

THE CREATION-EVOLUTION CONTROVERSY

Course, Time, & Place: Philosophy A09-6, 1:00–2:00 MWF, Library 5370

School & Term: Northwestern University, Fall 1992

Office & Telephone: 1812 Hinman, Room 202, 491-2559

Office hours: 2:00–3:00 M, 4:00–5:00 Th

Instructor: Dr. William A. Dembski

Required Texts:

Author	Abbreviation	Title
Peter J. Bowler	PB	<i>Evolution: The History of an Idea</i>
Richard Dawkins	RD	<i>The Blind Watchmaker</i>
Michael Denton	MD	<i>Evolution: A Theory in Crisis</i>
Phillip Johnson	PJ	<i>Darwin on Trial</i>
Philip Kitcher	PK	<i>Abusing Science: The Case Against Creationism</i>
Henry Morris	HM	<i>Scientific Creationism</i>

Course Description:

What do a criminal trial lawyer, a civil engineer, a medical doctor, a zoologist, a historian of science, and a mainstream Anglo-American philosopher all have in common? They've all written recent books in the debate over creation and evolution. The creation-evolution controversy is still alive and with us. In this course we'll examine the work of some of the more active participants in the controversy. The amazing thing about this controversy is how many intellectual questions it touches. These include the origin of life and the universe, the nature of science, the relationship between science and faith, the difference between natural objects and artifacts, the connection between chance and design, as well as a host of isms such as atheism, theism, pantheism, naturalism, mechanism, physicalism, scientism, evolutionism, creationism, etc., etc. Our aim in this course will be to use the creation-evolution controversy as a backdrop for examining some of these questions.

Teaching Method

Some lecture. Mainly discussion.

Student Evaluation

% of grade	Assignment	Due
15	3 page paper	16 October—Friday, week 4
20	5 page paper	6 November—Friday, week 7
40	10 page paper	7 December—Monday, exam week
25	daily theses	at class meetings

—In this course you should imagine yourself as a lawyer preparing to argue a case. Unlike a lawyer, however, you will try to make rational arguments, avoiding emotional pressures, subtle manipulation, and assorted cheap shots. Your goal will be not merely to persuade, but to persuade with a rigorous argument.

- In each of the three paper assignments, you must advance a thesis. A thesis is a position you are willing to stake out and whose truth is controverted ("Hitler was an evil person" is an unacceptable thesis—you won't find anyone to argue it with you). Your three paper assignments are not to read like reports (e.g., so and so did this, then she said that, then she visited there, ...). There is plenty of material in this course on which you'll want to take sides. Choose a position and argue it.
- Just what you write on in the three paper assignments is up to you. What I suggest, however, is that you let one paper build on the next, so that your 10 page paper is a thorough argument in support of the thesis you advanced in your 3 page paper. I'll say more about the papers in class. Feel free to run paper topics by me.
- This is not a course in grammar and rhetoric. Hence I don't see it as my job to correct your spelling, grammar, and style. Nevertheless, failure on your part to employ correct spelling, grammar, and style will count against you. A word to the wise: have someone proofread your papers. In extreme cases papers with too many typos and basic stylistic errors will be returned for a rewrite, with grades duly lowered.
- Papers are due on the appointed day by 5:00 p.m. in my mail box at the Philosophy Department (1818 Hinman). Late papers will receive lowered grades.
- A daily thesis along with a brief argument sketch in support of the thesis is to be handed in at each class meeting. The thesis plus argument sketch must be in writing and is supposed to respond to the primary reading for the day. Each thesis plus argument sketch that you hand in will be worth 1% of your grade. Be prepared to defend your thesis during class discussion. Note, I won't be returning your theses.

The Daily Theses

Imagine that part of your primary reading for the day is the following passage:

Nor am I, for that matter an anti-evolutionist. . . . [But] as to the claim, all too frequently found in the "most authoritative" literature, that the Darwinian evolutionary mechanism (the interplay of chance mutations with environmental pressure) has solved all basic problems, I hold it to be absurd and bordering at times on the unconscionable. While the mechanism in question provoked much interesting scientific research, it left unanswered the question of transition among genera, families, orders, classes, and phyla where the absence of transitional forms is as near-complete as ever. As to the origin of life and especially of consciousness, they are today no less irreducible to physics than they were in Darwin's time. I want no part whatever with the position in which Genesis 1-3 is used as a scientific text with predictive value (that is, predicting great lacunae in the fossil record), or with the diametrically opposite stance in which science is surreptitiously taken for a means of elucidating the utterly metaphysical question of purpose. In short, it is, in my view, intellectually far more honest to keep in mind the grave shortcomings of a theory, however appealing by its unifying and predictive potentialities, than to foster sanguine illusions about its true status, just because one becomes thereby an effectively protected and supported part of the "established consensus." [Stanley Jaki]

Here is what your thesis plus argument sketch in response to this passage might look like if you were taking a Darwinian line:

Thesis: Darwinism is our best scientific theory of organic development to

date and should therefore be accepted without reservation.

Argument Sketch: (1) Scientific knowledge is our most reliable form of knowledge—we should therefore place confidence in our best scientific theories. (2) We mustn't succumb to intellectual pessimism, thinking that science cannot solve the problems of organic development. (3) The fruitfulness of Darwinism as a scientific research program gives us reason to hope that eventually the problems Jaki points to will be resolved. (4) Darwinism need not apologize for failing to address the meaningless metaphysical questions Jaki raises about purpose. (5) There is good reason to think that Darwinism is the only scientifically acceptable account of organic development possible.

On the other hand, as a creationist you might want to take a different line:

Thesis: Jaki is totally wrong in refusing to treat Genesis 1-3 as a scientific text with predictive value.

Argument Sketch: (1) Since Jaki is a Catholic priest, he places lesser emphasis on Scripture than Protestants. Hence it's no surprise that he treats Scripture as less than factual. (2) If the Bible is the inerrant word of God, then it cannot lie when it touches on matters of science. (3) Genesis 1-3 does have predictive value—the very gaps in the fossil record which Jaki mentions could be predicted on the basis of the Genesis record. So why not just accept that it does have predictive value? (4) Jaki won't align himself with the Darwinists, but he won't align himself with us either. His middle of the road position is not so much an admission of ignorance, as an unwillingness to choose sides. (5) By refusing to take Genesis 1-3 as scientifically valid, Jaki places himself in a position to decide what is and isn't science. What gives him the right?

Readings:

Please read the primary reading for each class thoroughly. Your daily thesis is to be based on the primary reading. On average you will have about 30 to 40 pages of reading per class. The secondary readings are also required, but serve primarily as background, or reinforce material we've already gone over.

#	Topic	Primary Reading	Secondary Reading
1-2	Background	MD, 13-36	
1-3	"	MD, 37-68	
2-1	"	MD, 69-92	PB, 1-25
2-2	Darwin	PB, 156-186	
2-3	"	PB, 187-217	
3-1	"	PB, 218-245	
3-2	A Scientist's Critique of Darwinism	MD, 157-198	
3-3	"	MD, 199-232	
4-1	"	MD, 233-273	
4-2	"	MD, 308-343	MD, 344-359
4-3	A Scientist's Defence of Darwinism	RD, ix-xiii & 1-18	RD, 21-41
5-1	"	RD, 43-74	
5-2	"	RD, 77-109	
5-3	"	RD, 111-137	

6-1	"	RD, 139-166	
6-2	A Lawyer's Critique of Darwinism	PJ, 3-31	
6-3	"	PJ, 63-72	PJ, 32-62
7-1	"	PJ, 111-122	PJ, 73-110
7-2	"	PJ, 123-154	
7-3	Scientific Creationism	HM, Chapters 1-3	
8-1	"	HM, Chapters 4-5	
8-2	"	HM, Chapters 6-7	
8-3	"	HM, Chapters 8	
9-1	A Philosopher's Critique of Creationism	PK, 1-29	
9-2	"	PK, 30-54	
9-3	"	PK, 55-81	
10-1	"	PK, 82-123	
10-2	"	PK, 124-164	
10-3	"	PK, 165-202	
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