

The Politics of Religion: The Case of Scientific Creationism¹

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Then, in the final chapter of this book, the general creation model is defined more explicitly in terms of Biblical revelation. The whole question of origins and development is brought into its proper Biblical and theological context, and the student can be led into a comprehensive, coherent, and satisfying world-view centered in his personal Creator and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It should be emphasized that this order is followed, not because the scientific data are considered more reliable than Biblical doctrine. To the contrary, it is precisely because Biblical revelation is absolutely authoritative and perspicuous that the scientific fact, rightly interpreted, will give the same testimony as that of Scripture. There is not the slightest possibility that the facts of science can contradict the Bible...(15)²

Preface

Scientific Creationists are attempting to engage scientists in a debate between creation and evolution in the United States. Hoping to weave their ideas into the fabric of social thinking, they are specifically focused on the public schools and the teaching of evolutionary theory. As the public schools are governed by public laws, the arena for this engagement has included changing laws and the developing of a cadre of teachers who espouse their position.

The argument encompasses the nature of our being, of knowledge, of truth and authority; at once intellectual, theological, and political. This movement is an attempt to return these issues from (some) human domain of reason and scientific inquiry to biblical texts; in this case exegeted by self-named Scientific Creationists.

The current strategy is not a debate against reason or science in any clean or direct sense. Rather it is an attempt to show that both creation and science are forms of religion. Creationists worry that scientists, just as people in ancient pre-Noachic flood times, are challenging God's right to truth and omniscience and fear His wrath. It is thus time to return to His word.

A Brief History

In the late 1970's a Protestant fundamentalist pastor in Minneapolis directed a letter to some faculty at the University of Minnesota. Recipients were faculty whose departmental curricula included some course with the term, *evolution*, in its title. This meant anthropology (where I was located), geology, and several of the departments in biology.

The note exhorted us to include a course on Scientific Creationism, to parallel and augment our course offerings in evolution: to be renamed *Scientific Evolutionism*. Evolution was apparently being attacked by rewriting, revising, or repositioning. In other words, evolution was being placed in a new context, parallel or equivalent to creationism.

Was this an imoad for bringing religion into the public schools? It seemed significant that the University of Minnesota is chartered as a Land Grant University, a public University; in effect, an advanced public school run by the State of Minnesota and governed by its laws. In such schools the study of religion per se is forbidden by law, although one can study about religion usually in departments or courses called *religious studies*.³

My colleagues in anthropology showed little interest for themselves, with some tacit approval of my interest. The general reaction was that this was the work of a *crackpot* or a *crazy*. In most minds the Scopes trial of 1925 was unevitable; definitively won by evolution once and forever.

However, this was the 1970's. It was the time of the cults: of the Moonies, of Hare Krishna's, a decade after the U.S. infatuation with drugs, retreats to communes, the destructive Manson Family, Jonestown; a time of the weirdly dressed and festivals on University campuses where all sorts of shamanistic and mystical groups showed up. The book *Snapping* (Conway and Siegelman, 1978) explores these times. It tries to show how those who are seeking, can be indoctrinated into *Scientology* or *EST* or *AMWAY* or any of the groups which seem to promise a *religious* something. Stories about deprogramming of former cult members were surfacing. What *do* they seek, those who join cults, return to fundamentalisms and literalisms?⁴

I talked with colleagues, neighbors, and students who had been brought up as fundamentalist Protestants, but had moved from that to more liberal, critical positions (their terms). Their talk was about the *Book of Revelations*, and about their attempts to move out of strict religious upbringings.

These times and talks challenged my long held teachings that we (all) would become more and more rational. The United States in the 1970's were reminiscent of an extended fieldwork stay in indigenous Mexico where I had first encountered mystique and mysticism, shamans and seers, curers in competition with Western scientific physicians. Intrigued by the pastor's letter, I studied the book which his letter had recommended on *Scientific Creationism* by Henry M. Morris (1974), Director of the Institute for Creation Research in San Diego, California.

Then came the attempt in most of the United States to legally mandate the teaching of Scientific Creationism in the public schools, which failed finally in Louisiana in the early 1980's.

Currently, the Scientific Creationism movement is out of public view of courts and state legislatures. However, the movement is active in the training of biology teachers in high schools across the country. It has gotten several colleges accredited to produce those teachers of biology in the creationist vision. Its outlook has become a part of a larger movement of fundamentalist groups, gathered together within the Christian Coalition.

Context

The background issues of the creationism-evolutionism debate range quite widely. They include the: 1) theo-political questions of separation of church and state; 2) relationships and differences between culture as orientation toward the past or within a progressive idea of the ongoing present; 3) metaphysical questions of truth and authority; 4) some existential-psychological issues about personal existence which affect radically the very concepts of being and history; and, 5) some peculiarities of what the idea of *fairness* means in the U.S., which has helped creationism to challenge science

This debate occurs principally within the legal and historical setting of the U.S. Thus, some understanding of these issues in their cultural and religious history is useful to see how the arguments resonate in the present, as well as the contexts within which they gain meaning and power.

1) Theo-Political Questions: The first setting includes the legal codification of the advice of *Matthew 22:21* in which we are told that there is a separation between church and state. The 1st amendment to the U. S. Constitution contains two sections concerning

religion: a) maintaining freedom of religious worship for everyone; b) forbidding the establishment of a state religion.

The creationists claim that the evolutionists are, in actual fact, presenting religious ideas in the name of scientific truth; and have thus established a state religion. They hold that students in public schools are **not** presently free to doubt evolution in biology classes; therefore freedom of religion has been abrogated. For the creationists, there is no science or reason; only religion. For those who separate the parallel realms of faith and reason, this move to make science into religion is part of an attempt to undo democracy, and turn the country toward theocracy.

2) Culture Wars: The blunting and blurring of the church-state separation has to do with certain peculiarities of U.S. history, especially as they operate in the current situation. Some of this reflects questions of national identity which have, in large measure, been determined by U.S. opposition to the *evil empire* of Communism; no longer perceived to be much of a threat. We are thus left in some serious identity search for who we are, after an era of being defined largely by who and what we are against. In this sense, democracy and capitalism have been blended. Capitalism seems like the direction of the future, with principles of democracy in the background: A new cultural polemic seems to be emerging, calling attention away from principles of government, and toward competition within an industrialized world.

How has this come about? In the U.S., the question of theology and democracy has a long and complex history. Much of the history is the Protestant story of religious dissent against organized and/ or state religions. Its sensibility is well represented by Bunyon's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1687) in which each individual follows his/her path toward truth. Its (European derived) theology is complicated by the geography and cultures which arrived here at various times: Protestants, but also ethnically English, Scotch,

German, Scandinavian, and the post-slavery outlooks of African-Americans; Roman Catholic, but also Irish, German, Slavic, Latino, Mediterranean; Jewish, but also German, Russian, Polish.

Its religious history blends with ethnic socio-economics, complicated by the facts of who got here first and took the most. Each group rising to some national identity and success then, in its turn, became opposed on theo-cultural grounds to the next arrivals: anti-Catholicisms, anti-Semitisms, currently anti-women and persons of color; questions of who is a proper person and what that means (Upset, 1969).

But within the European-derived populations, at least, these antagonisms have truly diminished in the past generation or so (Christopher, 1989). In its place, there is developing a kind of bipolar consensus on religious issues, which Hunter characterizes as the *culture wars* (1991).

In this broad context, the creationism-evolutionism battle exists principally within a white and Protestant outlook. But this outlook has recently extended to become a form of theo-political-economic conservatism, those who are believers in a fairly fundamentalist way, over a range of socio-economic issues: in God, in church, in the family, against crime, against progressives. Here, the abortion debate is acting to coalesce those strongly committed to a conservative (religious) outlook, where the shared *fact of belief* overrides denominational differences. Much of this so-called cultural battle takes place over questions of values and absolutes. Opposition to religious and/ or moral relativism becomes an icon for patriotism. Within this context, Scientific Creationism serves principally to help carve out a ground for a conservative coalition of forces. Whether this theo-politics will hold for issues beyond abortion remains to be seen.

3) Truth and Authority: In this context, creationism offers an anti-progressive theory, while simultaneously taking on the meta-physical issues of truth and authority. This particular theory would take us back to biblical texts in a literalist manner, while also seeming to offer a direct alternative to liberal, modernist scientific ways of determining truth. Under the banner of anti-progressivism, this literalist fundamentalism seems merely to be another form of, or justification for, conservatism.

It offers a named enemy: the *secular Humanist* who would remove prayer from the school classroom and believes only in the truth of science; as opposed to the truth of God.⁶ In the context of conservatism and progressivism, the secular Humanist is depicted less as interested in science or reason, but as particularly anti-God. The Humanist historical attempt to move toward objectivity and reason, is being revised and cast as an anti-religious religion. The concept of scientific progress is being placed within progressivism as opposed to a conservatism of religious outlook.

Scientific Creationism is concerned with the definition and control of truth and of authority, so its entry into public discussion is focused largely on public schooling which seems to teach and espouse a particular, scientific-progressive line on knowledge and truth. The creationists are very interested in the public school debate in the U.S.

The public schools are perceived to be failing, and blame flows in many directions. Indeed the opening words of Morris' book engage this debate: "The widespread movement in recent years toward the establishment of new private Christian schools has been stimulated largely by the failure of the public schools to maintain academic and philosophic objectivity." It goes on: "In the name of modern science and of church-state separation, the Bible and theistic religion have been effectively banned from curricula, and a nontheistic religion of secular evolutionary Humanism has become...the official state religion promoted in the public schools."(iiz)

The intellectual context of Scientific Creationism seems far removed from the *Realpolitik*. It reads like a scholarly polemic rather than a political debate. But, like much else in the (post)modern world the principal issue/problem turns out to be one of reading, interpretation, and authority. Here, Scientific Creationism offers an alternative way of knowing. Its principal texts are various of the New Testament Gospels and Apocrypha, especially the Book of Revelations. These texts are taken at the level of presumption, then, to a *re-reading* of the Book of Genesis: the locus of the creation and Noachic texts.

It is likely of great importance in this discussion about creation, that we now approach the millennial moment prophecied with immense power in Revelations: the apocalypse, the holocaust, the return of the Messiah, our escape from earth, our (souls') return to Heaven.

On or about the year 2,000 A.D. (by now within easy vision), we can expect that a large number of Christian Fundamentalists will become excited about the so-called *rapture*, in which the deity reappears on earth. The souls of those Christians who have been *born again* will be carried back to heaven; while the rest will be condemned to a literal hell on earth. This excitement developed before the year 1000 A.D. when many Christians went to Jerusalem to await the second coming, setting off the Crusades, and radically affecting the Western world. It developed again around the year 1500 A.D., which Durer's famous woodcuts of the Apocalypse were created to celebrate. We can expect it once again; soon!

Using some of these texts as foundational ideas and/or statements, Scientific Creationism is a particular New Testament re-reading of Genesis, with a specific emphasis on the Noachic flood (Genesis 6-9). So, like this text, Scientific Creationism is about flood hydrology. This includes the idea of life as an aspect of the return of the soul to heaven, and an attempt to explain why we are here

on earth, what our lives mean, and so on. But it is especially concerned with the human hubris of seeking all of knowledge through science. Since much of its history is shared with Catholicism, much of this story will be familiar; but much of it is different, as well.

Which texts are emphasized, how they are to be interpreted and understood, is paramount. We note that this issue of reading, of literality and interpretation is very ancient within the Christian world. In fact, much of the groundwork for the establishment of Catholicism by Augustine (1958) treats these issues of exegesis or interpretation in detail, and opts for an educated scholarly class of priests who would read the biblical texts with properly thoughtful and careful scholarly authority in the context of community (*charity*); as opposed to individual-literal readings.

Scientific Creationism, like other fundamentalisms, is an attempt to return to literal readings of the biblical texts, and the various forms of fundamentalism believe in the so-called *inerrancy* of the Bible.⁷ In many senses, this moment is a replay of Augustine's times: deciding which texts to read and how to interpret them; who has the authority to decide these questions, on what grounds. For Augustine, it was an intellectual clergy who would study and interpret, within - as it turns out - an institution: the Church. For the literalist, the quest - at least at this time - is to return authority to the biblical texts and to individual readers; and the actual fact of exegesis is backgrounded. Although the battle for authority is quite ancient, it arises again today in these theo-political contexts complicated by history and culture and the self-conscious practices of revisionism.

The principal intellectual questions which Scientific Creationism likes to foreground have to do with human nature; especially how we are, why we are here on earth, and how to get back to heaven, where we (our souls) belong. Some questions are shared with all or most of Christianity, especially the (neo-Platonic) concern with the Augustinian principles of the human *fall* to earth. The over-

riding idea is that we belong as souls in heaven, and are here on earth primarily as punishment; our purpose in being to return our souls to heaven.s The very idea of death is as punishment for our vanity, hubris, and disobedience. *Vanity* and *hubris* are especially critical to the Scientific Creationists!

Although some issues are more shared with other fundamentalist Protestants - especially the fight against evolution, and against the concept of change⁹ - Scientific Creationism takes the issue of human-scientific hubris as a centerpiece for its theories. It believes, specifically, in a recent earth theory (6,000+ years or so), an earth-centered (geocentric) world made for us humans: in which all the species were created at the beginning; in which there has been no change; can be no change. The six days of creation are just that; six days; done once and forever.

The principal thinker of this movement, Henry Morris, is a hydrologic engineer with a degree (ironically?) from the University of Minnesota (PhD., late 1930's), and this is no accident. For this story of the flood, the taking of each species on board by Noah, confirms for the creationists that all the species were created by God...in the beginning: thus there has been (could have been) no evolution. All the species which exist on earth were created at that time, and saved on Noah's ark. This anti-evolutionary idea will turn out to be useful in boosting the idea of the messianic return in the millennium, as it powerfully undercuts the idea of linear history.lo

Some of this battle actually took place during the 18th century, before the modern principles of geology were well understood. There was a grand debate, some of which still is important, about whether the history of the earth from earliest times to the present form was more or less linear and gradual (uniformitarianism), or whether the earth was formed principally by large sudden events (catastrophism): floods (!), meteors, volcanoes. Here, the thinking tends to be either lor as in much of this debate, although

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these creationists have very little sense and/or regard for the history of ideas. The Noachic flood proves to Scientific Creationism that the world is marked particularly by catastrophes, having to do with our Faustian/Satanic quests to challenge God's will and omniscient knowledge. Whenever we overstep ourselves (i.e., science, in this moment), God's wrath will fall upon us once again.

The initial subject area which would establish the facts in this polemic is the fossil record. The first line of attack of creationism against evolutionism concerns itself principally with geology: fossils, methods of dating, and so on. The attempt is made to prove that the fossil record supports a clean catastrophism, that there has been no evolution or change from one species to another; no intermediate forms, no missing links. Meteor collisions are favored over stratigraphy and carbon-14 dating methods.

The second arena for debate is with biology: whether we are evolved and derived from beasts, from lesser creatures; or whether we are made in God's image directly as in Genesis 1:26. If, Morris worries, we are like beasts, then we would act bestially; not really able to know God, and never able to return to heaven.

For the creationists, our very existence as humans is at risk over this debate. The questions of sex, sin, and soul are paramount. Some of the polemic has to do with comparative anatomy, sharing of morphology and behavior with other species, trying to show that humans are especially unique. Of course, part of the context of this debate is that recent ethological work, the teaching of sign language to apes, and so forth, has brought human uniqueness, including language, rationality, and knowing, into some question. (Sarles, 1985)

The last contextual arena for intellectual debate, one which is just beginning to surface (1993), is that of anthropology: the question of what is human nature; what of language, of culture, religion (179). The question of human origins is particularly sensitive: of

language, meaning, of how we know God. But the entire comparative method, contrasting humans with other species to uncover similarities and differences, the idea of relationship with other species, is anathema. God made the world for us; we alone, in His image. Humanity is central, the beasts are ours to do with as we would; not us, not to be compared, certainly.

4) Existential Issues: The existential-psychological impetus of Scientific Creationism and much Fundamentalism seems to be driven by the fear of death (not a small issue), but especially by a nagging doubt concerning one's own existence. The question of creationism, as has been indicated, is concerned with the Genesis texts of the creation of the world and of the species. In the context of the either/or of this argument, the world and all that is in it, is held to have been created in the six days of creation as laid out in Genesis 1. Creation happened during this period. The world is essentially static. Eternity of God, of our souls is the reality. If our very being is a mistake born out of disobedience and sin, then life, *itself*, remains a dubious puzzle,

As well, the fact and idea of history becomes dubitable. In setting the context, it is important to point out that the catastrophic approach to being signals an either/or approach to the very idea of history and the construction of time. I distinguish here between a kind of linear, *predictive* sense of history, and a *prophetic* sense. Creationism is clearly an attempt to return us to a prophetic sense of history. The return of the millennium Messiah will literally wipe out (the memory of) the intervening 2,000 years. Concepts of history or of culture have no place in this thinking. In the sense, the creationist attack on reason continues to expand its powers.

5) Fairness: Finally, the question of the phrase *scientific* as a prefix to creationism and evolutionism can, according to Nelkin (1977), be understood best within the context of a U.S. concept of *fairness* as practiced within the communications media. The con-

cept: that any point of view is to be contrasted with its opposition on radio or television and given equal time; in the name of *fairness*. As any position of, say, the Democrats, deserves to have its Republican opposition heard, any position can be said to have an opposite: a kind of *equivalent* opposite. There are always opposing positions, and both should be heard: especially, for the creationists, by students in biology classes. Thus religion and science are moved into equivalent and oppositional status; thus distinctions or separate domains of faith and reason are blurred; of church and state; and so on.

The move to contrast creationism (an obviously religious notion) with evolution (a reasoned, factual scientific idea) is extremely clever and potentially powerful. It at once opposes religion with science, but it does so within a common gathering idea; a *co-optation*, in modern parlance. Both become scientific, while both are matters of faith: as religion becomes a form of science, science becomes a matter of faith. Indeed, the creationists hold that both creation and science are matters of faith; both are beliefs, both are religions. There is nothing but religion: theistic or non-theistic. Science as the pursuit of truth and nature falls off a slippery slope; reason and logic exist merely to serve faith.

They maintain further that they cannot possibly be wrong (15), whereas science regularly admits (as a strength) that it hypothesizes and offers tentative proofs; a weakness from the creationists' perspective. This, in my judgment, contributes to the current nihilistic undermining of meaning, of science, of the possibility of any sort of objective truth leading toward a destruction and a current crisis in meaning (Sarles, 1993ms1).

The Hubris of Science

Much of the reaction of Scientific Creationism is to the dogmatic and Godlike-omniscience claims that some scientific determin-

ists have made within the idea of science; a progressive attempt to control nature, thence human nature. Morris reacts bitterly to these statements (p.199):

"Through the unprecedented faculty of long-range foresight, jointly serviced and exercised by us, we can, in securing and advancing our position, increasingly avoid the missteps of blind nature, circumvent its cruelties, reform our own natures, and enhance our own values." (Muller, 1958)

"Man's unique characteristic among animals is his ability to direct and control his own evolution, and science is his most powerful tool for doing this. We are a product of two kinds of evolution, biological and cultural. We are here as a result of the same processes of natural selection that have produced all the other plants and animals; it started roughly a million years ago with our hominid tool-making ancestors." (Hoagland, 1964)

Morris responds: "This belief that man can control future evolution is simply another evidence that evolution is itself a religion." (200) Even if we could control future evolution, its course would depend heavily on value judgments = religion. To Morris, these statements are a return to Genesis 6:5, in which man has once again become wicked, his heart's thoughts only of evil, and God's vows to destroy him once again imminent. The last time, only Noah (and spouse) survived. Who will survive this time? - the paramount question of existence: surely not evolutionists, scientists, or their followers.

Morris asks: "...how can a random, impersonal, non-random process produce a complex animal possessing personal consciousness and moral principles with which to make such plans and judgments?"(p.200) Something is missing in this evolutionary story, and Morris intends to make it right!

The theory of creation of Scientific Creation is laid out in the final chapter (VIII) of Morris: *Creation According to Scripture*. There are three parts to the story of creation. To excerpt: 1) "six days of special creation"; 2) "the rebellion of man and the resultant Curse of God on all man's dominion"; 3) the world-destroying flood in the days of Noah, leaving the new world largely under the domain of natural uniformity." (p.215) Everything is to be examined and understood within this framework. God made the kinds of creatures as He wanted them to be...and they must remain this way.

Geological stratigraphy must be understood within the context of the flood. The Edenic river system does not now exist on earth, wiped out by the flood, and on, and on. All this leads to the conclusion: "...if the Bible and Christianity are true at all, the geological ages must be rejected altogether." (p.255)

As in many other outlines of religious thought, Morris' notion of Scientific Creationism takes his assumptions, texts, and beliefs quite seriously and adumbrates them at length. One must read this and his other texts to get a more complete sense for his theology. It is well thought-out and developed, if very strange sounding to those of us who live well within the modernist contexts of heliocentrism, interpretation, and a generally rational-scientific worldview, distinguishing domains of faith and reason.

Conclusion

Since the early 1980's when the legislative Bills to teach Scientific Creationism in high school (and public college) biology classes were effectively turned down in the legislatures and/or courts of the various States, the felt presence of Scientific Creationism has become less public and dramatic. But the movement goes on, and is slowly gaining a kind of power: of definition and of presence. How much power...?

In debates at most of the major universities and colleges, Duane Gish (a close colleague of Henry Morris) offers to take on any willing (scientific) evolutionist in debate. And, in the debate mode in which Gish is a very elegant rhetorician, he does quite well. Many thousands of students and faculty in higher education have witnessed such a debate, and come away from this scene no longer fully convinced that science and evolution are true in any overarching sense. Where there is a staged debate, creationism (Gish) has held its own. At the least, it influences most of its audience to be sympathetic to its right to have its ideas: at the least, on grounds of fairness. Whether the audience lessens its affections for science and scientific ideas, it seems to begin to think that there is something valid in both enterprises.

Scientific truth cannot merely dismiss Gish or scientific creationism; at least in debate form. And since most of us have accepted our personal scientific outlooks less than critically, and have become television addicts, we tend to be sympathetic, especially when we witness scientists whose dogmatism is aroused in the debate forum; i.e., the debate forum lends itself to the credibility or legitimacy of both sides having some right to be there.

Perhaps we are not critically aware of how we accept the presumptions and results of scientific thought. For example, much of the programming we frequently experience on public television, ideas and depictions of various animal species are presented within the assumptive ideas of evolution. The public discussion of astronomy (especially NASA), of geology, of satellites, of sunspots, global warming, the rise of technology, and so on, merely take science and evolutionary thought as clear and obvious.

Apparently, the immense success and mere obviousness of science seem to have allowed us to background its power over our thinking. Whether all this thinking enters into the creation-

ism-evolutionism discussion in the wider public-political arena remains unclear. Within high schools themselves, there is actually (apparently) very little teaching of evolutionary theory within biology classrooms. In this sense creationism, more generally fundamentalism, has been very effective. Most of this is directly due to the fact that the competition for textbook monies tends to drive publishers to *dumb-down* most high school texts, and to avoid topics which might be controversial.

We have become very confused about boundaries between truth, authority, celebrity, and success in this television era. In Minnesota, for example, there are moves to censor almost 100 books per year, and to remove them from public school libraries. Many of these censorship attempts are successful. That is, there are many vigilant (parental and religious) groups observing texts; many of these are fundamentalists of various persuasions; most of these oppose evolution on whatever grounds as anti-God on their face.

As stated earlier, the move to enter creationism into biology classes moved from public, legal arenas since the early 1980's and into the preparation of high school teachers, actually teaching creationism as biology. For example, Northwest College (formerly Northwest Bible College) in a Minneapolis suburb, now turns out accredited teachers, who presumably obtain positions in various school districts. There are other such colleges around the country. How far this has gone is difficult to discern.¹⁴

Probably more important is that Scientific Creationism has created a climate and context in which the fight to battle the liberal scientific establishment has found legitimation. The Christian Coalition can be assured, in its strategic thinking, that a conceptual-political *space* has been carved out for fundamentalist thought, entering whatever is the mainstream. In this sense, Morris' flood theology is less important for its specific ideas and theology, than that it creates doubt in the progressive establishment view.

It sounds serious, and, in my view, should be taken seriously. It has motivated several thorough and thoughtful studies from philosophers of science, among which is Kitcher, 1982.

Its potential politics and power for replacing democracy with a literalist theocracy is no longer a vain fantasy. In this sense, Scientific Creationism successfully opened the space for the legitimation of fundamentalist thought among our population, and seems to be growing in influence.

Its intellectual importance resides in these complicated times. It arises, in my view, whenever there is some crisis in meaning. In such times (Buber, 1965), various persons/peoples lose meaning in their lives, lack a sense of direction and self-authority. Time moves too quickly; we lose identity. Maybe it has been importantly the revolution in technology, particularly television, communication, computers (Gergen, 1991); maybe what some call the bureaucratization *of the mind*.

In such times many people look to various sources for help: ancient philosophical or religious texts, mysticism, nationalism or ethnicism, drugs, and so on. Whatever postmodernism may be, it also joins the fundamentalist attack - unwittingly and unknowingly in my observation - against science, against the so-called Enlightenment Project of scientific objectivity, even the possibility of any transcendent truth. As Nietzsche predicted last century, there has been a rise of European nihilism: a slippery slope from a simple skepticism to a skepticism about the possibility of knowledge, to cynicism, and finally to nihilism. For many persons, this acts less as critique, but more as destructive to their own quests for identity, distracting social critique and opening up space for a return to various forms of spirituality; including fundamentalisms.

Scientific Creationism is one response to this felt destruction of meaning, and of the erosion of identity. Like other returns to tex-

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tual authority, it promises truth and the safety of absolute knowledge. In the case of Scientific Creationism, it seems at the least to promise a kind of truth and authority which is at least as good and certain as that of science. In any moment of great doubt or economic depression, its theo-politics may be powerful.

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¹ Many thanks to Janis Sarles for her critical editing of this essay.

² Unspecified page references refer to Morris, 1974.

³ Most private colleges and universities in the U.S. are affiliated with some religious denomination even when they are (apparently) secular. Of course there are also many institutions of higher education which are directly connected to and administered by religious denominations: notably, perhaps, Georgetown and Notre Dame (Catholic) and Brigham Young (Mormon). Religious studies is usually a program in which courses in comparative religion are offered, with no particular direction or theology offered; no chapel or religious services held, and so on. Until Darwin (1860's) almost all U.S. universities were church related, and there was very little scientific inquiry at all. Public universities and science flourished only after that time (Metzger, 1955).

⁴ For a thoughtful, interpretive overview of this movement at that time, see Marty, 1981.

⁵ There was, indeed, such a Bill to teach Creationism introduced in 1979 in the Minnesota State Legislature. A number of us professors along with high school teachers of biology (Committees of Correspondence formed all over the country), Father Hunt of the Newman Center at the University of Minnesota, and some liberal religious leaders, gave testimony against the Bill, which was narrowly defeated in the Minnesota House of Representatives Committee on Education. Father Hunt distinguished between religious *faith* and scientific *theory* in his testimony against the passage of the Bill.

⁶ *Secular Humanism* is a name which scientific creationism has used to cover all its opponents. Whether there are actual secular Humanists in the U.S. is somewhat dubitable. The opposition movement has centered in the publications of Professor Paul Kurtz, Emeritus Philosophy at SUNY-Buffalo. He publishes two journals, *Critical Inquiry* and the *Skeptical Inquirer*, which take on all anti-scientific issues, ranging from religious fundamentalism to ESP and other

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scientific quackery. He also is the publisher of Prometheus Press whose book list reflects his positions. Others who have taken up the mantle of (secular) Humanism include the American Humanist Society, the Ethical Culture Society and its affiliated Humanist Institute, of which I am a faculty member. What sway (not very much!) Humanism has today gets its primary impetus from the anti-Humanist stance of creationism.

⁷ The use of the term, *story*, seems to be very objectionable to Scientific Creationists. This likely indicates some of the boundaries between those who understand the Bible to be inerrant and literal, and those who admit to the necessity of interpretation.

⁸ Those of us who follow Augustine's (1958) arguments and/or deal critically with the problematics of authority and interpretation reject the possibility of inerrancy on a variety of grounds; at the least, that it is difficult to understand the thinking of authors who lived in other times and cultures than our own - in their own terms. Besides, as Augustine says, there is semantics - natural and conventional signs - which need a theory (34-7, 43), dissension (37), contradictions and ambiguities (38), different languages (46), translation (48-9), etc. Indeed, the history of the origin of language study, has been motivated to a large extent by the wish to rediscover Adamic language, the so-called true language of God; a reference to Genesis 2:19 in which Adam was told the true (= Godly) name of the animals; also one of the principal texts of Scientific Creationism. "And out of the ground The Lord God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called them, that was the name thereof." (See: Hearne, 1986)

⁹ This issue arises particularly in this time, over the debate about abortion. The universalizing tendencies of Greek thought are particularly important in understanding Christian thought especially as contrasted with earlier Jewish thinking which is, I think, fairly characterized as being more existential; e.g., the Adam and Eve story is understood by most Jews as being descriptive of the experience of every pair of lovers on first finding one another naked, while the Christian re-interpretation holds the Adam and Eve story to be about the condemnation of all humans because Eve (woman) disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden (Feldman, 1968). At the time of this writing fundamentalists and the Church have joined sides over the issue of abortion: but over no other issues as far as I am aware: an uneasy coalition?

¹⁰ Fundamentalist Protestantism does not distinguish between the arenas of faith and reason. Life is based on faith, and reason is useful only to serve faith. It is my view that creationism and other forms of literalist readings of Biblical texts move us directly toward theocracy, erasing the ideas which distinguish

between Church and State, faith and reason. In this context, Fundamentalism simply has no domain of Christian Humanism.

¹¹The idea of the messianic return is that any elapsed period (1 or 2,000 years) would be as nothing, as if no time had intervened between His first and current coming to earth. All institutional and cultural history would then be as if they had never occurred.

¹²In my view, this issue surfaces just now in the context of what I calling, "Aspects of the Crisis in Meaning," a rise in nihilism, a sense of loss in identity, a wishful return to ethnicism and nationalism especially in the context of the fall of the Soviet bloc. (Sarles, 1993ms1) More literally, Morris worries that if one believes in evolution from beasts, then he will "behave as a beast, either aggressively struggling for supremacy himself or blindly following aggressive leaders." (p.iii)

¹³I do not think I overstate to suggest that the move to develop creationism - and many other fundamentalist returns to ancient texts - is driven to a large extent by the worry that existence is truly dubitable (Sarles, 1993ms2).

¹⁴It is also important to note that Morris and, increasingly, others have adopted scholarly practices in writing, footnoting, quotations, etc., making their work look very much like scholarly texts, even as they are religious tracts.

¹⁵How the entry of doubt about the Western edifice also affects the hegemony of reason and science in our lives, the questions of subjectivity and the attack on the so-called Enlightenment Project from critical theory, is also unclear. That these two movements reinforce each other is clear.

¹⁶The last presidential election of 1992, the estimate of fundamentalist Christians, more or less tied together by Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition was said to be about 8% of the U.S. population...and "they all vote," they say.