

Origins Insights

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Remember the Alamo 2003 Modern Texans Battle for Truth in Education

by Bob Harsh

In August 2003 I learned about a great battle that was about to take place in Texas, not in San Antonio but in Austin this time. The battle promised to have several similarities to the other famous Texas battle. The “heroes” would be vastly outnumbered by foe. The outcome seemed to be inevitable. The good guys were doomed to take a loss. The good guys in both battles were fighting for a principle; FREEDOM. The bad guys had many more resources at their disposal than the heroes. It would have made “more sense” for the combatants to have left the scene of the upcoming battle for safer ground. But, heroes do not “willingly” give ground. At the Alamo, one side represented the establishment while their opponents represented an oppressed people. At Austin, one side represented the educational establishment while the other side were rebels who were demanding truth be taught in the public schools of Texas.

The public school students around the world use textbooks in their biology classes that are produced by a handful of publishers. The market is huge and the profits from those book sales keep many people employed. It costs hundreds of thousands of dollars to produce and publish any new textbook so the publishers are very anxious to employ writers who have a good reputation and are capable of writing Biology books that school districts will want to purchase for their students. At an average cost of \$60.00 a copy teachers are interested in providing books that supplement their teaching in a positive way.

All Biology textbooks in America are written from an evolutionary worldview. The “fact” of evolution from non-living materials to “primitive life” to invertebrates to fish to amphibian to reptile to mammal to apes to

humans goes unquestioned in any of the textbooks! The supporting evidence for the “scientific truth” of evolution can be pretty much summed up with the ten “Icons of Evolution” that Jonathan Wells examined in his 2000 book, *Icons of Evolution*. Wells identified 10 concepts used by biology teachers to support the validity of evolution.

In most states the local school districts can choose any textbooks that they desire. However, in a few states, including Texas, the State Board of Education chooses the textbooks that the local schools must pick their textbooks from.

CSF Meeting

Tuesday, February 17, 7:30 PM

A Creationist Perspective of Microbes and Viruses.

From God In The Beginning?” Did death and disease come before sin entered the world? Were bacteria, fungus, and viruses created? If they were, what “good” purpose did they serve? Bob Harsh will be exploring the role these microbes serve in today’s world. You will discover that these microbes are essential to life today! You will want to join us to find out how they gained their bad reputation.

A group of citizens formed an organization, Texans for Better Science Education in the summer of 2003. Their purpose was to pressure the State Board of Education to mandate that Texas public schools choose biology textbooks that teach evolution accurately. According to Ide Trotter, Ph.D., spokesman for the group, "Textbooks currently under consideration contain misleading factual errors and outdated information about evolution that are an inexcusable embarrassment to sound science." Trotter added, "Bringing these texts into factual compliance with Texas law is not just a legal and scientific issue. It is truly a matter of academic freedom in science education which should be a concern of every thoughtful Texan."

TBSE developed a website, www.strengthsandweaknesses.org, to inform fellow Texans of their campaign and to try to convince them to join the ranks of TBSE. Texas law requires that if factual errors are discovered in the textbooks used in Texas schools the errors must be corrected in any new approved textbooks. Theories and hypotheses that are presented in texts must include examination of their scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses.

TBSE's purpose was very limited. Trotter explained, "Let me make perfectly clear that TBSE is not a creationist group and we are not advocating including creationism or intelligent design in any textbooks. We are trying to encourage and support the Board of Education in correcting factual errors and making sure that a scientifically accurate picture of evolution is presented." Texans for Better Science Education is a group of concerned Texas citizens who support the right of all students to learn about both the strengths and weaknesses of evolutionary theory in conformance with Texas law as well as the right of all teachers to the academic freedom to teach without censorship and intimidation from any pressure groups.

To people outside of direct experience with the science education establishment in America, TBSE may sound like a group that has abandoned Biblical Creationism and such a weak group does not deserve our support. Believe me; they had their work cut out for them! The evolutionary naturalism community does not take skepticism of their orthodox views kindly.

"The issue of teaching weaknesses of evolutionary dogma to our children is a clear winner across the landscape of America. Polls routinely show that only a small minority of Americans actually believe, even after decades of exclusive evolutionary instruction, that a purely naturalistic materialistic evolution is capable of explaining life. That textbook publishers ignore this underscores the de facto monopoly power a relative handful of individuals exert over the teaching of chemical and biologic evolution."

A September 24 news release from TBSE reported on what polls say Texans believe would be a good strategy for teaching science.

"The most recent confirmation of this decades-old support for teaching both strengths and weaknesses was demonstrated in Texas by the Zogby organization. It found that a remarkable 75% agreed that "The state board of education should approve biology textbooks that teach Darwin's theory of evolution, but also the scientific evidence against it." In another question specifically addressing whether the board should enforce the existing requirement to teach both strengths and weaknesses in textbooks, 82% agreed. Yet another question tested specifically whether biology teachers should teach both sides, and 76% agreed! The last question was not specifically related to the question before the Texas SBOE, but asked if "intelligent design" should be taught alongside evolution, and a whopping 84% agreed either strongly (64%) or somewhat (20%)."

"In short, thinking Americans, in spite of the censorship of scientific evidence against evolution from the classroom, in academia, and in public television, have and continue to reject evolution as inadequate. Zogby further found that younger Americans were even more likely to reject naturalistic evolution than those over 65 years of age."

In their October 2 news update TBSE pointed out the changes in the textbooks they would like to take place concerning the fossil record. To many educators the fossil record is the strongest evidence that shows how evolution has worked in the past. Quoting the late evolutionist Stephen J. Gould of Harvard,

“The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of paleontology — we fancy ourselves as the only true students of life’s history, yet to preserve our favored account of evolution by natural selection we view our data as so bad that we never see the very process we profess to study.”

One of the most prestigious science journals on this planet, the British journal *Nature*, recently had an article that brought to light the prevalent lack of primate fossils., the author indicated that there is a ‘low sampling level’ of primate fossils.

“So just how low is the sampling level of this fossil record, that is said to be the best evidence for evolution? The *Nature* article cites a prior study that showed only 3.8% of assumed primate fossil species were represented by actually discovered fossils!”

Evolutionists are fond of producing tree diagrams that purport to depict the ancestry of modern species. “The dotted overall shape depicts a standard ‘descent from a common ancestor’, with the common ancestor being at the bottom and the modern living species being at the top. The dotted lines representing the assumed, but not yet found species.” The bottom parts of the tree, including the very base, (or common ancestry) are missing. There are no vertical or horizontal ‘links’ between any of the actually found (or observed) fossils! Only the 10 solid lines represent found fossils out of the approximately 333 assumed ancestral species.

But there is more. Even the actual fossils, as modeled by the 10 solid lines, are only fragmentary in most cases. So we are left with “difficulties of interpreting fragmentary fossils to infer primate origins with unconnected fossil lines, which of course almost always consist of bones and teeth alone! Put another way, if we did not have the dotted lines in place, (and in the real world we do not), how could we accurately determine how to ‘connect the lines’ representing found fossils? The *Nature* author, in concluding his discussion on primate evolution, notes:

In the face of major gaps in the fossil record, far-reaching interpretation of fragmentary fossil remains can easily lead to misinterpretation of phylogenetic relationships.”

“A Chinese paleontologist lectures around the world saying that recent fossil finds in his country are inconsistent with the Darwinian theory of evolution. His reason: The major animal groups appear abruptly in the rocks over a relatively short time, rather than evolving gradually from a common ancestor as Darwin’s theory predicts. When this conclusion upsets American scientists, he wryly comments: ‘In China we can criticize Darwin but not the government. In America you can criticize the government but not Darwin.’”

One of the Icons of Evolution is the speciation that has occurred in the finches that inhabit the Galapagos Islands off the coast of South America.

“In the proposed 2004 Prentice Hall textbook “Biology”, the Galapagos Island Finches are discussed on several pages (406-410, 412-414). A study conducted by the Grants is referenced repeatedly as evidence for evolution in progress, (specifically related to beak size measurements). Nowhere in the text do the authors report that what the Grants observed was an oscillating variation in beak sizes, apparently dependent on weather conditions and/or available food supplies. What was actually observed was variation within a species, not any net genetic change in a species. The beak sizes were observed to increase in size during dry years, go back the way they were before during normal years and actually shrunk during wet years. This is well known, and in fact, is reported in several of the other proposed 2004 textbooks. The Grants’ data,

including the observation that the beak size oscillated, and did NOT move in a single direction only! This type of variation is no more significant in evolutionary terms than variations in hair color or eye color! “

“Another Example - Proposed 2004 Textbooks Continue to Propagate the Fraud of Haeckel’s Embryos and Embryonic Recapitulation . The saga of the “Haeckel” embryos continues. Briefly, a German embryologist name Ernst Haeckel, overzealous in trying to support Charles Darwin in the late 1800’s, published what he said were drawings of embryos. Darwin later said they were the very best evidence for evolution. Slight problem. They were faked. While some publishers have made substantial improvements from prior years’ editions, this fully debunked idea of “embryonic recapitulation” or “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny” stems essentially from drawings originally constructed by Haeckel in the late 1800's. He originally posited that as embryos develop in the womb or egg, they essentially retraced their supposed evolutionary history.

Note that in the late 1800’s, embryologists were already aware of the faked drawings, and openly accused Haeckel of scientific fraud. More recently, embryologists have discovered that the idea of embryonic recapitulation is also untrue. Yet, Darwinian thought police still maintain that it is OK to use embryos in the books. The scientists disagree. To quote Harvard’s late atheist-Marxist-evolutionist Stephen J. Gould, perhaps one of the most outspoken proponents of the ‘punctuated equilibrium’ flavor of evolution until his recent death, said: "We do, I think, have the right to be both astonished and ashamed by the century of mindless recycling that has led to the persistence of these drawings in a large number, if not a majority, of modern textbooks." [emphasis added] It is not merely the faked drawings that are the problem, but the whole concept of embryology ‘proving’ evolution that is wrong. (Most publishers have NOT yet addressed this, even if they have removed or changed Haeckel’s drawings). In short, it was a fraud that has been exposed by further scientific research and scrutiny, and yet continues in the school textbooks.”

Finally the day for the decision from the Texas State Board of Education came. The following is the announcement put out by TBSE.

PRESS RELEASE November 10, 2003

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

State Board of Education Votes Unanimously to Adopt All Books and Correct Factual Errors
Turns Down Efforts to Identify Better Books

AUSTIN, TEXAS, USA – In an important step forward for good science, the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) voted unanimously Friday to require all textbook publishers to correct all remaining factual errors as a condition of adoption. These errors have been identified by various groups over the past few months, including Texas Education Agency (TEA) textbook review panels, the Discovery Institute, the Mel Gablers/Educational Research Analysts organization, Texans for Better Science Education (TBSE), Texas A&M University and numerous scientists, educators, parents, and other concerned citizens who testified at the two public hearings.

Prior to this vote, an amendment was submitted by SBOE member David Bradley, and supported by members Gail Lowe, Terri Leo, and Don McLeroy. The amendment would have put all biology books EXCEPT the regular biology books submitted by publishers Holt and Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, on the ‘non-conforming’ list for failure to meet state standards. Had the amendment passed, all books would still have been available to all school districts. However, it would have made it easier for Texas’ independently run school districts (ISDs) to distinguish the Glencoe and Holt texts as being closer to meeting the full intent of the textbook standards, particularly in the area of teaching both ‘strengths and weaknesses’ of evolutionary theory. The

ISDs select the books they want to use, but the state of Texas pays for them, whether on the conforming or non-conforming lists.

During the debate, several members of both parties expressed interest in recent reports of errors remaining in the books, and seemed pleased that the TEA will be correcting them as a condition of purchasing the books. Mrs. Terri Leo also read the language of the 'Santorium Language' of the No Child Left Behind Act into the record, which states in part that, "Where topics are taught that may generate controversy (such as biological evolution), the curriculum should help students to understand the full range of scientific views that exist, why such topics may generate controversy, and how scientific discoveries can profoundly affect society."

The amendment to help ISDs distinguish which books are better failed 11-4.

With that effort falling short, the vote turned to the full textbook adoption report, which included all of the biology books and dozens more unrelated subject books. That report, which included provisions to correct remaining factual errors, passed on a unanimous voice vote.

While the SBOE did not explicitly require publishers to insert well known profound scientific weaknesses of evolutionary theories into the books, TBSE spokesman Dr. Ide Trotter was very encouraged by the progress, and applauded Robert Scott, Deputy Director of the Texas Education Agency, "...for assuring the State Board of Education that publishers will be required to address remaining factual errors before a book is put into the hands of students." TBSE's Mark Ramsey noted, "This is a victory for all students of Texas, because hundreds of factual errors are finally being addressed." Discovery Institute's President Bruce Chapman said that the, "Texas [Education Agency] has pledged to make sure that publishers address all remaining errors in the textbooks over the next several months" and that, "we now hope that fake facts like human embryos with 'gill slits,' the flat earth myth, and overstatements about peppered moth research will be things of the past as well."

Numerous corrections of factual errors and editorial changes on a variety of subjects are being addressed this year. While much work remains, these promising steps are in the right direction. Texas students will be the better for it.

Texans for Better Science Education is a group of concerned Texas citizens who support the right of all students to learn about both the strengths and weaknesses of evolutionary theory in conformance with Texas law as well as the right of all teachers to the academic freedom to teach without censorship and intimidation from any pressure groups.

"OVERALL - While we wish the profound scientific weaknesses pointed out by peer reviewed literature were addressed, the fact that the SBOE voted to agree with the TEA to adopt corrected books is a SOLID VICTORY THAT WILL RESULT IN BETTER BOOKS FOR Texas Students!"

Throughout this short battle the members of TBSE who spoke out were slandered by their opponents. They were accused of promoting a campaign to weaken the quality of biology education in Texas. They were accused of wanting to teach religion in Texas schools. And of course, they were marginalized as right wing religious fanatics. The major newspapers provided very slanted editorials against the members of TBSE. These courageous people in Texas organized a very intelligent plan of action that appealed for people from all parts of Texas to voice their opinions to the State Board. Their strategy worked! No, they didn't get all they wanted and it remains to be seen whether the textbook publishers will make the prescribed changes. The Board of Education mandated some changes that will need to be enforced. **THIS GROUP OF TEXAS VOLUNTEERS PREVAILED IN THIS BATTLE FOR TRUTH!** I am a biology educator in a public school in Pennsylvania and I hope my friends in Texas have started something that will bring about changes outside the borders of Texas. **THE CREATION COMMUNITY SALUTES TBSE FOR THEIR VALOR IN THIS BATTLE!**

[Editor's note: All quotes in this article were harvested from the TBSE website www.strengthsandweaknesses.org]

CSF 2004 Calendar

- **February 17 – Bob Harsh**
A Creationist Perspective of Microbes and Viruses
- **March 16 – Dr. David C. Whitcomb**
Stem Cell Research and Cloning: The Promises and the Problems
- **April 20 – Phil McCaffrey**
Plate Tectonics and Creationism
- **May 18 – Creation Adventure Video**
- **June 15 – Biblical Geology, Presenter to be announced**
- **July 20 – Dr. Steve Rodabaugh**
Job's Park
- **August 17 – Dr. Jerry Bergman**
Flood Myths
- **September 25 – Carnegie Museum of Natural History Tour**
- **October 19 – Dr. Lionel Dahmer**
New Evidence That The Decay of Radioactive Materials Has Not Been Constant At Certain Times In The Past.
- **November 19 and 20 – Ken Ham**
Answers in Genesis Seminar
David L. Lawrence Convention Center

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