V1 Chapter 1 Sidebar

Debating Evolution

The advent of Darwin's theory of evolution was far from the beginning of what has been a multi-century tussle between different systems of truth. Indeed, this is part of an ongoing collision between different sources of knowledge and paradigms. On the one side were the world's religions (not just Christianity), with their revealed sources of information. On the other was a growing body of scientific information based upon observation, questioning, research, and testing of evidence. Growing scientific knowledge about matters such as nature of the solar system, the size of the universe, and age of the earth had brought about debate and the occasional burning at the stake for hundreds of years prior to the publication of *Origin of Species* in 1859. Darwin's book not only reinforced the scientific perspective on the age of the earth, but also took the then-radical stand that living organisms had changed considerably over the course of millions of years. Rather than being created by a divine being as the vast majority of religions suggested.

It didn't take long for Darwin's work to bring controversy. In 1860 the Oxford University Museum hosted a debate pitting the biologist Thomas Huxley (who would publish *Man's Place in Nature* in 1863) against the bishop of Oxford. Perhaps one of the most famous confrontations over evolution took place in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925. The debate took the form of a trial which was itself a result of a young substitute biology teacher, John Scopes, who had broken a new Tennessee law, the Butler Act, which made it illegal "for any teacher in any of the Universities, Normals and all other public schools of the State which are supported in whole or in part by the public school funds of the State, to teach any theory that denies the Story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from

a lower order of animals." Scopes was found guilty at the end of the trial. The Butler Act remained law in Tennessee until it was overthrown following a lawsuit by another teacher, Gary L. Scott, sued for reinstatement after he was dismissed from his job for breaking the law.

While the teaching of Evolution slowly became more common, particularly in the industrialized world, over the course of the late twentieth century, there were still numerous challenges to this perspective on the history of life. During 1990s and early 2000s, numerous Christian groups argued that schools should teach "intelligent design," a perspective which argues that life on earth is simply too complex to have developed without the aid of a divine being of supreme intelligence. Lawsuits brought by pro–creation science groups resulted in laws requiring "equal treatment" of different perspectives on biological history. Critics of this "balance" pointed out that such an approach gave credence only to the biblical story of creation, and failed to present other religious models of human and animal origins. In response to a Kansas decision in 2005 to offer the teaching of intelligent design as an alternative to evolution, Bobby Henderson proposed that the schools must also offer equal time to a version of religious creation he himself created, which involved a deity dubbed the "Flying Spaghetti Monster," which not only created the universe, but also has a soft spot for pirates. Remarkably, the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (the followers of which call themselves Pastafarians) has spread worldwide. We're not sure what this means . . . other than the fact that humans are certainly a kooky bunch.

In 2007, Ken Ham, an Australian-born Christian who adheres to a "young earth" perspective on history (arguing that the world was created in a single act by God roughly 6,000

years ago) opened a 75,000-square-foot Creation Museum in northern Kentucky. In 2014 the museum hosted a debate on Evolution and Creation Science pitting Ham against Bill Nye (the "Science Guy"). We're obviously not yet done with this controversy.