would need to be immediately expelled. A teacher doing so might expect to be immediately fired. Such a rigid police state mentality should not be part of our public school system.

Criminalizing even the slightest mention of opposing viewpoints is certainly going much too far. The extra-constitutional idea of "a wall of separation" between church and state, which the evolutionists always mention and strongly support, should not be allowed to go so far as to become a war between church and state. That was never intended and should not be allowed today.

This using of one portion of the First Amendment, the establishment clause, to absolutely crush out another portion of the First Amendment, the all-important "free exercise" clause, at least during science classes and discussion, is such an extreme action, and so inconsistent with our general freedom culture, that it ought to be rejected. What we really have is the federal court system trying to take control of a state education system and dictating what can and cannot be taught and discussed there. That is a huge overreach of federal power in our Republic, and for that reason alone it ought to be rejected. (It is not even a valid interpretation of our Constitution, since states have in the past supported their own state religion, and could do so again if they chose. The federal imposition of an atheist viewpoint in teaching biological science in state schools is an extreme overstepping of federal powers on several levels.)

Surely, good science, buttressed by generous amounts of testable evidence, ought to easily overcome any contrasting viewpoint which can produce no such evidence. The science educators ought to proceed on that track, and be satisfied with the opportunity to present the truth, rather than try to use the courts to silence all competing viewpoints. As a nation, we ought to fear those efforts at thought control as being much more potentially damaging to our open and scientifically successful society than any controversy about a specific set of scientific results.

Atheism is a religion

In spite of the efforts of atheists to avoid being categorized as a religion for all legal purposes, it appears to be only a matter of time until that categorization becomes official. For general constitutional accuracy and social fairness, it ought to happen soon.

Simply defining atheism as a strong belief that there is no God, and adopting all the natural consequences of that belief, is one way to make it clearly a religion. It is true that there are many cases where people are agnostic or simply cannot be bothered to worry about the question of whether there is a God or not, but when they cross over to become militant atheists who proselytize for their faith, especially in attacking Christian beliefs, often joining together in groups to pool their resources to do so, as numerous atheists groups do in the United States, then it becomes absurd to define their all-consuming materialist worldview as anything but a religion, since it fulfills all the social purposes of any other religion. It becomes especially egregious when their "no religion" status allows them to have sweeping powers in defining the role and the curriculum of public schools, including having the entire school budgets of all the states and the federal government devoted to teaching and promulgating their philosophy and religion.

It is philosophically conceivable that an organization could promote legitimate neutrality in the public schools on the issue of philosophies and religions as they might relate to science, but militant atheists should definitely not be considered a neutral force, regardless of any of their self-serving protestations otherwise. They fully realize the vast powers they have acquired illegitimately through the foolishness and intentional misbehavior of some of the courts, and they are quite willing to continue to try to play philosophical games with definitions to maintain their governmental powers if people and courts will allow it.

The Internet article by Daniel Smartt, "Atheism: A religion," published 4 May 2010, does a nice job of analyzing the question. He basically paraphrases the work of Ninian Smart in his 1996 book, *Dimensions of the sacred: an anatomy of the world's beliefs* (HarperCollins, London). Wikipedia tells us that "Roderick Ninian Smart was a Scottish writer and university educator. He was a pioneer in the field of secular religious studies."

A better way to determine whether a worldview is a religion is to look for certain characteristics that religions have in common. The framework set forth by Ninian Smart,⁶ commonly known as the *Seven Dimensions of Religion*, is widely accepted by anthropologists and researchers of religion as broadly covering the various aspects of religion, without focusing on things unique to specific religions.

The seven dimensions proposed by Smart are *narrative, experiential, social, ethical, doctrinal, ritual* and *material*. Not every religion has every dimension, nor are they all equally important within an individual religion. Smart even argues that the "secularisation" of western society is actually a shift of focus from the doctrinal and ritual to the experiential.
<http://creation.com/atheism-a-religion>, accessed 6/1/2013.

Some links from that article are of interest here: Michael Ruse, an anti-creationist philosopher, admitted in a published article that evolution is a religion. For a brief quote from the article, see <http://creation.com/michael-ruse-evolution-is-a-religion>, and see quote below. For the entire article, see <http://www.omniology.com/HowEvolutionBecameReligion.html>. For the book see Smart, N., 1996. *Dimensions of the sacred: an anatomy of the world's beliefs*. HarperCollins, London.

Legal analysis

Separately I have listed two law review articles by Casey Luskin on the legal issues of teaching evolution in a setting that promotes academic freedom and the scientific method.

With the exception noted below, I have found no competing articles written by militant atheists and evolutionists on the issue of constitutional law and academic freedom in the public schools. That is not to

say there are not any such articles, merely that I have not located any. If it is true that there are no respected articles on this topic by atheistic evolutionists, we might take that as evidence that their legal logic would be found faulty on its face by legally trained peer reviewers who are not themselves militant atheists. Presumably, the study of law is mostly an objective process, and anyone composing such an article would be expected to be clear in all meanings, interpretations, and references to authorities.

The pro-atheism article, Sara S. Ruff, "Nonreligion, Neutrality, And the Seventh Circuit's Mistake", May 2007, is a somewhat amusing effort to defend atheism's current "non-religion" status, the means by which it has tricked various (obviously willing) courts into giving atheist philosophies vast governmental powers, especially in the public school system. The author's "legal" argument consists mostly of repeating the mantra that "atheism is not a religion," assuming the main point she wishes to make, without any serious analysis. This practice of assuming the point they wish to make, this circular reasoning, is also one of the main rhetorical devices of the atheistic evolutionists in their exposition of biological principles. The article cited above which actually analyzes the question of atheism as a religion reached quite a different conclusion. See http://works.bepress.com/sara_ruff/1/

She might more accurately have entitled her article "The Logic for Retaining Atheism as the Unacknowledged Established Religion of the Federal Government." The atheists have acquired an almost unimaginably large windfall of trillions of dollars in state and federal education funds over a 50-year period to further their agenda of proselytizing to the K-12 education establishment of the entire nation through the avenue of science education. Remarkably, it appears that not everyone in the United States is aware of this grand takeover, this coup they have accomplished, and the atheists can only hope that a majority of people will stay unaware of the true state of things. Therefore, those cognoscenti who understand these things must find a way to support the current situation without inadvertently giving away the truth by saying too much about it. Obviously, if enough people acknowledge that the federal government has established atheism as its official government religion, then the establishment clause of the First Amendment requires that process immediately stop. All militant atheists must therefore do all in their power to avoid any changes to their legal standing.

In her article she claims that atheists don't need any protection under the "free exercise" clause (since they never exercise their religion or belief system in any way, such as by putting up anti-Christian billboards?), but only the protection of the "establishment" clause, which she interprets as requiring a legal neutrality between religion and non-religion. However, that seems extremely simplistic. How can you tell if you are being neutral or not, if you cannot even define the entities on the opposing ends of the spectrum?

If the atheists merely say that they have no definition of themselves except when they say "Whatever all those other guys are, who are clearly religious, we are not," that doesn't really solve the problem. It seems unlikely that any particular atheist is in exact, 100% rebellion against every tenet of some particular Christian religion, or all of them together. And who even knows what all those highly diverse tenets might be at any one moment? As soon as you go down that path, there is a need to have a definition for whatever this entity of atheism is, not just what it is not or what it might be the opposite of. Nothing in life is that simple and simplified, with one always being the exact opposite of the other. There is always a great deal more nuance than that.

She claims that atheism absolutely does not define any particular morality. It may indeed be true that every atheist has a different morality than every other, but I think it would be seriously wrong to say that none of them have any morality at all derived from, or related to, their strong belief that there is no God. We have atheists who work very hard and write books concerning how atheists should derive their morals and behavior from the lower animals, including apes and groundhogs. We have Richard Dawkins who claims that our most basic moral judgments are made for us by our "selfish genes." Evolution itself has a whole set of moral assumptions and requirements for the success of the principles of "descent with modification" and "survival of the fittest."

Here are some of the general moral positions which atheistic evolutionists naturally accept as part of their extreme materialist worldview or religion, and some common-sense rejoinders, as those proposed general biological principles relate to humans:

Every organism has as many descendants as it can. That's what Darwinian Theory holds.

But do you know *anyone* who has as many descendants as he could?

In every species, child mortality—that is, the proportion live births which die before reproductive age—is extremely high. How many friends do you know who have children? How many have died?

The more privileged people are the more prolific: if one class in a society is less exposed than another to the misery due to food-shortage, disease, and war, then the members of the more fortunate class will have (on average) more children than the members of the other class. Which comes closer to the truth, this Darwinian chestnut or the old song "The rich get richer and the poor get children"?

Any variations in the least degree injurious to their possessors in the struggle for life will be rigidly destroyed by the process of natural selection. Start with the letter "A": Abortion, fondness for Alcohol, Altruism. Are any of these "variations" being "rigidly destroyed"?

[This quotation comes from the back page of a book by David Stove, *Darwinian Fairytales: Selfish Genes, Errors of Heredity, and Other Fables of Evolution*].

At least one atheist I spoke with reached the logical conclusion that his morality should be at least be based on the criminal and other statutes of his state of residence. That is rational, because otherwise he might very well end up in jail or have his possessions or even his life taken from him. At least he did not claim to have rejected all law from any source. Of course, a large number of state statutes, especially the criminal ones, are based on the Judeo-Christian culture including the Ten Commandments, so it is hard to really separate oneself from any kind of religion-based morality.

And of course, the worst kind of morality, is to have no morality at all. As the Russian writer famously said, "If there is no God, then all things are permitted." As I see it, someone who declares himself an atheist could immediately have a very large problem in his community, unless he also quickly defines the details of his new personal morality and makes it public. If declaring oneself an atheist means that he no longer feels responsible to obey any laws or traditions, then everyone else should logically treat him as a great threat to the community, as he may have just given himself permission to lie, cheat, steal, murder, molest children, originate child pornography, etc. He may have just declared himself an outlaw, and in some circumstances a vigilante spirit of self-protection could lead a society to drive him off or kill him. It may be only because of the great tolerance and friendliness of his neighbors, who are probably Christian, that he even gets to stay around after making such potentially antisocial statements.

Even among atheists, a person declaring that he will be bound by no laws or traditions, perhaps implying that "it is every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost," could cause himself a great deal of trouble. This could be taken as a declaration of war of one man against all others. Even thieves and mafia members have expected rules of behavior.

New general challenges to atheistic evolution

There are some interesting new and general challenges arising to the most basic assumptions and assertions of evolutionary theory. Two of these charges come from men who have studied evolutionary biology extensively, and have come to the conclusion that the orthodox teachings of evolutionary science are simply wrong. Medical Dr. Carl Wieland, past atheist and now creationist speaker, in his article "The evolution train's a-comin' (Sorry, a-goin'—in the wrong direction)" asserts that the process of mutation almost always results in a loss of biological information, not an increase in information or an increase in complexity. Adaptations may be successful, but they usually involve a narrowing of the future biological options. See <http://creation.com/the-evolution-trains-a-comin>.

A second similar challenge comes from Dr. J. C. Sanford in his 2005 book *Genetic Entropy and the Mystery of the Genome* where he demonstrates that the rapidly accumulating mutation errors in the human genome point to our gradual decline and extinction as a species, rather than our continual biological advancement. He also points out that there is no obvious evolutionary solution to this serious long-term problem.

If this "genetic entropy" process is as bad as some researchers believe, then perhaps we should be devoting all the resources we have to get ready to deal with this problem. One of the difficulties of the atheistic evolutionist mindset is that it would be a terrible blow to their complex structure of speculation, their entire belief system, to admit that humans were actually de-evolving rather than benefiting from the invincible powers of progress of their theories of evolution. They would probably remain in denial for decades even after it became clear that the deteriorating state of the human genome had essentially made all of their theories concerning evolution inapplicable and obsolete.

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<http://creation.com/michael-ruse-evolution-is-a-religion>

Leading anti-creationist philosopher admits that evolution is a religion

‘Evolution is promoted by its practitioners as more than mere science. Evolution is promulgated as an ideology, a secular religion—a full-fledged alternative to Christianity, with meaning and morality. I am an ardent evolutionist and an ex-Christian, but I must admit that in this one complaint—and Mr [*sic*] [Gish](#) is but one of many to make it—the literalists are absolutely right. Evolution is a religion. This was true of evolution in the beginning, and it is true of evolution still today.

‘... Evolution therefore came into being as a kind of secular ideology, an explicit substitute for Christianity.’

Michael Ruse was professor of philosophy and zoology at the University of Guelph, Canada (recently moved to Florida), He was the leading anti-creationist philosopher whose (flawed) arguments seemed to convince the biased judge to rule against the Arkansas ‘balanced treatment’ (of creation and evolution in schools) bill in 1981/2. At the trial, he and the other the anti-creationists loftily dismissed the claim that evolution was an anti-god religion.

Reference

1. Ruse, M., How evolution became a religion: creationists correct? *National Post*, pp. B1,B3,B7 May 13,

The complete article can be found at:
<http://www.omniology.com/HowEvolutionBecameReligion.html>

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