



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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Turkish creationism

By Taner Edis

[My translation of a column in today's Cumhuriyet, a secularist newspaper in Turkey. Errors in grammar etc. are in the original. -TE]

THE AGENDA — by Mustafa Balbay

IGNORANCE IN MOTION!

Let us breach the subject by summarizing a letter from a university professor: “The book you mentioned in your column entitled The Science of Ignorance [Harun Yahya’s The Evolution Deceit, booklet version – TE] has also been distributed in our province. First they bring thousands of books and distribute them freely. Then they come and give presentations. They are able to post their presentation notices even in locations where obtaining permission is very difficult. The book is especially made available to high school students. It is placed in high school and university libraries. Let it be placed, we have nothing against that. But it has become difficult to find teachers to present the theory of evolution in schools. These are all results of a well-established movement. There are no qualified teachers left in schools to teach biology...”

This short letter summarizes much:

1. The Islamists are being supported by certain government institutions.
2. Their fundamental target is high school students.
3. They have acquired the confidence to attack science.
4. In schools, it has become difficult to find teachers who will defend science against them.

On 11 June Friday in this column, we had emphasized that the Science Research Foundation had distributed the book called “The Evolution Deceit” in primary and high schools, that the book attacked science under the guise of criticizing the theory of evolution, and that permission was obtained from certain governors for the free distribution of the book.

As well as the opening letter, many replies came from many places in Anatolia. Sensitive citizens emphasized that in certain schools, even the administrators took the lead in distributing the book.

But from state institutions, no response came. We did not expect such. But if the state were as sensitive as some citizens, ignorance would not be so much on the move!

In the inside cover, this address is given as the publisher:

Vural Publishing. Beyazsaray Kitaplar Carsisi. No: 43 Beyazit-Istanbul.

We called this publisher and asked how many of these books had been printed. “We don’t know. We only have the publishing rights. The foundation does the printing,” they replied.

Our request to speak to the book’s author, Harun Yahya, was not accepted. Apparently he never communicates with readers, and we should write the publisher. They would forward it. Perhaps he might reply.

Our friend refutes the 150 year-old theory of evolution. But he cannot face the public! That the author’s real name is not Harun Yahya, that it is a pseudonym, is also emphasized on the back cover!

An International Connection!



The overwhelming majority of the footnotes at the end of the book are of American origin. When examined in depth, different clues emerge.

Religious Right organizations in the USA have been conducting an open struggle against the theory of evolution for years. They even started campaigning to prevent the teaching of the theory of evolution in schools. They wanted that “creation” should be taught instead of evolution. They went to the Supreme Court when they could not succeed. The court refused this. Disliking the decision, they objected, saying that “a court cannot decide this.”

So 72 Nobel prize-winning scientists and 21 academies of science emphasized the scientific importance of the theory of evolution and started to defend against attacks on the theory.

We face a similar situation in Turkey. Since the 19th century, Darwin’s theory of evolution is a target of reactionary religious forces. However, the evidence in support of evolution continued to strengthen. In the modern world today the debate is not about whether the theory of evolution is correct or not, but how it took place, and what phases it went through.

But the mentality which wants to drag Turkey into the darkness of the middle ages does not want this theory to be taught in schools even as a textbook. And it brings this up as a “democratic right”!

We discussed the matter over the weekend with Professor Sevket Ruacan from the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TUBA). He said that attacks on professors who wrote or expressed opinions against the book *The Evolution Deceit* are “beyond insults.” Some declarations to this effect also reach us.

The organizer of the presentations which attack the theory of evolution appears to be the Science Research Foundation founded by Adnan Oktar. Notices of presentations by this foundation, which describes itself as “pro-Ataturk,” for some reason appears in *Akit* and *Milli Gazete* [Islamist newspapers – TE]!

We will continue to examine the interesting connections related to this issue. Let us stop with a quotation from Ataturk:



[Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was the founder of the modern Turkish Republic.]

“As my spiritual legacy I leave no scriptures, no dogma, no frozen and stereotyped rules. My spiritual legacy is science and reason.”

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Bleeding Kansas

By John Blanton

The story is well known by now. In August the ten-member Kansas Board of Education voted six to four to eliminate evolution from the curriculum. Teachers in Kansas are not prohibited by this action from teaching evolution, but evolution is no longer required. This effectively eliminates evolution from most class rooms, because many teachers will not teach something that's not required, and teachers will have less backing for teaching evolution in the face of opposition from creationist parents.



Also stricken from the curriculum is modern cosmology. Teachers no longer have to tell students that the universe quite likely formed by accident about 15 billion years ago and has been developing ever since without help from a grand designer. The creationists did leave in what is called micro-evolution. Micro-evolution is the readily observable change in a population due to the selection of certain characteristics. A quick example of this is the case of dogs. It is conceded that all domestic dogs are derived from one wild species—the wolf. Creationists don't consider this to be real evolution, and they deny that separate species can be produced by such a process. They call a process that can produce new species macro-

evolution, and this is what they have dropped from the curriculum.

Although the Board majority action appears to be politically motivated, Republican Governor Bill Graves expressed dismay at the action and indicated he will institute steps to dissolve the Board of Education. Other consequences are likely. Robert Park of the American Physical Society wrote in his newsletter [see **What's New** below]:

Back in Kansas, today's Topeka Capital-Journal says a software company has already crossed Topeka off a list of possible locations for a regional headquarters. The company's CEO says the education board's action "isolates Kansas and handicaps its children in a competitive and unforgiving world."

Is all of this a win for the creationists? Well, yes and no. This is certainly a tactical victory. They won their immediate objective, which in a military situation would be equivalent to taking an enemy stronghold. Strategically it might not be so good for their side. Taking this objective has revealed their position and strength and puts the opposition on the alert. It even has the effect of polarizing otherwise neutral parties. Some who would previously have been willing to let the creationists have their say now see the danger in such leniency.

Skeptics organizations are certainly mobilized by the outcome. Expect to see more programs by The North Texas Skeptics on creationism and more exposés of creationism in The North Texas Skeptic. Of course, we can expect to see more action from the creationists, as well. Emboldened by this success they will attempt to duplicate their Kansas victory in other states. Get ready for a bumpy ride.

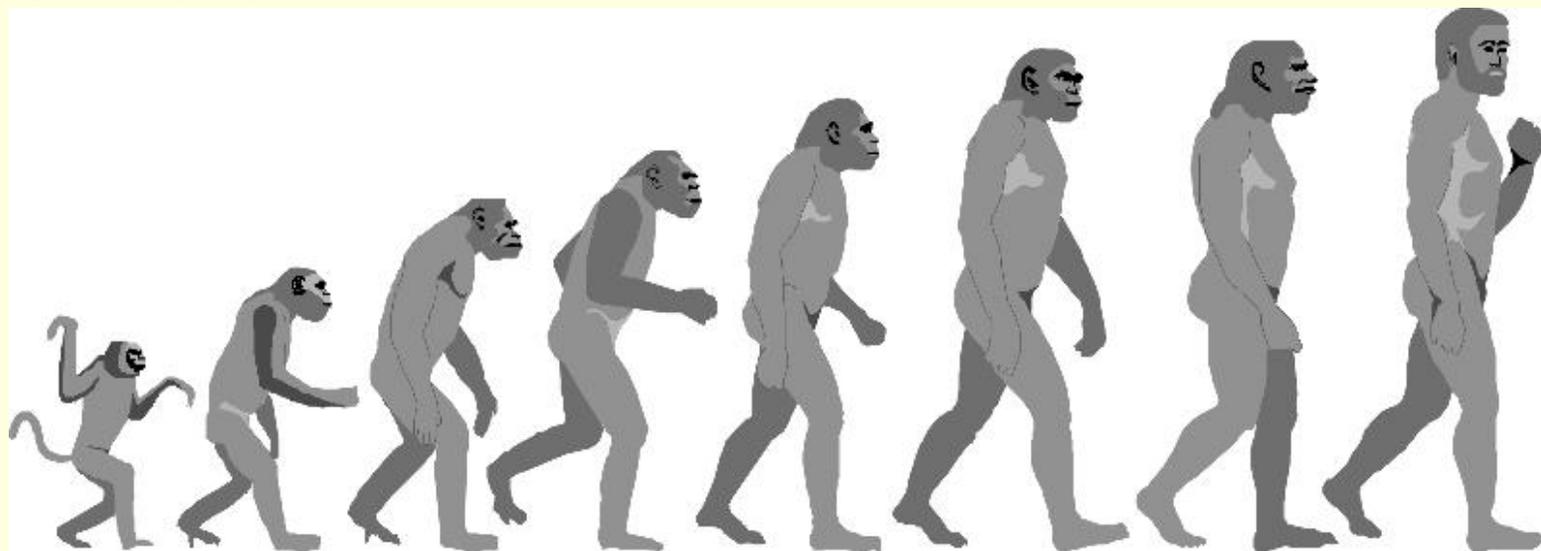
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What's New

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.aps.org/WN/index.html>. Following are some clippings of interest.-Ed.]

Evolution: "Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."

Uh, sorry Dorothy, it's Kansas all right—Oz is not this strange. The tireless foes of reason employed a new strategy this time. Rather than insisting that "creationism" be taught, or banning evolution from the classroom, both of which face constitutional obstacles, the elected state school board simply deleted any reference to evolution from the curriculum. And it wasn't just biological evolution; any mention of "big bang" theory was also explicitly eliminated. The chair of the school board defended the decision on NBC News last night: "Where is the evidence for that canine-looking creature that somehow has turned into a porpoise-looking creature," she asked, "or the cow that somehow has turned into a whale?" How do these people get on school boards? Philistines are much better organized than scientists. "I'll get you my pretty, and your little dog too." Scary story.



Economics 101: Meanwhile, Michigan invests in biotechnology.

Using \$1 billion of its tobacco settlement money, Michigan aims to become tops in life sciences research, attracting the sort of industries that Kansas seems determined to drive off. Back in Kansas, today's Topeka Capital-Journal says a software company has already crossed Topeka off a list of possible locations for a regional headquarters. The company's CEO says the education board's action "isolates Kansas and handicaps its children in a competitive and unforgiving world." Governor Bill Graves expressed disappointment and said the board's action has left people across the country wondering "What's going on in Kansas?"

Paleontology 101: Eukaryotes are much older than supposed.

On the same day the Kansas school board put the age of the Earth at less than 10,000 years, scientists in Australia were reporting evidence that eukaryotes existed 2.7 billion years ago.

Evolution I: Darwin runs dead last in the Iowa straw poll.

The timing of the school board decision to eliminate evolution from the curriculum in Kansas made it inevitable that candidates in the Iowa dollars-for-democracy exercise would be asked about their views. They all came out boldly for leaving it up to local school boards, but some went a bit further. Bush: "I believe children should be exposed to different theories about how the world started." Forbes: "In terms of evolution, there's a huge debate now." Dole: "I'm a person of strong faith—we must restore discipline to our schools." Bauer: "I personally believe my children were not descended from apes, that they were in fact created by God... There is a growing body of scientific evidence for a divine intervention that created man." Quayle: "Absolutely, I do [believe in creation]. Sure." Lamar Alexander is waiting for a reporter to ask him a question. Both Gore and Bradley also ducked behind local control, but Bradley's office added that if he lived in Kansas he wouldn't support the board's action.

Evolution II: Darwin polls badly with Americans.

A Gallup poll found that nearly half of American adults say they believe in a literal biblical interpretation of creation, and only about one in ten subscribe to a purely scientific interpretation of evolution. Americans are about five times as likely to take the Bible literally as people in England. However, people tend to keep religious views separate. Asked about the age of the Earth in a non-religious context, they might respond very differently.

Devolution: will no one stand up for Darwin?

True vertebrate fossils first appear in the Middle Ordovician some 500 million years ago. It's not clear just when the spine began to disappear among presidential wannabes, but little trace seems to remain. Last week, when WN asked Gore's campaign office for his reaction to the Kansas School Board action, his spokesperson dodged behind local control (WN 20 Aug 99). This week, Reuters posed the same question: "The Vice President favors the teaching of evolution in public schools," a spokesperson replied. He should have stopped there. "Obviously that decision should and will be made at the local level, and localities should be free to teach creationism as well." Gasp! The Supreme Court ruled that unconstitutional in 1987. Informed of that, the spokesperson called Reuters several hours later with a clarification, "The Vice President supports the right of school boards to teach creationism within the context of religious courses and not science courses."

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Nutrition Forum

by John Blanton

Nutrition Forum is one of the newsletters we get from CSICOP. We send CSICOP 75 issues of The North Texas Skeptic every month, and they occasionally send us a package of newsletters from around the world.

Nutrition Forum is published by Paul Kurtz of CSICOP fame—so you get the connection. The consulting editor is Stephen Barrett, an M.D. who is famous for dealing with medical pseudo-science. He was one of the co-authors with Emily Rosa, child scientist, of a paper published last year debunking therapeutic touch. After getting over the innocuous title readers might be surprised to see that the newsletter is devoted almost entirely to medical quackery.

Chiropractic

“Chiropractic Nutrition” is the title of a recent front page item by Samuel Homola. “Chiropractors can greatly augment their income by selling nutritional products to their patients,” he points out. “More than 50 companies market them primarily or exclusively through chiropractors.”

The article also discusses functional intracellular analysis (FIA), applied kinesiology (AK), biological terrain assessment (BTA), biomagnetic therapy, contact reflex analysis (CRA), and more.

CRA is an offshoot of AK (you’re going to have to look that one up) and “involves pushing down on the patient’s outstretched arm while touching ‘reflex points’ located in various parts of the body.” The testing arm is like a circuit breaker that will draw excessive electrical energy if it becomes unhealthy. This helps find problems in the corresponding reflex points in the body.

The article was adapted from Inside Chiropractic: A Patient’s Guide written by Dr. Homola and edited by Stephen Barrett. Check out

<http://www.chirobase.org/03Edu/C/homola.html>

“Many chiropractors use elaborate systems that include a nutrition component. The numbers using such systems range from a few hundred to many thousands.”

Kava

“Who could resist a product that lures you with promises of relief from stress, feelings of relaxation and euphoria, enhanced mental alertness, and more harmonious feelings toward others—all legal, nonaddictive, and without the side effects of prescription anti-anxiety drugs.” The subtitle of the article by Beth Fontenot is “Controversial claims, questionable evidence.”

“Kava is the name for both the shrubby pepper plant that is native to the South Pacific Islands, and for the mildly narcotic beverage made from the crushed rhizome and roots of the plant.” The islanders have been using kava beverages for centuries the way other cultures use alcohol. Today you can get capsules of kava root extract in health-food stores and on the Internet. You can make your own kava beverages from the ground up root. Americans spent over \$50 million on kava last year.

As far as handling anxiety problems, the evidence is questionable. In the longest study, at Jena University in Germany, kava was slightly more helpful than a placebo. Half of the patients taking the placebo reported relief from symptoms while three-fourths of those taking kava did. Fontenot points out that by the end of the study nearly all the participants reported some relief.

There are safety issues, besides. Kava should not be taken by children or teens or by pregnant women or those lactating. It should not be combined with alcohol or other depressants for obvious reasons.

“Anyone suffering from anxiety serious enough to warrant treatment should be under professional care and not self-medicating with a questionable over-the-counter product.”

More

Besides the editorial pieces the newsletter features brief news items:

Alliance of GNC and Rite Aid

General Nutrition Centers, Inc., and Rite Aid Corp. have formed a “strategic alliance” in which GNC will manufacture and the two companies will jointly market PharmAssure products through 3,900 Rite Aid pharmacies and 3,650 GNC domestic stores. The plan includes placing GNC kiosks staffed by Rite Aid employees “specially trained in nutrition” into 1,500 Rite Aid stores. The companies will also develop a nutritional information and supplemental sales Web site at <http://www.gnc.riteaid.com>.”

You can check out Nutrition Forum at

<http://www.quackwatch.com/04ConsumerEducation/nf.html>

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