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Creationism: is it science?

By John Blanton

The following is a summary of a talk I gave at the Philosopher's Forum in Dallas in September. A lot of the text pertaining to the young Earth creationism court case is taken straight out of Judge William Overton's decision, and I have put that in quotes.

For a number of years the courts of the United States have ruled that teaching religion in the public schools violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution. At the same time, Christian fundamentalists have long objected to the teaching of evolution in the public schools. They consider naturalistic theories of human origins to be contrary to their basic religious principles.

Faced with the prospect of having evolution taught but being unable to bring biblical teachings into the classroom, they have sought a way to get around the prohibition against Bible instruction. They decided that if the story of Genesis were considered to be science it could be taught, regardless of its religious implications. They invented the term "creation science."

"On March 19, 1981, the Governor of Arkansas signed into law Act 590 of 1981, entitled 'Balanced Treatment for Creation-Science and Evolution-Science Act.'"

Supported by the American Civil Liberties Union, a number of plaintiffs brought suit on May 27, 1981, challenging the constitutionality of Act 590. The plaintiffs included "Arkansas Bishops of the United Methodist, Episcopal, Roman Catholic and African Methodist Episcopal Churches, the principal official of the Presbyterian Churches in Arkansas, other United Methodist, Southern Baptist and Presbyterian clergy" among others. The suit challenged the act on three separate grounds, the principal one being that creationism was not science as claimed in the wording of the law, but was a religious tenet.

From Judge Overton's decision: "The trial commenced December 7, 1981, and continued through December 17, 1981. This Memorandum Opinion constitutes the Court's findings of fact and conclusions of law. Further orders and judgments will be in conformity with this opinion."

What essentially happened here is that after many years of claiming that creationism was real science, the creationists got the opportunity to prove it. It was to be their chance of a lifetime. Media attention would be focused on the debates, and the best minds on both sides of the issue would be made available. The side for science would draw upon the resources of the ACLU and the creationists would have at their disposal the treasury of the state of Arkansas. For the creationists it would not be enough.

The text of Act 590 defines the terms under contention. "Section 4 of the Act provides:"

Definitions, as used in this Act:

(a) "Creation-science" means the scientific evidences for creation and inferences from those scientific evidences. Creation-science includes the scientific evidences and related inferences that indicate: (1) Sudden creation of the universe, energy, and life from nothing; (2) The insufficiency of mutation and natural selection in bringing about development of all living kinds from a single organism; (3) Changes only within fixed limits of originally created kinds of plants and animals; (4) Separate ancestry for man and apes; (5) Explanation of the earth's geology by catastrophism, including the occurrence of a worldwide flood; and (6) A relatively recent inception of the earth and living kinds.

(b) "Evolution-science" means the scientific evidences for evolution and inferences from those scientific evidences. Evolution-science includes the scientific evidences and related inferences that indicate: (1) Emergence by naturalistic processes of the universe from disordered matter and emergence of life from nonlife; (2) The sufficiency of mutation and natural selection in bringing about development

of present living kinds from simple earlier kinds; (3) Emergence by mutation and natural selection of present living kinds from simple earlier kinds; (4) Emergence of man from a common ancestor with apes; (5) Explanation of the earth's geology and the evolutionary sequence by uniformitarianism; and (6) An inception several billion years ago of the earth and somewhat later of life.

Judge Overton held first of all that the definitions of "creation science" provided in the act immediately identified it as religion. The mention within definition (1) of "sudden creation of the universe, energy, and life from nothing" was inspired directly from Genesis. Definition (2) relating to "[t]he insufficiency of mutation and natural selection in bringing about development of all living kinds from a single organism" was just a sideways attack on evolution. Definition (3) "[c]hanges only within fixed limits of originally created kinds of plants and animals" had no basis in science, because a) scientists working the field of biology do not use the term "kinds" in referring to different life forms, and b) the term is generally found only in the Genesis reference to life forms. (4) "Separate ancestry for man and apes" has long been identified as a religious tenet of Christian fundamentalism. (5) Explanation of the earth's geology by catastrophism, including the occurrence of a worldwide flood; and (6) A relatively recent inception of the earth and living kinds" was just a restatement of the religious texts of Genesis.

The judge ruled additionally that the claimed secular purpose of the law was readily denied due to strong evidence of religious purpose on the part of those sponsoring its enactment. The model for the act was drafted by Paul Ellwanger, a respiratory therapist from South Carolina. As expected, he was also one of the promoters for the passage of Act 590. From Judge Overton's decision:

Ellwanger's correspondence on the subject shows an awareness that Act 590 is a religious crusade, coupled with a desire to conceal this fact. In a letter to State Senator Bill Keith of Louisiana, he says, "I view this whole battle as one between God and anti-God forces, though I know there are a large number of evolutionists who believe in God." And further, "... it behooves Satan to do all he can to thwart our efforts and confuse the issue at every turn." Yet Ellwanger suggests to Senator Keith, "IF you have a clear choice between having grassroots leaders of this statewide bill promotion effort to be ministerial or non-ministerial, be sure to opt for the non-ministerial. It does the bill effort no good to have ministers out there in the public forum and the adversary will surely pick at this point ... Ministerial persons can accomplish a tremendous amount of work from behind the scenes, encouraging their congregations to take the organizational and P.R. initiatives. And they can lead their churches in storming Heaven with prayers for help against so tenacious an adversary."

Furthermore, the judge noted that passage of the act took an unusual route, bypassing a number of checks. "No scientist testified at the hearing, nor was any representative from the State Department of Education called to testify."

Neither was the evidence from the creationist witnesses any help. ACLU lawyers, using an old creationist trick, took to quoting some famous creationists. From [Evolution — The Fossils Say No!](#) by Duane Gish "We do not know how the Creator created, what processes He used, for he used processes which are not now operating anywhere in the natural universe. This is why we refer to creation as Special Creation. We cannot discover by scientific investigation anything about the creative processes used by the Creator."

Duane Gish stated in a letter to the editor of Discover magazine:

Stephen Jay Gould states that creationists claim creation is a scientific theory. This is a false accusation. Creationists have repeatedly stated that neither creation nor evolution is a scientific theory (and each is equally religious).

The judge also noted "The leading creationist writers, Morris and Gish, acknowledge that the idea of creation described in 4(a)(1) is the concept of creation by God and make no pretense to the contrary."

Creationists were criticized for not practicing science. Edward J. Larson has noted in the *Nova* television program *God, Darwin and Dinosaurs* that the judge said science is what scientists do, and scientists don't do creationism.

The creationists' claim that mainstream science had shut them out by refusing to publish their papers was soundly refuted. The defendants did not produce a single paper that had been refused publication.

Even if the defendant's witnesses think that creationism is not science, could it still possibly be? Judge Overton concluded:

More precisely, the essential characteristics of science are:

- (1) It is guided by natural law;
- (2) It has to be explanatory by reference to nature law;
- (3) It is testable against the empirical world;
- (4) Its conclusions are tentative, i.e. are not necessarily the final word; and
- (5) Its is falsifiable. (Ruse and other science witnesses).

Clearly creationism was none of those.

Judge Overton handed down his decision on 5 January 1982, and the law was effectively dead from that time on. A brief attempt to resurrect the act was stymied when newly-elected Governor Bill Clinton vetoed the new bill.

That creationism is not science became a matter of law with the judge's ruling. It has been nineteen years since the McLean vs. Arkansas Board of Education trial defeated Act 590. Has anything changed since then?

Yes, the creationists have changed their tactics and have become a bigger threat than before. With the new emphasis on Intelligent Design (ID) they have attempted to distance themselves from the obvious miracles of Genesis.

What ID has done is to take the Genesis story of creation in six days (plus a flood) and tuck it away in the attic like a crazy old aunt. As many have found, the Genesis miracle was so obvious that high school students could pick it apart. So, the ID creationists have hidden the miracle at the molecular

level where the average man on the street can't see it.

People who otherwise do real science, such as Michael Behe, have espoused ID and have given creationism a new luster. In his book [Darwin's Black Box](#) Behe posits a number of cellular chemical processes he claims are irreducibly complex.

By "irreducibly complex" Behe means first of all complex. Secondly, if less complex, then not useful.

Take a biochemical process such as blood clotting, which works through a number of inter-working chemical reactions. Each of these components is the result of a separate evolutionary development (if Darwin was correct). If one component is missing, then the other components don't do anything useful and would likely have been discarded by natural selection before the development of the remaining link in the chain (if Darwin was correct).

Behe, and others of the ID following, now tell us this is direct evidence of design. The implication is that it is Intelligent Design.

Here is where the miracle of Genesis reappears. What we have in a process such as the mechanism for blood clotting is a miraculous mutation. It is something even the Darwinists agree cannot happen. What they are really saying is not that the Moon and the stars were suddenly cast into the sky, but that once in the development of a living organism a very fortunate miracle occurred. And then there was a chemical process for blood clotting.

Of course there were other miracles, as well. Behe describes a number of these in his book, which is frequently cited by creationism's advocates in public debate.

Other scientists, in the mean time, continue to do real work and to make scientific progress. Many have pointed out the manner in which an interlocking process such as blood clotting could have arisen by natural evolution, even if they have not proposed any specific evolutionary histories.

In time it is likely these details will be worked out, as well. It will be interesting to see what the creationists propose to replace Intelligent Design on that occasion. What the creationists still are not doing, however, is providing any scientific explanation for the new miracles.

Robert Pennock in his book [Tower of Babel](#) notes the consequences of relying on miracles to explain science. Either the miracles lose their luster and become just another natural process, or else science becomes just a special plea for miracles. One quickly thinks of Sidney Harris's cartoon with "Here a miracle occurs" stuck in the middle of some equations.

Who is calling for miracles? Each side points to the other. I always remember which side it was that first decided to go it alone without the miracles.

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Web news

By **John Blanton**

The World Wide Web is an unreliable source of information. But it's free.

Exorcise this!!

From: Fox News.Com

<http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/092200/exorcism.sml>

The Exorcist is baaack, and everybody's talking about it. Even the NTS is jumping on the bandwagon with a program on exorcism in October. Of course it's given by our own expert on exorcism, Danny Barnett, who probably could use another shot of it himself.

Fox News.Com tells:

In 1980, a young Jesuit priest was approached with an offer he couldn't refuse: Would he like to sit in on an exorcism?

Father Dave Creamer, the director of a Jesuit faith center at the University of Manitoba in Canada, was doing missionary work in southern India, and was a patient at the Child Jesus Hospital at the time. He was weak and feeling lousy from malarial fever - not exactly in the mood to go face-to-face with the Evil One. Still, he accepted the invitation to an event he'll never forget.

Looks as though we won't be forgetting any time soon, either. In case we ever do, be assured it will be back. Just as soon as the viewing audience is again ready to shell out bucks to have its stomach wrenched inside out. About thirty years, I would say.

Not all agree

Naturally there are those skeptical of exorcism. Fox News continues:

Skeptics say it's not the devil but rather physiological disorders—Tourette's syndrome, childhood schizophrenia, temporal lobe syndrome or, as [Paul] Kurtz puts it, other "psychological deviant behavior"—that are responsible for what passes for demonic possession.

Daniel Barnett, who as vice president of the North Texas Skeptics has studied exorcisms extensively, also blames folie à deux, or shared

delusion.

"Within the scope of an exorcism ritual, which is psychologically a highly demanding event for all parties involved, it is probably easy for relatively mundane events to be misinterpreted as genuine paranormal activity," he says.

...

"In the sessions that I have been able to observe, whether on videotape or in person, I have yet to find any evidence of paranormal activity during a possession state or any sort of ritual for deliverance or exorcism," Barnett says.

Still, after countless hours of research, Barnett, who is a Christian, admits he has not been able to convince himself that possession is not possible.

"I'm not saying that genuine cases of spirit possession do not exist," he said. "But all possible medical options must be exhausted before the more spectacular possibility of demonic infestation can seriously be considered."

You can be skeptical if you want, Danny, but I'm going back to see the movie and get the real truth.

Change sought in way evolution is taught

From the St. Paul (Minnesota) Pioneer Press (<http://www.pioneerplanet.com/docs/home3.htm>)

By John Welbes staff writer

Mike Steiner says his conflict with the Rosemount-Eagan-Apple Valley school district traces its origins to a 1996 open house at Rosemount High School.

He asked a science teacher about the methods used to teach the theory of evolution. After two answers he thought were evasive, he asked a third time. He says the teacher told him, "I teach it as scientific fact."

That didn't sit well with Steiner, who thinks it should be taught as a theory. Eventually, Steiner's inquires into science instruction in District 196 led to his ongoing effort to get two books questioning evolution onto the district's high school library shelves.

Steiner is still trying, and he calls the situation "anti-intellectualism." He wants Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box* and Phillip Johnson's *Darwin on Trial* in the library.

Last spring, media specialists at District 196's four high schools were called together by district administrators to decide whether to accept Steiner's gift of the books to the high schools. The media specialists looked at books already on the shelves, studied reviews of the two books in several journals and then decided not to accept them, said Mike O'Sullivan, media specialist at Rosemount High School.

"They were not well-received in the scientific literature," he said. The books received mixed reviews in other literary journals, he added, and one of them was described as best suited for an advanced academic audience.

Steiner also noticed in 1998 that his child's biology text book did not mention that evolution was a "theory." The school district has assured him that evolution was being taught as a theory.

Steiner is now on District 196's curriculum advisory committee, having taken over the spot by a retiring member.

Good and bad science in US schools

By Lawrence S. Lerner

<http://www.edexcellence.net/fordham/foreports.html>

Lawrence S. Lerner is emeritus professor of physics and astronomy at California State University, Long Beach, Long Beach, California 90840, USA. e-mail: lslerner@csulb.edu

One-third of US states have unsatisfactory standards for teaching evolution.

Almost all science is the study of the evolution of systems in time. Biology is no exception; its central organizing principle is the evolution of living things, just as geology centres on the evolution of the Earth and astronomy on the evolution of the Universe.

That evolution is the central organizing principle of all the historical sciences is not a controversial issue among scientists, or among most educated people. Consequently, science teaching worldwide treats evolution as routine. The United States is the exception. In much of the country, teaching evolution as scientists see it—particularly biological evolution to K-12 (age 5-18) students still evokes bitter controversy, 75 years after a landmark court trial first brought the matter to broad public attention. A variety of organizations and people object to the teaching of the facts and theory of evolution in public schools at the primary and secondary level.

Report card on evolution

WASHINGTON (AP) - A report evaluating the teaching of evolution in public schools gave six states scores of 100 for their science education standards.

Quoting from the Associated Press article, here are the winners and the losers:

A (score of 100): California, Connecticut, Indiana, New Jersey, North Carolina and Rhode Island

A (scores in the 90s): South Carolina, Delaware, Hawaii, and Pennsylvania.

B: Colorado, Minnesota, Vermont, Washington, Michigan, Arizona, Idaho, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah and the District of Columbia.

C: Maryland, New Mexico, Nevada, New York, Nebraska, Louisiana and Texas(!).

D: Arkansas, Kentucky, Wisconsin, Virginia, Alaska and Illinois.

F: Wyoming, Maine, Ohio, Oklahoma, New Hampshire, Florida, Alabama, North Dakota, Georgia, Mississippi, West Virginia and Tennessee.

F-: Kansas.

"Iowa was not included because it does not have statewide standards."

NASA: The big lie

Did NASA moon the American public in 1969? Posted by Snopes (snopes@snopes.com):

<http://www.primeline-america.com/moon-ldg/>

In the early hours of May 16, 1990, after a week spent watching old video footage of man on the Moon, a thought was turning into an obsession in the mind of Ralph Rene.

"How can the flag be fluttering," the 47 year old American kept asking himself, "when there's no wind on the atmosphere free Moon?"

That moment was to be the beginning of an incredible Space odyssey for the self-taught engineer from New Jersey. He started investigating the Apollo Moon landings, scouring every NASA film, photo and report with a growing sense of wonder, until finally reaching an awesome conclusion: America had never put a man on the Moon. The giant leap for mankind was fake.

On his Web page Ralph Rene cites nine reasons for claiming the Moon landings were a hoax:

- The Spacey Twins - Photo taken inside aircraft simulating 0 g gravity and later passed off as a "space walk".
- Divergent shadows which could only have been produced by a spotlight.
- Space rocks which have "Hollywood Type" letters.
- Backdrops for "The Mountains of the Moon".
- See the Astro-nots jump out of their own shadow. (Above photo clearly shows shadow of flag, but shadow of "Astro-not" is absent).
- Photo showing absolutely no crater under the main rocket of the LEM.
- Photo of Astro-not taken by fellow Astro-not who had no camera.
- Read how radiation should have turned the Astro-nots into crispy space bacon.
- Why are there never any stars showing in any of the moon pictures? If the Hubble Telescope can see them, why can't the Astro-Nots?

Arthur C. Clarke demands cold fusion rethink

Why didn't I see this coming? From BBC News at

<http://news6.thdo.bbc.co.uk>

Monday, 11 September, 2000, 11:21 GMT 12:21 UK

By BBC New Online's Jonathan Amos

The author and visionary Sir Arthur C Clarke says society has made a huge mistake in rejecting out of hand the idea that cold fusion may be possible. And he mocked editors and journalists at the British Association's Festival of Science for not giving the technology serious consideration.

He said the age of fossil fuels was coming to an end and society needed to find new sources of energy. Cold fusion or other "anomalous sources of energy" might just turn out to be the answer, he said.

Cold fusion has taken a number of hard knocks since the idea was first proposed by researchers Martin Fleischmann and Stanley Pons in March 1989. Although Fleischmann and Pons have long ago retreated in disgrace, many others have taken up the cause, apparently riding on the wave of cold fusion's early publicity.

Arthur C. Clarke is a writer of science fiction, including the popular 2001: A Space Odyssey. In the 1940s he first proposed the idea of communication satellites, but it's been pretty much downhill for him since. He has more recently taken to supporting a variety of crank ideas without assessing their true value.

"Over the last decade there have been literally hundreds of reports from all over the world from highly qualified people and distinguished institutions of anomalous sources of energy," he said in a recorded video address to the festival.

"They may or may not be cold fusion and in some cases have nothing to do with nuclear power.

"Although there are lots of crooks, cranks and cowboys in this field, I believe there is now enough published evidence to prove that

something strange is going on."

I have to agree. Something strange is going on.

Something for the space conspiracy buffs

Richard Hoagland, check out this. From http://spacescience.com/headlines/y2000/ast26sep_1.htm

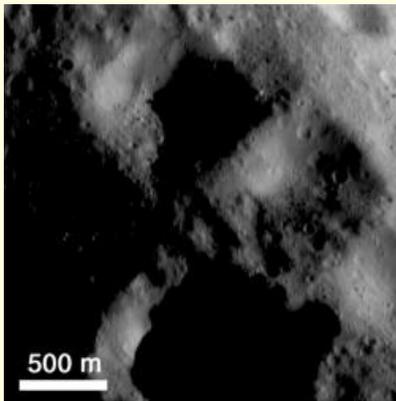
By Dr. Tony Phillips (phillips@spacesciences.com)

September 26, 2000 — In the pantheon of cosmic geometry, curves rule. Astronomy texts are filled with spiral galaxies, elliptical orbits, and ring nebulae. There are no chapters on triangles or rectangles — after all, who ever heard of a square planet? Some of the simplest shapes, common in the handiwork of humans, are just plain rare in space.

Rare, but not impossible...

Last month, astronomers were studying pictures of asteroid 433 Eros when they noticed some unusual craters. Most impact craters are circular, but these were square!

Where do you think they got the dirt to build the pyramids on Mars?



Square craters on Eros (NASA NEAR Shoemaker photo)

Richard Hoagland's page is at <http://www.enterprisemission.com/>



The astroid Eros. Just another place in the universe (NASA NEAR Shoemaker photo)

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Skeptical ink

By Prasad Golla and John Blanton

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