

1/2002

Re: Science is Human

Dear Editor,

The difficulties in debating evolution in letters to the editor are more fundamental than simply a lack of space and time. It seems to me that each side argues from insufficient understanding of its own positions.

For example, one writer declares that evolution is broadly accepted in college textbooks. This is true, yet scientific theories are sometimes overturned with new and convincing evidence.

The creationists, on the other hand, believe the Bible to be the infallible foundation of creation science, and therefore no amount of evidence against it will change their minds. However, both viewpoints have missed a crucial aspect of how science works.

Science is not what is written in a book. Science is a way of seeking understanding about nature, even if that knowledge flies in the face of our deepest intuitions and strongest prejudices. For that reason, no matter how accepted a scientific theory is, it can change or even be replaced with the acquisition of new knowledge. Any belief that claims to be scientific must be vulnerable to falsification- otherwise it's not scientific, no matter what book it is written down in.

Science is a very human endeavor, and as Jacob Bronowski once said, "Science is a tribute to what we can know although we are fallible. In the end, the words were said by Oliver Cromwell: 'I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken.'"

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