

Resolving the Evolution Controversy

Version 1.0

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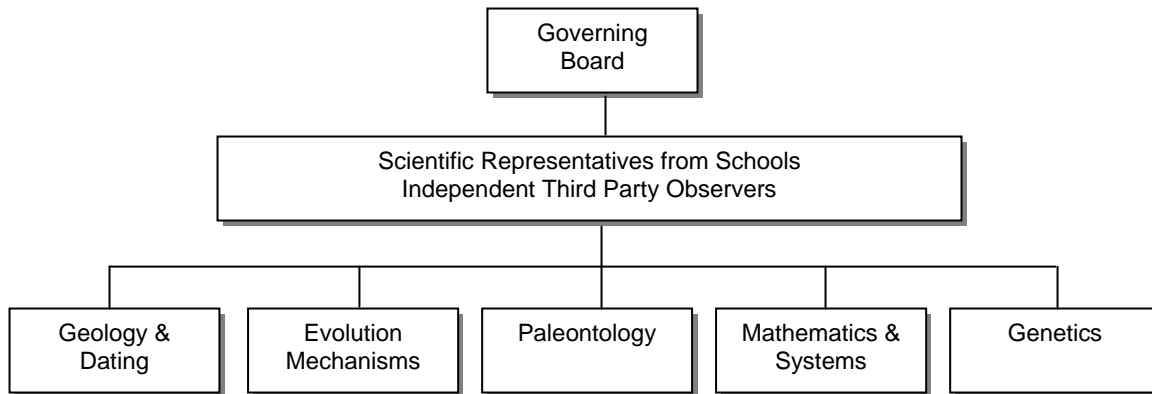
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Since the courts are such a poor choice for resolution of the evolution controversy (if indeed there will ever be a resolution), we must seek alternative venues. One possibility is to utilize the approach taken throughout the book, which is to search for areas where the various theories differ, develop tests to differentiate them, and then find objective scientists willing to perform such tests. Such an effort would require an appropriate organization capable of gaining the respect of key members of each school, as well as the public at large. It should comprise an oversight board and a committee that would handle the scientific end. The integrity and impartial dedication to truth—whatever it may turn out to be—of each of the committee members must be such that it cannot be called into question. The committee must therefore consist of members of each of the schools, as well as others who are not committed to any school and whose objectivity is respected by all. Such a board would have to operate under the auspices of a respected third party, such as the President or the Congress, who would appoint a governing board to oversee selection of committee members and the operation of the committee. The actual committee members would then be chosen by the governing board for their expertise, dedication to truth, and willingness to look objectively at all facts and consider all theories. None of the schools would have a majority vote, so that none could dominate the committee’s efforts or dictate its conclusions. While the committee’s findings would not be legally binding, they would be extremely useful in the resolution of public policy disputes that turn on the question of evolution, such as equal classroom time and funding of research. *It is our firm belief, after researching this subject in great depth, that there are ample persons of good will on all sides of the controversy, who would be willing to step up to this important responsibility.*

Still, this project will not be easy, because established bodies such as the National Academy of Sciences will immediately cry “Foul!” They would feel, with some justification, that their rightful role as the spokesman for science was being usurped, and worse, official recognition was being accorded to groups promoting pseudo-scientific ideas. But for once, at least, they should be overruled, given the cultural background to the controversy that we have discussed here, and the important public policy issues at stake.

The responsibilities of committee would be as follows:

- Understand in detail the views of all schools on major points of difference
- Determine types of experiments or tests which will differentiate schools
 - This should be done in each area affecting the controversy (information theory, genetics, etc.)
- Put out calls for grant proposals that will address the key experiments



- Board members would be able to submit grant proposals to other members of the board as well
- Analyze results and publish consensus as well as dissenting views

A possible organizational form for the committee is shown in Figure 1. The committee would receive funding from Congress, and would publish its findings on a regular basis.

Given the extremely contentious nature of the evolution dispute, and the large number of non-scientific (religious, philosophical) issues at stake, ensuring smooth operation of the committee will be a very difficult task. Difficult, but not impossible, we believe.

Figure 1. Proposed Organization for Committee on the Evolution Dispute

Together with this committee, and perhaps as part of its functioning and responsibilities, we also propose a new journal, dedicated to airing the issues raised by the evolution controversy, with all sides represented on any given topic. The journal, entitled perhaps *The Journal of Comparative Evolutionary Studies*, of which the review board would be editors, would publish articles on topics of interest written by a member or team from one school, accompanied by another article on the same topic by members of another school giving its viewpoint and critiquing that of the first school. While this function is now performed informally by some of the dueling websites, such as talkorigins.org and trueorigins.org, a more rigorous, analytical, and formalized method of managing the conflicting views would be an important public service. All articles would be peer-reviewed for use of sound arguments, use of verifiable evidence and facts, clarity of presentation, and respect for other opinions. The justification for this is the one promoted throughout this book: *the facts and arguments should be presented in the most persuasive way by the most capable advocates of all the schools. The truth will soon enough become known. No one has anything to fear from a thorough airing of the issues, facts, evidence, and arguments.* Topics for the journal are envisioned to include the following:

- Information gain by evolutionary (naturalistic) means: does it happen?
- Intermediate (transitional) forms and the fossil record: a real or pseudo-problem?
- What evidence should be left in the wake of changes in fundamental constants?
- Can Creationism and Intelligent design give rise to real research programs?
- Can hydrodynamic sorting account for observed fossil deposits?
- What is the appropriate operational definition of the taxonomic categories?

- How can real science be distinguished from pseudo-science?
- What would distinguish common descent from common design?

The emphasis in the journal would be on subjects which lend themselves to empirical testing, so as to provide a clear basis for evaluating the various schools' claims.

Undoubtedly many members of the Neo-Darwinian school will ask why they should waste their time arguing subjects about which science has already pronounced in a definitive way. Passing over the fact that there is disagreement on that matter, the real reason is that if they do not do so now, they may be facing a much less desirable situation if the culture war turns really nasty, which it well might. The Creationists are not going away, nor will they relent. On the contrary, they are becoming much more sophisticated in their communications skills, their science, and their legal and political maneuverings. Pretending that they do not exist, that there is no disagreement about evolution, and that there are no arguments against it, is not a strategy that can work in the Internet age. The moral and demographic aspects of the controversy guarantee it. The only hope is a forthright, open confrontation, in which all sides can put their best foot forward, so to speak. This will not satisfy everyone—that goal is clearly unattainable—but it will allow intelligent men and women of good will to make informed judgments about the matter, thus diffusing some of the controversy, especially among decision makers. Now, in all fairness to the Neo-Darwinians, they have very little to gain, and a great deal to lose, in this or any confrontation, for the simple reason that they are now the “king of the hill”. The best the king of the hill can ever do is to retain his position; everyone else stands to gain at his expense. Nonetheless, the king still has to fight to show that he deserves his position!