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Title: Darwin Day 2008

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1/26/2008--There are posters all over Duquesne University this week announcing upcoming "Darwin Day", an annual event celebrating the importance of evolutionary theory and attempting to show that biology and religion are not enemies. Since Duquesne is a Catholic University, this is a powerful symbol. Federal Judge John Jones III, who decided the Dover Pennsylvania intelligent design case in 2005 that removed a biology class qualifying statement that a religiously conservative school board had inserted in the curriculum, is the featured speaker. He will be welcomed as a hero no doubt. The statement was removed after it was shown that the school board lied about its intentions and motives and the voters changed the membership of the board. Peace now reigns in Dover and Darwin is taught. What could be better?

But Darwin Day will not ask the deeper questions—the ones that thoughtful Darwinians, like Philip Kitcher in his book *Living with Darwin*, are asking. You see, evolutionary theory actually is potentially corrosive of religious belief. And there is no reason for a school board not to worry about that. No reason, that is, except for the law's insistence that government not be allowed to care that children might be pushed toward atheism. Judge Jones was right that the board did not tell the truth about their motives. But it was an unjust legal regime associated with the secular Lemon test (*Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971)) that made decent people into liars.

Darwin conflicts with religion in at least two ways. First, many people believe that the Bible is literally true. There is even now a large "Creation Museum" in Petersburg, KY, that purports to show a much younger earth and a tree of life contradicting a great deal of what biology thinks it knows about the history of life.

Conflict at this level between science and religion is irreconcilable, but that does not bother the authorities at Duquesne because the Catholic Church has come to terms with a non-literal Bible. But is it really the role of Biology class to show that fundamentalism is wrong? Why not tell the students that they can still believe the Bible? Not, of course by lying to them about science. But just by saying that science and some religions have different accounts of the history of life. Just saying enough that students won't have to resolve their religious futures in 11th grade.

The problem with such a mild statement is that the only reason to have it would be sympathy for religion. And that is what certain secularists cannot stand.

On a more fundamental level, the insistence that evolution is a random process really does conflict with our three monotheistic religions—Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The New Atheism argues precisely that. And I don't know why the Catholic Church is not worried about it. God could not have had a plan for humans if evolution might never have produced sentient life.

On this level, religious partisans have been trying to show that evolution "could not" have been random. That is the gist of intelligent design. This attack has been countered by scientists, for all I know successfully.

But science cannot prove that apparently random processes really are random. If I say that God has been pulling the strings all along, there is no way to disprove me. We are simply beyond the realm of science. Why shouldn't students be told that?

The problem here is not science or religion. The problem is American law. It is American law that says the motive to protect children from a premature leap into atheism is an improper motive. That is why decent people lie.

But, I am happy to say, American law is changing. The United States Supreme Court probably now rejects the very framework that Judge Jones applied in Dover. Judge Jones wasn't wrong—there isn't yet any other framework to apply. And certainly he was right to find dishonesty by the defendants.

But there is nothing to celebrate in the Dover case. That case represented the worst effects of the effort by a secular legal elite to move American culture away from traditional religion. That effort—the secular project—is at an end. Eventually, there will be statements in biology classes to limit the corrosion that Darwin can cause. And science will be restricted to its proper frame and will no longer be taking a side in a fight that is not its own.