

Science Cannot Allow Supernatural

Marvin Mueller

29 Jan 1997

The Los Alamos Monitor

globalflood.org/origins-debate.html

Editor:

Yet again in his latest Letters (Jan. 14 and 24) John Baumgardner displays his considerable talent for obfuscation by putting up a smoke screen of peripheral issues, playing semantic games, and failing to address the core issues in his attempted rebuttal of the points raised by Ray Rogers in his letters of Jan. 10 and 17.

The pivotal issue concerns nothing less than the nature of science itself, and the resolution of the creation-evolution debate turns on whether a supernatural explanation for natural phenomena can be admitted into the explanatory methodology of science without changing science into something it has never been. An issue of this importance demands careful discussion in some detail, but such cannot be presented in this space. However, in response to Baumgardner's lengthy letter to the State Board of Education (Monitor of Aug. 23), I wrote a Guest Column (Aug. 28) which did address this crucial issue in considerable detail. The interested reader is urged to obtain a copy.

Let me here repeat one concluding paragraph of that Aug. 28 article: "Given its history and its nature, it's clear that science (a modern form of rational naturalism) cannot allow even one supernatural explanation of natural phenomena - it would then have to be called something entirely different (Natural Theology?). Far worse yet, supernatural explanations -- which are usually inherently untestable, for reason is impotent in the context of miracles -- are supremely easy to concoct, and thus would multiply like viruses and quickly kill science. Most simply expressed: Science and the supernatural cannot coexist in the same explanatory framework -- the historically older will devour the younger."

All major disciplines and fields of endeavor are governed by rules, both written and unwritten, and science is no exception. In this they are similar to games, such as chess or tennis. The practitioner must play by the rules, or he's not allowed in the game. From its inception four centuries ago, scientific method

has meant the rigid exclusion of all supernatural hypotheses and theories. This has always been the most indispensable part of the methodology and its most distinguishing feature in intellectual history. All scientists know this "intuitively," and well know that any proffered supernatural explanation would be ruled, out of bounds.

Rogers' otherwise excellent disquisition on (idealized) scientific method (Jan. 10) failed to mention the requisite exclusion of supernatural explanation from the methodology. This omission left him open to the astonishing counterclaim by Bill Powers (Jan. 14): "The scientific method can be and is well employed within the context of both creationism and materialism."

Once again, Baumgardner has trotted out a list of some prominent early scientists - who, incidentally, received their formal education in pre-Darwinian times - said to be Christians. So what? This is yet another decoy ploy. Science qua science has always been neutral with respect to the personal beliefs of its practitioners - be they Islamic, Taoist, Christian, or whatever - so long as they play by the rules when they carry out scientific research.

Marvin Mueller