

Question:

Should U.S. schools teach “Intelligent Design”?

NO – INTELLIGENT DESIGN: A DANGEROUS DISTRACTION

by Alan I. Leshner

The controversy over teaching Intelligent Design in public school science classrooms is often cast as a clash between science and religion, between Darwin and God. But this view is simplistic and distracts us from a deeper risk: If we undermine the integrity of science education, we jeopardize our nation’s long-term economic strength.

Science is a method of understanding the natural world. It’s a problem-solving process requiring an open mind and the rule of evidence. Evidence is gathered, tested and challenged, and if it bears out, new discoveries translate into treatments for illness, disease-resistant crops and safer motor vehicles. It’s understandable, then, that scientists and science educators have been troubled to watch ID advocates trample evidence and manipulate facts.

Advocates see “gaps” in evolution science. But there are gaps in our understanding of cancer, the climate and distant galaxies, too. Not long ago, our ancestors thought the Earth was flat. It’s the job of science to fill those knowledge gaps.


They say that evolution is unproven and scientists are divided. In fact, evolution is supported by extensive evidence, from ancient fossils to living DNA. Every mainstream scientific society in the world accepts it.

For most people, science and religion are not in opposition. Many scientists are religious, and religious leaders from many faiths see no conflict. American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), America’s largest general science society, says fact and faith can happily co-exist – just not in science classrooms, lest we confuse tomorrow’s innovators about what is and isn’t science.

Advocates say ID is not about religion. Yet their 1999 “Wedge Document” pledged to promote “a science consonant with Christian ... convictions.”

U.S. District Judge John E. Jones III, a Republican, saw through the spin. In a devastating ruling against the former school board in Dover, Penn., he concluded that ID cannot be taught as science. Today, his decision creates an opportunity to focus on more urgent issues together.

Science and technology have accounted for up to 50 percent of U.S. economic growth over the past several decades; clearly, continued research is crucial to our future. But while India and China are graduating an increasingly well-educated technical workforce, interest among our students is declining.

Science classrooms are where we cultivate a spirit of discovery that benefits millions of people worldwide. The challenge is not to bring religion into those classrooms, but to teach science better than ever, with new imagination and energy. 

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