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# Academic Libraries and Creation Science Resources

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## ABSTRACT

Although there is significant debate over whether or not to teach creationism alongside evolution in public schools, there has been little discussion on the role of libraries and librarians in this debate. In this article I argue that academic libraries in particular have a potentially vital role to play in that the majority of science-based research takes place in institutions of higher education; and that academic libraries have an obligation to provide empirically based creation science materials because the debate centers around science. I support my argument through a brief analysis of the institutions that subscribe to the *Creation Research Society Quarterly*, one of the only peer-reviewed journals focusing on creation science.

## Introduction

Over the last 25 years there has been a great deal of controversy over whether or not “creationism”<sup>1</sup> should be taught alongside evolution in public schools. However, there is also the less often heard challenge to libraries. Both creationists and evolutionists have weighed in on this issue. Creationists argue that libraries do not carry enough resources supporting their views (Bergman, 1996). Conversely, evolutionists claim that libraries are being unfairly “pressed to add ‘creation science’ books to their libraries” (Matsumura, 1998). As the primary keepers of knowledge and information in our society, libraries have the potential to greatly influence the outcome of this debate. However, with limited resources libraries and librarians are potentially faced with a problem: should they provide resources that support the creationist standpoint, and if so to what extent? Failing to do so could be construed as a form of censorship. Academic libraries in particular have a vital role to play, because universities are where the majority of scientific research takes place. This paper will therefore focus primarily on the responsibility of academic libraries to provide “science” based creationist materials.

## Background

Since 1968, there have been at least six major court cases involving the teaching of creationism in public schools (“Legal Background,” 2001). The most significant of these cases, *Edwards v. Aguillard*, resulted in the U.S. Supreme Court effectively banning the teaching of creationism from public schools in 1987. The Court ruled it unconstitutional to teach creationism in public schools, because creationism is founded on religious beliefs. The Court argued further that requiring creationism to be taught alongside evolution “undermined” the teaching of science (“Legal background,” 2001).

Failing in their attempt to have creationism taught in public schools, religious conservatives shifted their tactic. Public schools are now facing a new challenge – intelligent design, “the belief that living organisms are so complex that the best explanation is that they were created by an intelligent force of some kind” (Goodstein, 2005a). Proponents of intelligent design argue that unlike creationism, intelligent design is based on empirical evidence rather than Scripture (Goodstein, 2005c). Opponents, on the other hand, argue that intelligent design is just creationism under a new guise (Forrest, 2001). Regardless, proponents are challenging public schools to teach intelligent design alongside evolution. The first court case involving intelligent design occurred recently (October 2005) in Dover, Pennsylvania (Goodstein, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c).

The central arguments against creationism are fairly simple: 1) creationism is not science, and 2) there is no supporting empirical data. Opponents believe that if they can persuasively argue that creationism is actually a pseudo-science (e.g., astrology) then there is no justification to teach it alongside an established scientific theory (e.g., evolution) (Overbye, 2005). Intelligent design advocates are doing little to rebut this claim. For example, in the Dover case, the leading witness for the proponents of intelligent design, Michael Behe, claimed that “under his definition of a scientific theory, astrology would fit as neatly as intelligent design” (Goodstein, 2005c).<sup>2</sup>

The issue of the definition of science is central to this debate. The primary justification for the Supreme Court’s 1987 ruling was that creationism is not an established scientific theory, but a religious belief. This is the reason why creationists are taking a different approach (i.e., intelligent design) which they argue is *not* founded on religion. Opponents, on the other hand, claim that intelligent design is

<sup>1</sup>Although a number of terms are frequently used interchangeably with regard to the creationist perspective, the differences are significant enough to warrant explanation. “Creationism” is the general claim that the Judeo-Christian God created the universe and life *ex nihilo*. “Creation science” is the attempt to justify the creationist perspective scientifically. “Intelligent design” (discussed below) is a more general claim, detached from any specific religious context. Proponents of intelligent design argue that the universe must have been designed by an intelligent being rather than chance alone. In addition, there is an explicit attempt to support intelligent design with empirical evidence. Recognizing these distinctions the author will use the more general terms “creationism” or “creationist” throughout the paper (Pennock, 2002).

<sup>2</sup>Note that because so much of the debate has centered on whether or not creationism is a “science,” many of the key players involved in the debate are philosophers of science (Overbye, 2005).

just another variation of creationism, and “is a Trojan horse for religion in the public schools” (Goodstein, 2005b).

Although advocates of creationism are admittedly short on scientific evidence, they have argued that this shortage is due primarily to a lack of support for alternative research programs on the origins of life (Johnson, 2001). Paul Johnson (1993), one of the leading proponents of creationism, argues that creation science entails a totally different worldview, or paradigm, with an entirely different set of assumptions and presuppositions.<sup>3</sup> He claims that if the scientists investigating the origin of life began with the assumption that a Creator or “Designer” exists; then the product of their science would be radically different. That is, beginning with the assumption that an Intelligent Designer exists would yield scientific evidence of “design” in the universe.

In some sense, Johnson and his fellow creationists have a point. Thomas Kuhn (1970), the eminent philosopher-physicist, argues that the nature of science is not nearly as straightforward as many believe. The idea that scientists follow an established scientific method that generates facts about the physical world is completely erroneous, according to Kuhn. He compares what he calls “normal science” to puzzle solving. Most scientists operate under an overarching worldview or paradigm<sup>4</sup> and attempt to fill in the gaps within this particular paradigm. According to Kuhn, this kind of science follows a logical order or method to some extent. However, Kuhn is most interested in explaining the nature of the shift from one paradigm to another which he claims is not rational or logical. One of many examples that Kuhn (1957) provides is the transition from a Ptolemaic to a Copernican universe. He claims that there was no “revolution” per se, but rather a subtle shift over almost a 100 year period. This shift was brought about by a change of allegiance among the leading astronomers of the day (16<sup>th</sup> century), and not on the discovery of new scientific facts. Most significantly, without this change in allegiance among the astronomers no corresponding shift in paradigms would have occurred regardless

of the truth or the facts of the science (i.e., astronomy).

Kuhn’s theory of scientific change is a useful lens for analyzing the creation-evolution debate. Creationists argue that given enough time and resources they could fill in the gaps of their theory/worldview/paradigm (Johnson, 2001). Obviously, no one knows whether or not this is the case unless given the opportunity – hence the importance of libraries and librarians. As the gate-keepers of knowledge and information, librarians play a crucial role in whether or not alternative paradigms can ever emerge. The resources that libraries provide (or fail to provide) *could* determine whether or not a new scientific paradigm, such as intelligent design, emerges.

If one accepts Kuhn’s conception of science, then libraries – particularly academic libraries – are faced with a decision that could have significant consequences, that is, whether or not to expend limited funding on resources that support a minority.<sup>5</sup> The type of resources necessary are those that could be used to enhance or develop research related to the scientific (i.e., empirical) support of the creationist paradigm. The majority of larger libraries carry general resources related to the creation-evolution debate. For example, the *Library Journal* recently published an article listing a number of web resources related to the creation-evolution debate (Aycock, 2001). Even though these resources are important from a sociological perspective, they are of little value in terms of developing a *scientific* research program.

One problem is that few empirically based resources exist to support creationism. The small number of books that written from a scientific perspective are directed more toward the layperson than the scientist.<sup>6</sup> As discussed above, this can be viewed in two ways. Opponents of creationism argue that the lack of empirical evidence proves that it is not a valid science (Pennock, 2001). Proponents, on the other hand, claim that this begs the question; that is, creationists have not been given the opportunity to develop a research program (Johnson, 2001).

*As the primary keepers of knowledge and information in our society, libraries have the potential to greatly influence the outcome of this debate.*

<sup>3</sup>Johnson distinguishes between “scientific naturalism” and “theistic realism.” Proponents of the latter claim that supernatural phenomena can explain some natural phenomena; the former rejects this claim (Johnson, 2001).

<sup>4</sup>Kuhn (1970) distinguishes between what he calls a “paradigm” and a “theory.” The former is much broader in scope, and according to Kuhn frames the theories in which scientists practice.

<sup>5</sup>Minority in the sense of the scientific community.

<sup>6</sup>See for example, Gish (1995), or Behe (1996).

Although scant, resources that could be used to support a viable scientific research program do exist. In fact, a peer reviewed scientific journal has been in existence since 1964, *Creation Research Society Quarterly* (CRSQ). However, it appears that very few academic libraries actually carry this journal. A random survey to determine which academic libraries carry CRSQ yielded the following table (“College & University Libraries,” n.d.):

Table 1  
**Institutions Carrying CRSQ**

State (Region)	Number of Institutions Carrying CRSQ	Number of Four-Year Academic Institutions with no Religious Affiliation Carrying CRSQ
Georgia (Southeast)	8	0
New York (Northeast)	6	1
Texas (South)	18	0
Minnesota (Midwest)	10	0
Arizona (Southwest)	8	2
Washington (Northwest)	3	0
Colorado (Mountain)	0	0
California (West)	28	1

Note that although Table 1 is not comprehensive, an attempt was made to examine states from each region of the country. Although one might expect to find better representation in the more conservative regions of the country (e.g., the south), this is not the case. As Table 1 indicates, extremely few four-year academic institutions with no religious affiliation carry CRSQ, regardless of the geographic region. I’m not suggesting that scientific research never occurs at religious affiliated academic institutions, but clearly the vast majority of research takes place at larger public and private institutions.<sup>7</sup> This is obviously due in large part to the fact that most viable scientific research programs require significant funding, which is generally funneled to scientists working at research institutions.

Most significantly, this table seems to demonstrate that academic libraries are not committed to providing empirically based resources that support creationism.<sup>8</sup> CRSQ is the leading peer-reviewed journal in the field of creation science and extremely few

academic institutions carry it. Of course, there are undoubtedly various reasons for this;<sup>9</sup> nevertheless, the fact remains and the consequences are significant enough to warrant further discussion.

## Analysis

As stated, if academic libraries fail to provide the resources that support creationism, then most likely a viable scientific research program will fail to develop. One might reply, so what? However, failing to provide proponents of creationism with the necessary resources only furthers the controversy by keeping it in the realm of the speculative. Either the creationists have a valid scientific theory or they do not. The irony is that one could argue that the best way to diffuse the creationist’s agenda is to provide them with all the resources they need and see if they can establish legitimate scientific data.

In addition, an argument could be made to support funding creationist resources in academic libraries from a sociological perspective. Somewhat surprisingly, 64 percent of the population of the United States does not oppose the teaching of creationism alongside evolution in public schools (Goodstein, 2005a). Certainly, the majority opinion is not necessarily true.<sup>10</sup> In a democratic society, however, the majority opinion should at least be acknowledged and given an opportunity to prove itself. For this to occur, the necessary resources must be available. This is especially true in the case of publicly funded libraries, including public academic libraries.

## Conclusion

My perspective on this debate is shaped largely by a background in Science and Technology Studies (STS).<sup>11</sup> STS has its origins in the work of Robert Merton, a sociologist of science, and Thomas Kuhn, a philosopher of science (discussed above). The prevailing theoretical view of science that emerges from STS is social constructivism – that is, the view that science, like all social institutions, is a product of a particular social-historical context.

<sup>7</sup>The majority of the institutions carrying CRSQ would be considered “Bible” colleges and seminaries, most of which the author has never heard of.

<sup>8</sup>The author admits that this is an assumption; however, it is one based on some degree of empirical evidence.

<sup>9</sup>And I agree that the most likely reason is lack of demand; but I also wonder if scientists opposed to creationism are even aware that such a journal exists.

<sup>10</sup>In fact, the opposite is more likely the case.

<sup>11</sup>I have a doctorate in Science and Technology Studies.

Additionally, anyone familiar with the history of science knows that scientific theories change overtime. Even within the theory of evolution the actual means or mechanism of speciation has been hotly debated since Darwin (Dennett, 1995). Natural selection – Darwin’s theory of speciation – has actually come in and out of vogue a number of times since he first proposed the idea in 1859 (Bowler, 1984). Not surprisingly, creationists have often used this to argue that evolution is not an established theory, and that creationism is just as viable (Johnson, 2001).

With this approach I believe the creationists are to some degree undermining their own position. On the one hand, creationists want to use science to support their view, but on the other hand, they want to denigrate the prevailing opinion in science (i.e., evolution science). The latter approach could be supported from an STS/Kuhnian standpoint – arguing that theory/paradigm can never really be “established.” The problem is that creationists want to use science to support their “theory.” They should take either one approach or the other – that is, attempt to undermine science itself and elevate the role of faith, or concede that science does generate sound theories and then attempt to support their position with science. If creationists admit the latter, then it seems that they would have to concede that some theories have more scientific legitimacy than others. And with regard to the issue of what to teach in public schools that textbooks must be limited to the most legitimate theories.

However, creationists are clearly not attempting to dismantle science in general. They concede the necessity of generating sound scientific data to support their views, and are making every effort to do so. Since resources in this area are scant, it would take a small amount of funding on the part of academic libraries to support the creationist agenda. And given that creationists have chosen a scientific approach, I believe that libraries – particularly academic libraries – have a responsibility to provide whatever resources necessary to aid creationists. †

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