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Creationism Lite

Creationism comes in two flavors: strong and "lite." In Creationism Lite, God in a few memorable days synthesized earth, air, ocean, beasts, and then moved in Adam and Eve. He pronounced it good and spent Sunday with his feet up.

This is the kind of creationism that the Kansas Board of Education wants to make certain students have the chance to learn.

Consider, by contrast, Strong Creationism. In this view, God created an imponderably vast universe governed by laws so miraculous that they, not he, created us and everything else. We honor him in part by studying, with the most rigorous means we know, the mechanics and the magic of

Practically all of history's greatest scientists were creationists, of the strong variety: Galileo, Kepler, Boyle, Pascal, Newton, Faraday, Pasteur, Kelvin. Shall I go on? How about Albert E., who said: "I want to know how God created this world"? These guys rode science all the way to the limits of empiricism—then knelt at the side of their beds, bore into the Torah or took communion on Sunday.

Fast forward to today. I don't know the religion (if any) of Stuart Kauffman, but any molecular biologist who writes a book called "At Home in the Universe," about the inexplicable inevitability of life, hardly strikes me as an enemy of creationism. Dr. Kauffman notes that the birth of the first bacterium required the perfect assembly of many enzymes, each requiring the perfect assembly of many amino acids. The odds of this occurring by chance from the primordial ooze are about as great as a tornado sweeping through a junkyard and leaving behind a Boeing 747. The utter improbability of life forming by accident leads Dr. Kauffman to one conclusion: "We are the natural expressions of a deeper order."

Who created that order? Like most scientists today, Dr. Kauffman resists the leap into theology. As Karl Popper said: "It is important to realize that science does not make assertions about ultimate questions."

But that will change. It's already changing. Whether you're talking about physicists in search of the Grand Unified Theory or biologists searching for the origins of life or the computer scientists leading us into the age of "spiritual machines," science and religion will have a lot to say to each other in the years ahead, just as they did when science was called "natural philosophy."

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a paleontologist and Jesuit priest, put it this way in "The Phenomenon of Man" (1955): "After close on two centuries of passionate struggles, neither science nor faith has succeeded in discrediting its adversary. On the contrary, it becomes obvious that neither can develop normally without the other. And the reason is simple: The same life animates both. . . . Like the meridians as they approach the poles, science, philosophy, and religion are bound to converge as they draw nearer the whole."

It's hard to imagine a more stimulating dialogue. Unfortunately, there will be school kids in Kansas who won't even know the conversation is under way.

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Houses of Worship

By Thomas Petzinger Jr.



this unfolding. In a testament to the brilliance of his laws, the more we learn about them, the more we want to learn. Think about it: a system that increases in mystery in accordance with our success at demystifying it. This fills people with such awe that they're sometimes inspired to pause and say, "Wow. Thanks!"

If faith, to cite the New Testament definition, is the conviction of things unseen, which is a greater statement of faith, Strong Creationism or Creationism Lite? The Kansas decision legitimizing the latter is not an act of religious zealotry, as widely portrayed by scientists and media commentators. It's an act of religious laziness, a short-cut in faith. Tastes great, less filling.

In 1794, Charles Darwin's grandfather Erasmus, himself a great biologist, recognized the *real* miracle of creation in a book called "Zoonomia," in which he wrote: "The world itself might have been generated, rather than created; that is, it might have been gradually produced from very small beginnings, increasing by the activity of its inherent principles, rather than by a sudden evolution of the whole by the Almighty fiat. What a magnificent idea of the infinite power of the great architect! The cause of causes! Parent of parents! Ens Entium! ['Entity of all entities!']"

Imagine, the granddaddy (literally) of evolutionary biology—a creationist! But a Strong Creationist. Charles Darwin himself embraced the idea that evolution began through more than "blind chance," acknowledging "I feel compelled to look at a First Cause." Rather meekly, he noted, "I deserve to be called a Theist."