

In the 19th century, as science was beginning to replace religious explanations for phenomena, the old guard pushed back. This battle raged even within one of the world's great scientists, Charles Darwin, who was a devout Christian but also a keen observer. His lifelong observations about how species evolve (which he could see with his own eyes) differed from the Biblical explanation that God created all life in one moment and that nothing has changed since.

Darwin was sad about having to abandon religious explanations because these notions had given comfort to generations of people. However, toward the end of his life, he did see the elegance of the evolutionary system. He could consider it an equally marvelous explanation of God's works. But as late as the 19th century, Evolution was dismissed by religious believers as a "theory," not understanding that this was not speculation at all; it was the introduction of a system that can be verified.

Science (and the telescope) unseated the ancient notion that the world was a flat disc around which the sun, moon, and stars circulated. Galileo, the scientist who promoted this knowledge, ran afoul of his own Catholic Church, a body of traditional wisdom that only forgave Galileo in the 20th century! European explorers circumnavigated the globe in the 16th century, never "falling off" the edge. We have since then seen the globe from space, yet among us are people stubborn enough to insist that the earth is flat and that the space voyages were make-believe shows filmed on a Hollywood sound stage.

Even today, some literalist religions weigh in on the findings of science. An amusement park in Kentucky has been built to re-imagine the Biblical myth of Noah's Ark, repudiating the science of Evolution and showing dinosaurs and fully evolved human beings side by side. This nonsense is promoted as "alternate science."

Even Israel, which has produced six Nobel Prize winners in science (and many others in the humanities), enjoying the fruits of science that have transformed a stony desert into a giant of agriculture and industry, gets pushback from the pious minority, who refuse to recognize Evolution.

Israel has opened a new national natural history museum in Tel Aviv that aims to encourage scientific education, despite religious opposition. The museum will house more than 5.5 million specimens of species from around the globe, with emphasis on the flora and fauna indigenous to the Holy Land.

This museum, the only such enterprise in the Middle East, aims to raise public awareness about the natural world and environmental challenges. One exhibit on human evolution titled "What makes us human?" looks at humanity's evolution through the lens of cultural accomplishments, from harnessing fire to exploring the universe. Ultra-Orthodox Judaism's literal interpretation of the Bible leads many to reject the notion of evolution, which is not taught in state-funded ultra-Orthodox schools, making up 23 percent of Israel's schools. This could be very bad news indeed if one hopes for a continuation of Israel's astonishing brainpower.

Our own country has a vocal minority of science scoffers, who believe that all science is merely "theory" or a plot to hurt our businesses or our culture. Some politicians (a distinct minority) believe that scientists are merely promoting ideas that less educated people are free to scorn. That a vast majority of earth scientists can demonstrate the effects of too rapid climate change does not impress doubters, even up to their chins in sea water or having heat stroke.

President Trump, and his former Environmental Protection chief, Mr. Pruitt, wanted to end "unwarranted" abandonment of asbestos. President Trump incredibly announced that asbestos is a great fireproofing product, and had it been in the World Trade Towers, they would not have burned! That thousands of people who have lived in asbestos-poisoned housing are dying of asbestosis is just inconvenient.

The attack on science by this government can bring back foul air, lead-poisoned water, and dangerous food and drugs. The good old days before science were not good at all. If this minority has its way, we will revisit the horrors of the past.

683 words

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