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Dictionary of Science and Creationism

THE BOOK

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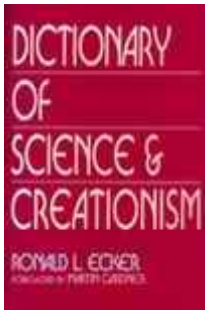
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A MUST READ

Dictionary of Science and Creationism *by* Ronald L. Ecker. Foreword by Martin Gardner. References, Index, Cloth, 6" x 9".
Prometheus Books, 59 John Glenn Drive, Amherst, New York 14228-2197, USA. or . Publication Date 1990. 263 pages, Category: Reference, ISBN 0-87975-549-0. Price $50.00
Official site of this book: Official site: http://www.prometheusbooks.com/catalog/book_605.html



The clock struck five, it was time for evening tea. Soon I was having a candid discussion with my grandfather on creation, evolution and the role of almighty. Quite a cliché, but even hours on the subject prove futile. The next day I was discussing the same issue with Prof. Aggrawal when he gave me this uniquely titled book "Dictionary of Science & Creationism" by Sir Ronald L.Ecker. The beautiful hardback cover appealed to me. I took this book to my daily evening tête-à-tête. I gave this 263 page masterpiece to my grandfather, it sort of brought order amidst the confusion.

It is easy to find details on the topic of creationism, the two cults namely the religious and the scientific have their own theories, all neatly showcased. There are volumes on the intricacies of the "Big Bang theory" and even more complex is the tale of "Adam and Eve". The book gains peerless stature because of its simplicity and ease. Basic premise of being a dictionary is to give facts about a word or subject, and this book fulfills the criteria to perfection. It gives all the facts whether scientific or religious about the word in question. One could argue to the natural bias that an author would have towards one theory, he could be inclined towards the scientific community or could be a holy sage. However, Mr. Ecker has done a fine job. There is both scientific theory as well as religious significance of every word. Also, the range of words is wide I was able to find "Noah's ark" and "Peking man". Further the whole book is thoroughly cross-referenced and indexed. On the whole it's a good dictionary on this controversial topic.

This dictionary is for everyone, right from school-goers to professionals. Anyone having a mental debate on any aspect of related to the creation of life on this planet, this is a book for you.

Excerpts:

There are a number of references and cross-references (words in UPPER CASE point to cross references) in each entry in this dictionary. If one follows each cross-reference, he would end up reading the whole dictionary. The concepts are explained in easy-to-read format. The following excerpts from the book would illustrate how Ecker explains his concepts. On pages 195-6, he explains the rather difficult concept of *transitional form* as below. One can see, how easily the concept is explained:

TRANSITIONAL FORM

Any past LIFE form that is intermediate between, or has mixed characteristics of, two groups of organisms in the FOSSIL RECORD, thus constituting evidence of one group evolving from another. Creationists persistently claim that there are no transitional forms in the fossil record. It is true that transitional forms are comparatively rare, partly because the odds are strong against any dead organism becoming fossilized. It is also a widely held view that many if not most new species arise in small, geographically isolated populations; the new species then appear suddenly in the fossil record upon extending their ranges, while the short-lived intermediate forms are unlikely to be preserved as fossils (see PUNCTUATED EQUILIBRIA). It should also be noted that it is the practice of taxonomists - those who classify fossils (see TAXONOMY) - to place a fossil in one distinct group or another, there being no transitional group in between. This is done for convenience and does not deny (though unfortunately it may hide) a form's transitional nature.

There are nevertheless all sorts of transitional forms in the fossil record to belie the creationist argument that they do not exist. They exist not only at the species level (creationists consider these only "variant forms of the same basic kind") but between major groups: There are intermediates between FISH and AMPHIBIAN (Ichthyostega), amphibian and REPTILE (Seymouria), reptile and

MAMMAL (the mammal-like reptiles), reptile and BIRD (see ARCHAEOPTERYX), extinct ape forms and MAN (see AUSTRALOPITHECINES). But creationists quibble to no end, their basic argument, as paraphrased by biologist Kenneth Miller, being that "the intermediates are not intermediate enough." The creationists consider the reptile - bird intermediate Archaeopteryx, for example, to be "100 percent bird" because it had wings and feathers and flew, when in fact Archaeopteryx was basically a flying, feathered reptile. What creationists, challenge evolutionists to show them, it seems, is a "perfect 10" transitional form, exactly halfway between, say, fish and amphibian. But no such "fishibian," says the INSTITUTE FOR CREATION RESEARCH (ICR), has ever been found in the fossils.

The creationists through such arguments exhibit no understanding of the nature of transitional forms. There is no general conversion of all parts of a transitional form at the same time; GENETICS would not produce a smooth gradation of all features of an intermediate such as the creationists with their fishibian require; rather, it is to be expected that the characteristics of an intermediate will be mixed, a pattern called mosaic evolution. Nor does a fossil form need to be in the direct line of descent between two groups to be considered transitional. Archaeopteryx, for example, was doubtless not the direct ancestor of birds but rather one of that ancestor's cousins. Similarly the fishlike amphibian Ichthyostega was probably a dead end collateral branch of the fish-to-amphibian transition. The point is that a cousin of an ancestor is the more likely paleontological find, given the multiple splitting off of species and the general spottiness of the fossil record, and is evidence enough that a transition occurred.

The fact is, however, that not even a direct ancestral "10" would make any difference to creationists. No such form could be accommodated to their preconceived belief system. Thus creationist leader Henry Morris states that even the discovery of a fossil intermediate between men and apes - Morris believes that no such intermediate has been found, the australopithecines being "merely extinct species of apes" - would not be proof of human EVOLUTION. "An extinct ape," says Morris, "could have certain manlike features and still be an ape," and a man could have some apelike features and "still be a man." In other words, no conceivable ape-man transitional form could be anything other than either true ape or true man. Creationists simply cannot allow transitional forms to exist, for to do so would be to admit that evolution has occurred.

Many of us are aware of the famous "Monkey trial" or the "Scopes Trial", which occurred in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925. The book gives not only this trial, but at least three other similar trials (involving the tussle between scientists and creationists on what should or should not be taught to the youngsters). These are *Edwards v. Aguillard, Epperson v. Arkansas* and *McLean v. Arkansas*. The cases are hauntingly reminiscent of similar struggles that go on in India, although none here has advanced to the court stage. This is how the book describes the first of these trials (pages 72-73):

EDWARDS v. AGUILLARD

The case in which the U.S. Supreme Court in 1987 ruled unconstitutional a 1981 Louisiana "Balanced Treatment" law requiring the teaching of creation "science" in public schools whenever EVOLUTION is taught. The statute, said the court, sought "the symbolic and financial support of government to achieve a religious purpose" and thus violated the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution prohibiting an establishment of religion. The ruling brought an end to Christian fundamentalist attempts, begun in the late 1970s, to have the teaching of "scientific" creationism legislated into public school curricula. The ruling did not address the broader question, however, of

whether any public school teaching of CREATIONISM is unconstitutional. Thus while Edwards v. Aguillard is a landmark decision in creation/evolution litigation (see also EPPERSON v. ARKANSAS and McLEAN v. ARKANSAS), it is probably not the last one.

The legislative history of the Louisiana law is instructive in terms of the nonscientific motives and methods of the creationists who instigated and supported it. The bill was drafted by Paul Ellwanger, a South Carolina respiratory therapist who headed an organization called Citizens for Fairness in Education. Ellwanger had earlier drafted an Arkansas "Balanced Treatment" law enacted in March 1981 (see McLEAN v. ARKANSAS). "I view this whole battle," Ellwanger told a Louisiana legislator, "as one between God and anti-God forces". The Louisiana bill was introduced by State Senator Bill Keith, whose twelve-year-old son had, in Keith's words, been ridiculed and harassed by a substitute SCIENCE teacher at school for his creationist views. Extensive testimony in favor of the bill was provided by a group called the Pro Family Forum, which presented to the legislature a written Summary of Scientific Evidence for Creation. This evidence included an explanation of GEOLOGY in terms of "a worldwide flood" (see FLOOD, NOAH'S), the "fixity" of original ANIMAL and PLANT "kinds" (see TAXONOMY), and a "relatively recent inception" of the EARTH. The Pro Family Forum also identified seven books that it considered appropriate to help teachers prepare to teach creation "science." Six of the books - were publications of the INSTITUTE FOR CREATION RESEARCH (ICR), which believes, in the words of spokesman Ken Ham, that the biblical book of Genesis "must be taken literally" and "is foundational to true science, true history, true philosophy, etc." The seventh book was a BIOLOGY text by the ICR's Harold Slusher and ICR Technical Advisory Board member John N. Moore. In 1977 the Indiana Superior Court held that the purpose of Slusher and Moore's book, which had been adopted for public school use by the Indiana Textbook Commission, was "the promotion and inclusion of fundamentalist Christian doctrines in the public schools".

Since it was constitutionally essential to avoid any religious or biblical references (direct or indirect) in its language, the Louisiana bill as passed did not contain an actual definition of creation "science." Instead, it contained this tautologous statement: "Creation-science means the scientific evidences for creation and inferences from those scientific evidences". It was "a bold trick," says biologist William J. Bennetta: "a law that promoted the teaching of 'creation-science' but refused to say what 'creation science' was."

Upon passage, the law was promptly challenged in a suit against Governor David Treen and other officials by a group of educators, religious leaders, and parents (Aguillard v. Treen). In 1985 a district court ruled that the statute was unconstitutional, a judgment affirmed that same year by a federal appeals court. The defendants then appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, where the case was retitled Edwards v. Aguillard, appellant Edwin Edwards being then-Louisiana governor and Don Aguillard, the original namesake plaintiff and now an appellee, being a public school teacher.

Ecker then goes on to describe the case in full detail. Readers interested in these and other cases would do well to read these cases in full from this book.

-Pranav Jain

Dr. Pranav Jain is currently an intern practicing at one of the most reputed hospitals in New Delhi - the Lok Nayak Hospital. He has completed his graduation in medicine and surgery from the prestigious Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi. Dr. Jain likes spending most of his time with his PC. Reading and writing are his main hobbies. His special area of



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-Editor-in-Chief