

Re: Classroom Topics

May 6, 2005

Dear Editor,

Robert Williamson writes (5/4/2005) that "faith, both theism and materialism" should be kept out of the classroom. I disagree. It is vital that students understand the assumptions of both of these belief systems. Therefore these ideas should be discussed in classrooms, just not in science classrooms. Theistic beliefs like intelligent design (the belief that any biological complexity not currently explained is due to a supernatural intelligence) and materialism (the belief that supernatural beings do not exist) are both unprovable propositions in science. The former is unprovable because we have no way to distinguish between what we haven't investigated sufficiently in practice and what is unexplainable in principle. The latter is unprovable because science cannot demonstrate a negative claim.

What is missing in appeals to faith is an appreciation that there is a difference between the methods of science (which only allows natural explanations because only material observations can be reliably verified) and the philosophies of materialism (which indeed is a belief based on an unprovable assumption). In any case, evolutionary theory is not in crisis, rather it is Behe's supposedly "irreducibly complex" examples of blood clotting and immune response (that have now been shown to be completely explainable as Darwinian processes) that have failed as science. Meanwhile, theologians have long recognized the important differences between method and philosophy and the danger of basing one's religious beliefs on what is currently unexplained by science. The point is that real faith does not require science, and real science does not require faith.

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