



Tower of Babel: The Evidence against the New Creationism

By Robert T. Pennock

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Creationism is no longer the simple notion it once was taken to be. Its new advocates have become more sophisticated in how they present their views, speaking of "intelligent design" rather than "creation science" and aiming their arguments against the naturalistic philosophical method that underlies science, proposing to replace it with a "theistic science." The creationism controversy is not just about the status of Darwinian evolution--it is a clash of religious and philosophical worldviews, for a common underlying fear among Creationists is that evolution undermines both the basis of morality as they understand it and the possibility of purpose in life. In *Tower of Babel*, philosopher Robert T. Pennock compares the views of the new creationists with those of the old and reveals the insubstantiality of their arguments. One of Pennock's major innovations is to turn from biological evolution to the less charged subject of linguistic evolution, which has strong theoretical parallels with biological evolution, both in content and in the sort of evidence scientists use to draw conclusions about origins. Of course, an evolutionary view of language does conflict with the Bible, which says that God created the variety of languages at one time as punishment for the Tower of Babel. Several chapters deal with the work of Phillip Johnson, a highly influential leader of the new Creationists. Against his and other views, Pennock explains how science uses naturalism and discusses the relationship between factual and moral issues in the creationism-evolution controversy. The book also includes a discussion of Darwin's own shift from creationist to evolutionist and an extended argument for keeping private religious beliefs separate from public scientific knowledge.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The face of creationism has been through some major plastic surgery in the past decade or so. The leading proponents of "intelligent design theory" have left the ranting flat-earth types behind and found respected positions in the academic world from which to launch attacks on mainstream science. Philosopher of science Robert T. Pennock has explored all sides of the ongoing debate, which remains (despite the protestations of many creationists) more about biblical inerrancy than scientific evidence. His book *Tower of Babel* examines the new directions antievolutionists have taken lately, but goes beyond a mere recounting of recent history by proposing a new avenue of counterattack: linguistics.

The parallels are striking once we look closely: Genesis proclaims that God created all human languages at one stroke, while modern scientific thought proposes linguistic evolution similar in form to genetics. Best of all for scientists, though, linguistic change is much more rapid than biological change, and we have actually observed what might be called "speciation events" to have occurred historically in languages. While not meant to supplant traditional arguments against creationism, Pennock's ideas certainly supplement them and will be useful to educators and researchers alike. His sense of urgency is compelling; he sees the future of scientific education and freedom at stake and argues strongly for a separation between private beliefs and public knowledge. --*Rob Lightner*

From Publishers Weekly

According to University of Texas philosopher Pennock, creationism has been evolving, changing from an unsophisticated attack on biological evolution to a more refined and polished assault on the nature of science itself. Rather than offering sophomoric arguments and forged archeological displays, he contends, the new creationists are attempting to promulgate a philosophical construct, theistic science, that is both more subtle and more insidious. With great insight and good humor, Pennock catalogues the wide range of creationist beliefs, dissects their main arguments and highlights what he sees as their internal inconsistencies. He focuses most of his attention on explicating the alleged weakness of the premises of theistic science and its reliance on an "intelligent designer," contending that its incorporation of miracles into its explanatory sphere undermines all aspects of science. In clear, direct prose, Pennock uses the basics of linguistic evolution to go after the foundation of the new creationism while employing sound philosophical arguments to demonstrate that an evolutionary worldview is neither immoral nor the first step toward the acceptance of atheism. With the new creationists claiming that an evolutionary perspective is responsible for virtually all of the world's ills and their desire to make amends by restructuring public education and the legal system, the stakes are huge. Pennock's response, thoughtful, thorough and respectful, deserves to be widely read.

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From Library Journal

Informative and clearly written, this important book by a philosopher of science (Univ. of Texas, Austin) and Quaker critically surveys the specious arguments offered by biblical fundamentalists and new creationists. e.g., Phillip Johnson and Michael Behe who reject the factual theory of organic evolution. Pennock stresses a crucial distinction between public knowledge and private beliefs, emphasizing that myopic religionists continue to deny the overwhelming evidence for biological evolution; the result is a serious threat to science education. Topics examined include neo-Darwinism, the evolution of language, philosophical naturalism, and the intelligent-design theory in so-called theistic science. For Pennock, "evolution is not an assumption accepted on faith, but a conclusion supported by a vast array of empirical

data." Still needed, however, is a rigorous and truthful defense of the ontological materialism that underpins the scientific methodology, which Pennock himself so glowingly supports. As far as it goes, this is an up-to-date and excellent presentation of the ongoing creationism-evolutionism controversy. Recommended for large science, philosophy, and theology collections. AH. James Birx, Canisius Coll., Buffalo, NY
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