

Does "Intelligent Design" Deserve a Place in Public Education?

US District Judge John E. Jones ruled that the school district of Dover, Pennsylvania could not teach "Intelligent Design" as an alternative view to Evolution. In his decision he stated that intelligent design was not science and is inseparably linked to religion. As such, Judge Jones referred to it as a "science stopper." A rural school district in California agreed to stop teaching "intelligent design" settling a lawsuit filed by the Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Both cases point to the same argument - teaching intelligent design is mixing church and state. Evolution is regarded as science while intelligent design is classified as religion belonging in a theology class not in a tax-supported, public institution.

However, there is growing opposition to this monolithic thinking. Teachers historically have been free to present alternative views to evolution. That freedom progressively faded over the past 40 years. Is it because education has advanced beyond the antiquated notions of the past? Is it because science has yielded sufficient evidence to move evolution from theory to fact? Or, are there other forces in motion? Is there a bias against the concept of intelligent design that has nothing to do with science? Can a school district allow the teaching of intelligent design without violating the separation of church and state?

What Is Science?

The debate is easily resolved by looking at a few definitions. "Science" means "knowledge." According to Webster's dictionary it is "knowledge or a system of knowledge covering general truths or the operation of general laws esp. as obtained and tested through scientific method." We all learned the scientific method in school. It involves three steps: 1.) Making detailed observations 2.) Collecting and analyzing the information observed 3.) Formulating a hypothesis based upon the phenomena observed. If the hypothesis stands after multiple experimental procedures, it advances to a theory.

For a theory to be properly considered in a science class, it should meet the basic requirements of the scientific method. Evolutionists claim to follow this process. They have gathered the facts, observed and analyzed those facts, and have developed a theory to explain the facts observed. Thus, the theory of evolution belongs in a science class. But, what about intelligent design? Doesn't it meet the same criteria? In this case, many scientists have gathered the facts, observed and analyzed those facts, and have developed a theory of intelligent design. Is that theory less credible than evolution? Is it simply a matter of a few religious zealots wanting to interject God into the public school system?

Suppose you were on a hill looking toward a lake where three boats are docked. The boat to the left is small, the middle boat is medium-sized, and the boat to the right is large. Applying the scientific method to our "boat scene", the evolutionist observes the boats, analyzes the data, and formulates a hypothesis. He might say, "I observe the boats are basically made of the same material, located in the same environmental circumstances, gradually ascending in size from small to large. Their "DNA" is very similar and there seems to be a development in complexity. Therefore, a process of evolving is indicated. One boat evolved from the other over a long period of time." The intelligent design observer might say, "I see three boats in the water.

Analyzing their structures indicates a high level of intricate design. Such design is never displayed in the observable universe without a designer behind it. Thus, the boats indicate the existence of a boat maker."

Is one less scientific than the other? Obviously not. In fact, "common sense" demands the conclusion a boat maker is behind the existence of the three boats. It is not a matter of trying to force a boat maker into the scientific method; rather, it is an obvious deduction based upon the facts. An evolutionary explanation of the existence of the three boats makes a mockery of objective observation. Yet, when some scientists discuss the origins of life, they blindly follow theories that make no more sense than "boats by evolution." Unfortunately, they have carried the day and controlled public education. The best and most objective theory to origins has been discredited as religious, while a lesser theory of "natural selection" and "random happenings" is called science. Because of a bias against intelligent design, students cannot pursue true science. They are prevented from exploring a credible theory by a vocal minority and judges who have little comprehension of the facts.

Why the Bias?

Science by its very definition is an objective discipline. What causes some scientists to reject the obvious? The answer is in the nature of evolution itself. Evolution is primarily a philosophy. It is a way of thinking. It is a philosophical system that affects many fields of study. For instance, sociology, psychology and ethics are a few of those fields. If a human has evolved from a simple organism to a more complex being, his/her values, emotions, social skills, social order, etc. have evolved as well. Under this thinking there can be no absolutes. Everything continually changes (or evolves). The theory of intelligent design unravels the system. Intelligent design demands a designer which, in turn, leads to certain absolute truths. Evolution cannot survive in a world of absolutes. Ultimately, public education (as practiced today) is threatened. Almost every academic discipline would need reconsideration if intelligent design were given equal footing with evolution.

The Bottom Line

Intelligent Design belongs in our science classes. Its academic credentials are impeccable. It is the product of a proper use of the scientific method. It should not be excluded because religious people accept it. To do so is prejudice of the worst kind - a prejudice that should never appear in tax-supported institutions. Shutting our public schools to a valid theory of origins is as Judge Jones commented, "a science stopper."

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