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Guest columnist

## Judging Darwin and God

**By David Klinghoffer**

*Special to The Times*

Issuing theological statements isn't normally thought of as the job of a federal judge. Yet, this week when U.S. District Court Judge John E. Jones III released the first federal ruling on intelligent design, there was at the core of his written decision an unambiguously theological ruling: that evolution as formulated by Charles Darwin presents no conflict with the God of the Bible.

Quite apart from what one thinks of his legal decision, what should we make of his theology?

In brief, Jones ruled that disparaging Darwinian evolutionary theory in biology class violates the separation of church and state. The context is *Kitzmiller v. Dover*, a case dealing with the question of whether a school district may teach about an alternative theory, intelligent design (ID). The latter finds hallmarks of a designer's work in the evidence of nature.

Wrote Jones, "[M]any of the leading proponents of ID make a bedrock assumption which is utterly false. Their presupposition is that evolutionary theory is antithetical to a belief in the existence of a supreme being and to religion in general. Repeatedly in this trial, [p]laintiffs' scientific experts testified that the theory of evolution... in no way conflicts with, nor does it deny, the existence of a divine creator."

As a matter of fact, Jones is wrong. Darwinism is indeed "antithetical to a belief in the existence of a supreme being and to religion in general." There are three reasons for this, and you don't have to be a theologian to grasp the point.

First, consider the views on religion from leading Darwinists themselves. Oxford biologist Richard Dawkins, the most distinguished of modern Darwin advocates, writes that "faith is one of the world's great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate."

In his book "Darwin's Dangerous Idea," Daniel Dennett, of Tufts University, condemns conservative Christians for, among other things, "misinforming [their] children about the natural world" and compares such a religion to a wild animal: "Safety demands that religions be put in cages, too — when absolutely necessary."

Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg, at the University of Texas, declares, "I personally feel that the teaching of modern science is corrosive of religious belief, and I'm all for that."

At the University of Minnesota, biologist P.Z. Myers, a bulldog for Darwin, writes about how he

wishes he could use a time machine to go back and eliminate the biblical patriarch Abraham: "I wouldn't do anything as trivial as using it to take out Hitler."

And so on. These are just a few examples but the bottom line is evident: Not all Darwinists, including the most famous and admired, share Judge Jones' view that Darwin and God may coexist peacefully.

Second, and more fundamentally, Darwinism and religious faith begin from antithetical metaphysical assumptions. In "The Origin of Species," Darwin's working premise is that God has no role in the unfolding of the history of life. In view of this belief, which he never states or defends but simply assumes, Darwin goes on to detail his theory about natural selection operating on random variation. It is only in the absence of a supreme being working out his will in the evolution of life that we would even undertake Darwin's search in the first place. That was a search for a purely materialistic explanation of how complex organisms arise.

As Darwin himself clarified in his correspondence, "I would give absolutely nothing for the theory of natural selection if it requires miraculous additions at any one stage of descent."

Religion, by contrast, does not assume that material reality is all there is.

This may be why, third and finally, thinkers who have tried to assert the compatibility of God and Darwin invariably end up changing the meaning of one or the other. Those, for example, who say that God may operate through the medium of Darwinian evolution have resorted to a logical fallacy. Again, the whole purpose of Darwin's theory is to discover a model by which life could have evolved without a need for God. Anyone asserting a full-bodied Darwinism has, by definition, rendered God superfluous and irrelevant.

The comforting thought articulated by Judge Jones, that we may have both our God and our Darwin, doesn't stand up to scrutiny, as some of the fiercer Darwinists themselves evidently recognize.

What this says about the public-policy question — What may be taught in schools? — should be clear enough. Whether children are taught materialism (Darwin), or an openness to what transcends nature (intelligent design), they are being taught not merely science but a philosophy about life and existence itself.

The idea that it is constitutional to expose young people to one such worldview, but not lawful to introduce them to another, is not really education. It is indoctrination.

*David Klinghoffer of Mercer Island is a columnist for the Jewish Forward, a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute, and the author most recently of "Why the Jews Rejected Jesus: The Turning Point in Western History" (Doubleday).*

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