

Evolution Versus Creation

The subject of this issue of *Humanism Today* is "Science and Humanism." Obviously, not all aspects of this subject could be covered in the talks that form the basis for the articles herein. Although there is an article on evolution, there is no discussion of evolution/creation controversy. This issue is, it seems to me, one of special importance within the science and Humanism arena. This is because many of the creationist opponents of evolution view the teaching of evolution in the schools as some sort of a plot sponsored by "secular humanists." We must make it clear at this point that it is not secular humanists, but scientists themselves who are behind the teaching of the evolutionary viewpoint and against the teaching of the creationist viewpoint in the science classes of America.

The reasons for this are quite simple. Science is a discipline. As such, it has certain rules, methods and procedures that must be learned and followed. One of the central ones is "the scientific method." Anyone who presents a theory or an hypothesis in science is expected to test it using the scientific method. Any other approach is not allowed within science. The problem with creationism, as scientists see it, is that it refuses to play by the rules of science, and indeed takes a diametrically opposite approach to that required in science. Creationists are, of course, free to take any approach they want, but if they do not play by the rules of science, they should not expect that what they say will be taken seriously *as science* or be taught in science classes.

Creationism is basically a criticism of evolutionary theory. It is well and good to criticise anything in science. However, a criticism is *not* an alternative explanation. When they are pressed, the creationists will admit that they *do* have an alternative explanation. It consists (for most creationists) of an earth that is about 10,000 years old, a universal (whole earthwide) flood having occurred, and a single springing into existence of all of the major phyla of plants and animals, as the result of the actions of a creator. When *any* of these parts of the creationist model are tested by the use of the scientific method, they are shown to be *false*. Why then should any aspect of creationism be taught in the science classes of America? The answer is that it shouldn't. We do not teach the phlogiston theory of combustion (except as an historical oddity) as if it were a possible alternative explanation in physics or chemistry class. That is because the phlogiston theory has been shown to be false. In the same way, the creation model and theory has been shown to be false. The creationist position is simply an idea of origins expressed in a religious context. As such, it should be taught in religion classes as one of the many ideas of origins. A "secular humanist plot" is in no way involved, and is merely a red herring dragged in by the creationists in an attempt to obscure the fact that their idea is distinctly *not* scientific.

Gordon Stein
Editor,
Humanism Today