

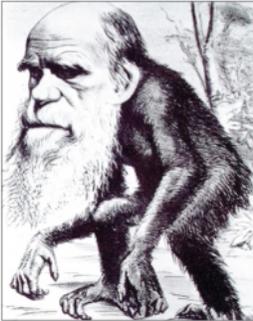
Are Evolution and Religion Compatible?

This page contains information extracted from one section of Integrating Concepts in Biology. Your task is to read the information here and answer the Integrating Questions. This sample has been shortened for this DIBS workshop.

In 2004, the school board in Dover, Pennsylvania, voted in favor of teaching intelligent design (ID) as an alternative to evolution. Parents filed a lawsuit (*Kitzmiller vs. Dover Area School District*) to prevent the teaching of religion as science. Judge Jones ruled in favor of the parents. Jones wrote a 139 page opinion explaining why ID cannot be used for science education. “The overwhelming evidence at trial established that ID is a religious view, a mere re-labeling of creationism, and not a scientific theory.” Jones continued by stating, “ID violates the centuries-old ground rules of science by invoking and permitting supernatural causation...”

When Darwin published his explanation of evolution, people felt like they were being forced to choose either religion or science. However, this choice was a false dichotomy. People may choose to believe in the God of their religion *and* accept the principle of evolution. Religion and science are two different ways of trying to understand the world. Misunderstandings often begin with a breakdown in communication. Let’s define some

key terms. According to Webster’s online dictionary, *religion* is “(1) the service and worship of God or the supernatural; 2) a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith.” Faith is a “firm belief in something for which there is no proof.” Notice that religion and faith are based on explanations outside nature for ideas that cannot be experimentally demonstrated. We cannot conduct experiments to demonstrate the existence of God or the absence of God. People of faith have complete trust in something that is beyond earthly matters.



ELSI Figure 4.1 Nineteenth century political cartoon of Charles Darwin. The concept of descent from a common ancestor was not fully understood by Victorian England, so Darwin was ridiculed as being a buffoon. From Wikipedia.

Science is, “knowledge...concerned with the physical world and its phenomena...covering general truths...as obtained and tested through scientific method.” Notice belief or faith are not used to describe science. Therefore, it is inappropriate to ask someone, “Do you believe in evolution?” Evolution is the outcome of the scientific method, and therefore it is a matter of science, not a matter of faith or religion. Instead, you should ask if someone accepts evolution based on the available data. Scientists can reject scientific conclusions and offer alternative explanations based on different interpretations of the same data.

Biologists who are deeply religious have no problem accepting evolution for the earthly explanations and believing in God to explain their spiritual world. Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and a devout Christian, wrote a book to explain how religion and science are not mutually exclusive. “Science is not threatened by God; it is enhanced,” and “God is most certainly not threatened by science.” In an interview, Collins said, “Don’t misunderstand me, it is clear that the process of evolution by natural selection over hundreds of millions of years is the ‘how’ that explains the marvelous diversity of life. But that doesn’t provide the answer to ‘why.’ I think God provides that answer.”

Parents in the Dover asked the court to determine if ID was religion or science. Jones wrote, “We conclude that the religious nature of ID would be readily apparent to an objective observer, adult or child. The goal of ID is not to encourage critical thought, but to foment a revolution which would supplant evolutionary theory with ID.” Jones is a self-described conservative Christian and a George W. Bush appointee. Jones emphatically ruled that science and religion are distinct, and faith cannot be employed to formulate scientific conclusions. Science, by definition, cannot disprove your faith. Religion will always be distinct from science and *vice versa*.

Integrating Questions

1. Compare and contrast the terms believe and accept with regards to evolution. Discuss the implications of using each word for science and education policy.
2. Should science classes address religious matters as part of the curriculum? Should religion classes address science matters?