



REVIEW

Enquête sur les Créationnismes: Réseaux, Stratégies et Objectifs Politiques

by Cyrille Baudouin and Olivier Brosseau

Paris: Belin, 2013. 336 pages

reviewed by **Kevin Padian**

We are all well aware that creationist opposition to evolution is stronger in America than in any western European country, although many countries in Europe have their own problems. Here, French scientists Cyrille Baudouin and Olivier Brosseau dissect the creationist problem in France and some nearby countries. They find some similarities to the American problem, including the direct importation of some American creationist views to Europe. And they also find differences that reflect indigenously European cultural, political, and social influences.

The book's title could be translated as *Inquiry into Creationisms: Networks, Strategies, and Political Objectives*. Baudouin and Brosseau explain that, for them, there are many "creationisms," or kinds of creationism that reduce to the same reliance on supernatural intervention, so it is not necessary to label some movements such as "neo-creationism." However, they are clear in separating different creationist approaches, such as young-earth creationism and "intelligent design."

Enquête sur les Créationnismes is different than most American books on the subject in some important ways. Of necessity, it covers the origin and evolution of American creationism succinctly and well; but it also shows how both imported and home-grown European creationist movements found their particular niches in European audiences that have seemed almost pre-adapted for their reception. For example, the authors trace the founding and metamorphosis of the Université Populaire de Paris in 1978 through its transmogrification as the Université Européenne de Paris to today's instauration, the Université Interdisciplinaire de Paris (UIP). Essentially run since its origin by the same people (whose credentials are somewhat questionable, apparently), this outfit—not, despite its name, a recognized university—cloaks a broadly anti-scientific and specifically anti-Darwinian attitude with a mantle of open inquiry and humanistic values. In this and other examples, American readers will be introduced to a new spectrum of creationist inroads in Europe. They will also meet a great many European scientists, historians, and philosophers of science who were interviewed for this book on their specific areas of expertise vis-à-vis creationism. These conversations are illuminating and full of insight.

The organization of *Enquête sur les Créationnismes* traces first how creationists use scientific advances to their own ends, conveniently ignoring the structure of scientific inquiry. Throughout, the authors and their interlocutors tend to contrast the "how" of science with the "why" of philosophy and religion; but as historian and philosopher of science Jean Gayon and others note, this is a false division because ultimately the "why" has to explain

the mechanics of the “how,” and once you do that the “why” part has little to add as rational explanation.

A large section of the book deals with creationist movements and institutions in various European countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Poland, Romania, and the Netherlands (which the authors call the “Kansas” of Europe). They also summarize the anti-evolutionary antics of the Turk “Harun Yahya” and the growing fundamentalism of the Muslim world. And they do not spare the European Protestant sects, or (particularly) the Catholic Church, whose “ambiguities” and “nebulousness” on the acceptance of science are especially frustrating. The Vatican, as they show, lobbied the European Council several years ago to weaken and eventually suppress its report on “The dangers of creationism in education”; fortunately, they only managed to secure some minor wording changes that did not affect the force of the report.

Here and throughout the book, the authors are strongly critical of organizations such as the Templeton Foundation, which to them are attempting to promote religion and weaken the boundaries of science through well-publicized conferences, recruitment of noted scientists to their cause, and lucrative prize and grant money. They note the connection of the Templeton Foundation to the UIP, and of the UIP to the Discovery Institute. That doesn’t mean that the Templeton Foundation is a supporter of the Discovery Institute, however: in fact, after an initial flirtation in the early 1990s, the Templeton Foundation apparently declined further support for the “intelligent design” movement, citing its lack of productivity (Goodstein 2005).

This book deserves a broad readership in Anglophonic countries. If you can get hold of a copy, it will repay your time for the insight it gives into how the French intellectual community parses an issue that in many ways is treated quite differently than in America.

REFERENCES

Goodstein L. 2005 Dec 4. Intelligent design might be meeting its maker. *The New York Times* 4:1.

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