



Creationist Peer Review

Finally, creationists have a peer-reviewed journal. Answers in Genesis (www.answersingenesis.com), the same nonsensical outlet that has given us Ken Ham's Creation Museum, recently launched a "peer reviewed" "technical" journal, called, of course, *Answers Research Journal*. The idea, as we learn from the journal's Web page, is to provide an outlet for "interdisciplinary scientific and other relevant research from the perspective of the recent Creation [*sic*] and the global Flood within a biblical framework." See, apparently "there has been a pressing need for such a journal," because "people want to know they can trust what is published on the Internet," and Answers in Genesis "can give you absolute assurance that the papers we will be publishing in *Answers Research Journal* are of the highest scientific and theological standard." Of course, a high theological standard is a bit of an oxymoron, but let's not quibble on the details.

The editor of this prestigious new arrival on the scientific scene is Andrew A. Snelling, who is so unknown and apparently insecure that he puts "B.Sc. (Hons)" after his name, before "Ph.D." (in geology, from the University of Sydney). The esteemed (by some) Snelling has published an astounding twenty-four technical papers in thirty years of research, an average that would not get him tenure at the local community college. Accordingly, in 1998 Snelling had to content himself with joining the "faculty"

of the Institute for Creation Research in California. Nevertheless, in the same year he won a whopping three prizes at the Fourth International Conference on Creationism for three technical papers he submitted (my hunch is that there were

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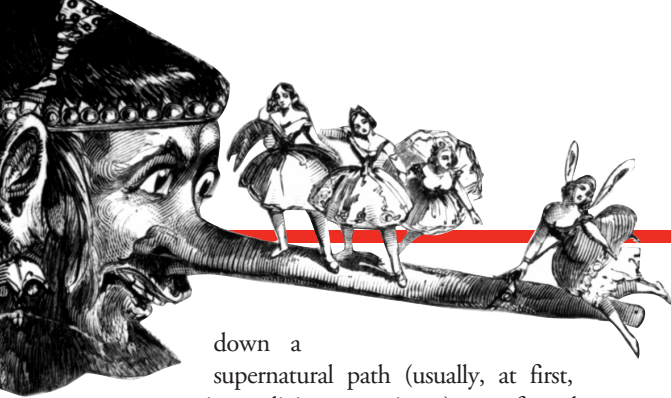
only three papers submitted to the conference, but I could be wrong). We are not told who is on the editorial board of *ARJ*; perhaps the distinguished scientists who agreed to oversee the peer-review process were afraid of losing tenure at their institutions. The downside of putting secular fascists in charge of American universities!

I simply couldn't wait to start reading

about all these new, exciting scientific discoveries informed by a Christian perspective, and I wasn't disappointed. The first volume of *ARJ* features the proceedings of the Microbe Forum, where we learn that "for many years the roles of microbes as part of God's wonderful design have been neglected. Perhaps it is because many people associate microbes as the cause of death, disease, and suffering." I think these many people have a point: what the heck was God thinking? Well, abstracts presented at the Forum begin to tell us, as titles include such gems as a "Creationist Model of Bacterial Mutations," "Creation Microbiology and the Origin of Disease," the highly technical-sounding "Viral/Bacterial Attenuation and Its Link to Innate Oncolytic Potential: Implications of the Perfect Original Creation in the Beginning," and my favorite: "Pathogenicity Tools and Mycotoxins: In the Beginning or after the Fall?"

The rest of the first issue of *ARJ* is not to be neglected either. For instance, Massimo Pigliucci is professor of evolutionary biology and philosophy at Stony Brook University in New York, a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and author of *Denying Evolution: Creationism, Scientism and the Nature of Science*. His essays can be found at www.rationallyspeaking.org.

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“SUPERNATURAL” IS NOT SO SUPER

down a supernatural path (usually, at first, into religious experience), we often abandon our natural curiosity and sense of wonder about the natural world. Any residual delight is channeled in a new direction. Any awe one might still feel about the natural is simply a shadow of the far more wonderful, more satisfying supernatural.

Too often, the result of our innate, naturalist attitude being suppressed, subordinated, or substituted by the supernatural attitude is the atrophy of objectivity, science, and reason. We become suspicious of those who still hold on to naturalism. We fear what we refuse to understand (stem cell research, gene therapy, genetically modified food sources). Accepting the supernatural (alternative medicine, crop circles, virgin births) is easier—and often more fun. Why investigate, why aim for critical understanding, why reason, why think? More generally, why risk uncertainty when absolute certainty is so close at hand? The alternative is a

adult lot less work, and isn't everyone else (except those narrow-minded scientists and fundamentalist atheists) doing it?

Face it, the supernatural attitude is not natural. It's nonsense based on nonsense. And it's often dangerous. As Voltaire wrote, "Anyone who can make you believe nonsense can make you commit atrocities." The atrocities committed in the name of the supernatural, especially in its many religious guises, are legion. Religion, not atheism, does indeed have lots of splainin' to do—unfortunately, explanation is not its strong point. □

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in "Microbes and the Days of Creation," by Alan Gillen (predictably, from Liberty University, the fundamentalist college founded by Jerry Falwell), we learn that "ongoing research, based on the creation paradigm, appears to provide some answers to puzzling questions," such as "where do microbes fit into the creation account? . . . Were they created along with the rest of the plants and animals in the first week of creation, or were they created later, after the Fall?" In a show of pure scientific balance, the author admits that "the answers to these questions are not explicit in Scripture, so the answers cannot be dogmatic." Gillen ends up postulating that "microbes were created as 'biological systems' with plants, animals, and humans on multiple days [during creation week]," because as we well know, "God made His creation fully mature, and complex forms fully formed." Amen.

No need to go any further with this nonsense, as good as it is for a chuckle or two. The real question is: why? Why

do creationists feel compelled to have a "science" museum, a peer-reviewed journal, or, in the case of the Discovery Institute Intelligent Design think tank, a recently established (but very secretive) research laboratory? Could it be science envy? Indeed, even more broadly, why do creationists feel compelled to argue their case at all? Is faith not enough? When I was living in the southern U.S., it often happened that someone would engage me in an impromptu debate. They were certain that I would see the light of (their) overwhelming reason and renounce Darwin on the spot. When instead I managed to put them on the defensive, they would play with evident pride the faith trump card: "I believe in spite of evidence." OK, fair enough (if more than a bit moronic), but then why did you just try to argue with me? Arguing, teaching, and doing research means that one accepts the rule of rational, evidence-based discourse. And yet creationists want to have it both ways and promptly retreat behind the all-encompassing shield of faith when things get rough.

I suspect that creationists, deep down, have internalized the much-despised, secular ethos that one must have sound reasons for one's positions, and they sense that rationality isn't on their

side. They seek respectability through fake museums and peer-reviewed journals because they know that the Middle Ages are over, and just shouting one's faith in a god is not going to cut it anymore (modern society's spurn of stoning and burnings at the stake doesn't help either). Indeed, the very progression seen during the twentieth century—from the Scopes to the Dover trials, from young Earth creationism pretending to keep evolution out of public schools entirely to so-called "intelligent design" (which accepts a lot of science, including natural selection) begging for a bit of classroom time—is a path of constant retreat away from biblical literalism, inching ever closer to modern science. The most advanced of the creationist ilk, the ID supporters, have progressed intellectually to the early nineteenth century (after Paley but before Darwin), while young earth creationists are still trying to come to terms with the Enlightenment. Perhaps if we wait another century or two they'll enter early twentieth-century science and make peace with Darwin. Now, that would be a miracle to behold. □