

Summary of the Response to my Talk To the Jewish Community Relations Council 3/9/06

The talk to the Jewish Community Relations Council today at noon was very interesting. Although there was not much visible agreement with my position, I pray that the seeds which were planted will germinate in a few hearts. I thanked them for having me and did tell them at the end to keep an open mind. It had taken me a long time to even consider the evidence when I was first confronted it because there tends to be an emotional reaction to things that oppose what we have accepted for a long time.

I spoke first and had been given special permission to go for 12 minutes because the other three were all opposed to intelligent design and that was the length of my PowerPoint presentation. The early guidelines said 5 - 10 minutes and at the event, the moderator said 8 minutes. The others had also been given a copy of a previous version of my talk by the coordinator of the event -- attached to an e-mail giving the ground rules. I think it was inadvertent and she had not given much thought to it, just including all the information she had at hand. No one else had submitted a transcript ahead of time so I did not get to preview their arguments, but of course, they were predictable. I e-mailed the group after that and told them that "since the element of surprise was lost ;-) I attached the current version of the talk." I said I hoped that it would improve the discussion.

There were about 20 people there. ID advocate and author Walter Remine had heard about it and came. Otherwise it was all members of the Jewish Council or other interested Jews, mostly older people (meaning my age). By a straw vote they took at the end, of those voting 15 wanted a policy forbidding intelligent design in Jewish schools and only 2 did not.

The other speakers talked a lot about separation of church and state. They all believed that science and religion were in separate realms and did not intersect. They said that ID was "only a Trojan Horse for Creation." They reiterated that one did not need to have explanations of mechanisms in order to continue accepting evolution. They were all cordial but simply could not accept any of my arguments. The biologist mentioned as evidence for evolution controlling genes that may cause an antenna to grow where an eye should be -- but of course this is in fruit flies whose genome knows how to make antennae.

The comments and questions from the audience included many of the familiar themes. One elderly gentleman asked to be able to read an article from the New York Times about "evolution in action -- the mutating avian influenza virus." I responded that this was a very important question because it represented the usual proof of evolution cited by most evolutionists -- micro evolution -- and explained that we see it in dog breeds and Darwin's finches but that macro evolution needs the development of new features, new information.

But the unique part of the response of this group was the emotional underpinning of much of their reaction. They were upset about my statement that there is truth. They take this as a threat by Christianity against Judaism. I tried to point out that first of all, saying that there is a correct answer and knowing what the answer is are two different things. But although it sounds humane to say that everybody is right, it ends up meaning that nobody is right and that religion, relegated to its own realm, is only a psychological crutch and tool to encourage moral behavior. The morality of evolution is survival and producing the most progeny in the next generation even though most evolutionists borrow their morality from a better source.

And my closing comments about the intellectual support that evolution gives to eugenics and genocide were met with anger and offense. Most evolutionists, they said, are moral people. They could not accept the connection. I said that most people do not live in complete harmony with their underlying assumptions but that

evolution at its root accepts the idea that some are more highly evolved than others, and that there is no clear dividing line that makes human life qualitatively different. The extreme is Dr. Peter Singer, ethicist at Princeton who believes that there ought to be mechanisms for killing defective humans and that some animals are more valuable than some people.

Some of the comments from the audience -- and the anti ID comments from the other panelists -- went on for a long time touching on a dozen topics so that it was impossible to follow most trains of thought. I did suggest that all of us might need to join the support group for people who talk to much called "On-and-on."

Walter said that in exchange for a monopoly in the classroom, evolutionists should engage ID advocates in debates and discussions -- in writing and available for people to review. He held up his book and said that although it proposed an alternative to evolution it has not been reviewed by an evolutionist.

One man said that when the environment was deteriorating and resources being used up, it was tragic that we spend so much time on this issue. He implied that it was trivial and also said that the same arguments keep coming up again and again. (Of course, if an argument has not been answered, it will not just go away.) I responded that it was a more basic issue than he realized because evolution amounted to training in illogical thinking. Certain conclusions were declared out of bounds by fiat and it was not possible to follow the evidence where ever it went.

In discussion afterwards, one man insisted that religion, especially religion that thinks there are right answers, is the source of evil and persecution. I did not deny that wrong has been done in the name of religion, but in the case of Christianity, it is against the principles that Christians claim to follow. But in the case of evolutionists, it is completely consistent with underlying beliefs to eliminate the negative influences on evolution. His wife is a convert to Judaism and he has "fundamentalist" in-laws. He says he has a cordial relationship but they stay clear of certain topics. He asked if Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God and I said that Christians worship the same God as Jews but the character of Allah does not seem consistent with the God of the Bible. The only point that seemed to make him pause was the idea that in a naturalistic world, there is no mechanism for free will.

One woman, who seemed to be genuinely interested in learning, talked for a while afterwards. She is a devout Jew and was troubled by the implications of the idea that there were right answers and whether as humans we could ever expect to understand God. I said that a 2 year old cannot completely understand what mommy and daddy do at work, but can understand those incomplete but true things that mommy and daddy tell. I pointed out that God wants us to believe the right things, not just anything. Moses believed God on the basis of the facts -- the burning bush and the miracles. Moses told the people to test the prophets and not follow those whose wonders did not come to pass nor those who told them to follow another God. I also said that I believe that if someone recognizes the hand of God in creation and seeks in humility, God will reveal more.

Ross

For the talk on which these responses are based, click on www.tccsa.tc/articles/id_jrcr.pdf