

EDITORIAL

WHERE HAS THE SCIENCE GONE?

“Creationism is scientific prostitution,” the newspaper headline read. Although it was only one of many similar statements that I had heard on the previous day at a national meeting of the Geological Society of America in New Orleans, I was surprised that such acrimony received prominent publicity.

The statement quoted above came from a professor of geology at Oregon State University who chaired one of two symposium sessions on creation and geology. He also declared that creationists are “as crooked as a three-dollar bill” and “intentionally and cynically mislead well-intentioned citizens.” A biologist from Boston University stated that “Biblical catastrophism” is “dishonest, nasty”; the same speaker also asserted that creationism as a science “represents political and religious mischief.” A prominent scientist from the American Museum of Natural History referred to creationism as the “tyranny of a well-organized and strongly motivated minority.” Another scientist from the same institution labeled both creation science and ecological zonation (the idea that ecology is responsible for the fossil sequence) as “a ruse.” A scholar from Georgia State University pronounced creationism to be “erroneous pseudoscience they pass off as scholarship,” and a geologist from the United States Geological Survey warned that one “should not let science fall to the fraud of creationists” and that “if you are a creationist, you are in the wrong place.”

This last statement seemed even more obvious when at the end of one session an individual supporting creation was denied the privilege of speaking, because his viewpoint was considered inappropriate. While creation was at issue in each symposium, no creationist was represented among the 15 speakers scheduled. This was hardly a balanced approach.

The emotionalism demonstrated at these sessions far exceeded what I had observed at any other scholarly meetings. Too many of the scientists had moved from objectivity to name-calling. I wondered what had happened to the scientist who is supposed to represent the cool unbiased appraiser of data. Evolutionists have been foremost in purporting that creation, in contrast to evolution, is not scientific; however, the behavior of several evolutionists at these meetings failed to convince me that evolution was a purely scientific concern.

Realistically, if creation is “nonsense,” is it worthy of especial concern? Why expend such emotional energy on something so obviously erroneous? The overabundance of ridicule, condescension and depreciation of character made one wonder if creation was not a more equal foe than the speakers

were willing to acknowledge. One is reminded of the statement by Michel de Montaigne: “He who establishes his argument by noise and command shows that his reason is weak.”

Lest creationists settle smugly into the comfort of self-righteousness, let me state that several speakers at these symposia presented well-documented examples of errors made by creationists. These errors were far too numerous to be dismissed as totally unrepresentative. On the basis of personal acquaintance as well as performance at these symposia, I can vouch for the gentlemanliness, decorum, and scholarship of some of the speakers. Their decorum is usually above reproach.

Unwarranted criticism and even depreciation of character are not limited to evolutionists. Some creationists have been equally at fault. Evolutionists are offended when creationists publish statements purporting that evolution “has served effectively as the pseudoscientific basis of atheism, agnosticism, socialism, fascism, and numerous other false and dangerous philosophies over the past century.

This melee is bewildering. Is the game now one of name-calling, and if it is, what purpose does it serve? Will the new approach of verbal abuse bring us closer to an understanding of the great questions of origins? Has the issue between creation and evolution become so polarized that science, reason, and understanding can no longer function? Given the accusations reported above, one must conclude that emotional reaction is interfering with scholarship and that confidence in the scientific process is depreciated by such behavior.

I am a firm believer in creation; nevertheless, I believe that evolutionists and creationists can learn from each other. Creationists must realize that some of their present scientific conclusions are not based on rigorous modes of scientific evaluation. Evolutionists must learn that their naturalistic explanations fail in trying to answer adequately the important questions of reason for existence, evidence of intelligent design, primal origins, aesthetics, values, etc.

It is regrettable that the inquiry into the fundamental question of origins has degenerated to such an emotional level. Goethe’s warning that “nothing is more terrible than ignorance in action” is appropriate to evolutionists and creationists alike. Objectivity is suffering seriously, time and energy are being wasted on both sides. Attitudes must be improved, and efforts now devoted to name-calling should be redirected towards good scholarship.

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