

Europe clones America; the good, the bad, and the ugly

Creationism in Europe

Stefaan Blancke, Hans Henrik Hjermitsev and Peter C. Kjærgaard (Eds.)

Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 2014

Jerry Bergman

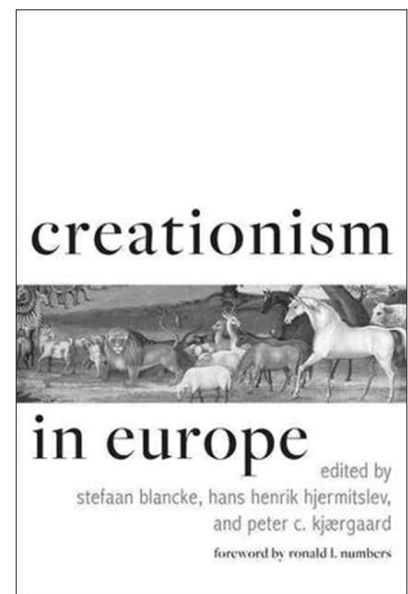
Creationism in Europe is a well-documented review of the status of creationism in 10 European countries. This work is in some ways a follow-up of my book *Slaughter of the Dissidents, Killing the Careers of Darwin Doubters*, only it focuses on Europe and my book focused on the United States. The authors, or at least the editors, are all Darwinists or ex-creationists, but most of the chapters were well done and fairly balanced, as the coverage of this subject should be in government schools. In contrast to what is common in writings by Darwinists on this subject, the authors largely avoided name-calling and derogatory innuendoes.

The authors discussed a number of highly credentialed scientists who have published in peer-reviewed science publications that support, or at least are sympathetic to, the creation and Intelligent Design (ID) worldviews. They also covered the sometimes strident opposition to all forms of creationism, which they defined as including not only ID but also theistic evolution. They documented that the common opposition to all Darwin Doubters by Darwinists that resulted from the growth of ID and creationism in Europe was sometimes irrational and aggressive.

Opposition to creationism

One of the countries that was most intolerant to creationism was France. The government controls the entire educational system to the degree that creationists and ID supporters involved in the science and academic professions often are even forced to “deny that they are creationists” in order to survive in their profession and retain the ability to earn a livelihood. This fact was mentioned by the author of this chapter, Thomas Lepeltier, to illustrate the difficulty in assessing the situation of Darwin Doubters in France (p. 15). Furthermore, any written material that openly questioned orthodox Darwinism is usually censored from French government schools. An example given to support this conclusion was a large quality hardbound book sent to all government schools in France that the authorities ordered removed from the schools to prevent student and faculty exposure to its contents.

Ironically, France was also the home of two of the leading scientists that had opposed Darwinism on scientific grounds, Albert Vandel (1894–1980) and Pierre-Paul Grassé (1895–1985) (figure 1). Until his retirement, Grassé was Chair of Evolutionary Biology at the Faculty of Paris. He was the author of over 300 publications, including the influential 52-volume *Traité de Zoologie*, a project in which he invested over 40 years to complete. His work was often quoted by Darwin Doubters. The two previous occupiers of the Sorbonne Zoology Chair, Alfred Giard (1846–1908) and Maurice Caullery (1868–1958), were also both Darwinism opponents (both were more supportive of Lamarckism).



Only after Grassé's retirement in 1965 was the chair occupied by a Darwinism supporter, Charles Bocquet (1918–1977).

Given this background, the hostility against Darwin Doubters is hard to understand, a task that the author of this chapter attempted to grapple with. The opposition to creationism has a lot to do with the rise of the well-funded aggressive Western anti-creation movement that has arisen since Professors Caullery and Grassé died.

The main leader of the “fight against creationism”, and all Darwin Doubters in France, is Guillaume Lecointre (1964–), a professor at the Paris Museum of Natural History (p. 20). Part of the reason for the opposition to creationism is 30–40% of the French population declare themselves atheists or agnostics (p. 17). Most of the rest are nominal or cultural Catholics, most of whom are often not involved in any formal religious activities. Also, most French theologians reject all creationist worldviews and “accept Darwinian theory in its entirety” (p. 26).

So committed to evolution were some Darwinists that they condemned the film *Avatar* as “not being Darwinian and of promoting

intelligent design because [a character in the film] Pandora was designed too much like earth carbon based life” (p. 24). They argued that, if life evolved elsewhere, mutations and natural selection would evolve it to be very different than life on earth. Thus, they concluded, the film was “creationism in disguise”, a “Trojan horse for American creationism” (p. 25). The largest group of creationism believers in France and several other countries are the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Muslims (p. 18).

The influence of American creationists

American creationists have had a major influence on all of European creation groups. For example, the Protestant Catalonia publishing house, CLIE, “distributed a collection of Spanish translations of brief works on the question [of creationism] since 1979 under the general series title *Creación y ciencia* (Creation and Science)” (p. 37). One book was an anthology of articles about evolution and the fossil record written by Drs Duane T. Gish and Bolton Davidheiser.

The volume also included a brief contribution by a Spanish chemist and Protestant evangelical, Santiago Escuain, that centred on the discontinuities in the fossil record. Escuain wrote that the fossil record not only does not “provide any support to evolutionism, but it is openly hostile to it” (p. 37). Escuain is “also a promoter of *Servicio Evangélico de Documentación e Información* (SEDIN, Evangelical Service for Documentation and Information)”, a platform for sending textbooks and news related to creationism to their denomination members (p. 37).

For several years, the *Creación y ciencia* series added new titles, almost all translations of creationist works by well-known American creationists including Henry M. Morris, Willem

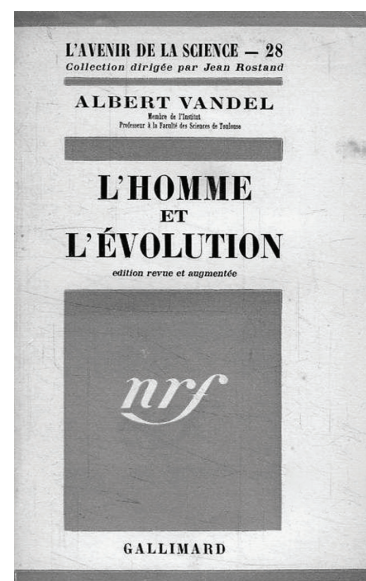
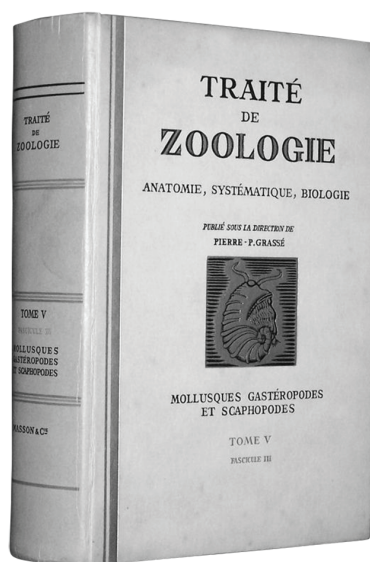


Figure 1. Books by two of the leading French scientists, Albert Vandel (1894–1980) and Pierre-Paul Grassé (1895–1985), that have opposed Darwinism on scientific grounds

Ouweneel, Harold S. Slusher, Thomas G. Barnes, and John C. Whitcomb. Dr Whitcomb and Morris’s classic *The Genesis Flood* and Phillip E. Johnson’s *Darwin on Trial* were especially influential in Europe (p. 37).

Censorship

Censorship is also a major problem in Europe as it is in America. For example, the Physicians and Surgeons for Scientific Integrity (PSSI), sponsored a lecture series in Spain in January of 2008. The speakers included Dr Thomas Woodward from Florida and author of *Darwin Strikes Back*; Geoffrey Simmons, a physician and fellow member of the Discovery Institute; Swiss engineer, Isaac Lorencez; and Spanish ophthalmologist and PSSI member Antonio Martínez. The planned 10 lectures, two per city, were given in Madrid, Barcelona, Malaga, Leon, and Vigo, but in the last two cities they were able to give only one lecture

“... because the local universities refused to provide a venue. These educational institutions had been warned by the Sociedad Española de

Biología Evolutiva (SESBE, Spanish Society for Evolutionary Biology) about the creationist orientation of PSSI [or PSSI]” (p. 41).

Another example of censorship occurred even before the lecture tour, when the Spanish Society for Evolutionary Biology warned the university administration in Gijón about “sponsoring a talk by the Cuban American astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez, senior fellow of the Discovery Institute” (pp. 41–42). This action

“... provoked a debate in the media about freedom of expression and the limits of science and scientific teaching. In some respects, there were certain resemblances to earlier controversies on evolutionism in Spain. The tone of the president of SESBE, Manuel Soler, is particularly significant. With regard to PSSI and its lecture series, he wrote: ‘This invasion is a very serious attempt to win [the battle of ideas] that will surely continue. We have to get ready for the defense ... Now Militant atheists are among the main leaders of the anti-creation campaign, as indicated by

the military metaphors they used which revealed a grave concern about allowing a presentation against Darwinism in universities in response to a situation that many "... evolutionary scientists consider alarming. The rhetoric of warfare is encouraged by some scientists who not only declare themselves as atheists but also scorn the religious attitudes of some of their colleagues" (p. 42).

An example is:

'... evolutionary ecologist Santiago Merino used a review of Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* for expressing his surprise when he finds scientists defending the compatibility between science and religion. Similarly, geneticist Arcadi Navarro assesses Francis Collins's *The Language of God* as a 'vehement but impossible attempt to reconcile God ... with the scientific advances to which he himself has contributed' and claims that Collins deceives himself [in believing in God as the Creator]" (p. 42).

Another example of the strident, sometimes irrational, opposition to creationism occurred in Britain. This case on the "effect of outspoken evolutionists on the creationism debate" involved the director of education of the Royal Society, Professor Michael Reiss. In 2008 he was forced "to resign after stating in a public lecture that science teachers should deal with creationism if a child raised the topic" (p. 60). If asked questions in class on this topic, he responded:

"... science teachers should explain why evolution was a scientific theory and creationism was not. The lecture was misrepresented in various media reports claiming that Reiss was not only professor of science education in London with a doctorate in evolutionary biology but also an ordained minister in the Church of England. Some atheist members of the Royal Society wrote protest letters arguing that

a priest could not represent a scientific institution such as the Royal Society, eventually resulting in Reiss's resignation" (pp. 60–61).

This event "alienated many religious people in Britain, and creationist organizations used this story as evidence to show that religious thinkers and scientists were excluded from science on grounds of their personal belief" (pp. 60–61). Another example, this one in France, involved the Christian paleoanthropologist Anne Dambricourt-Malasse (1959–) whose interpretation of "human evolution has generated much controversy". For example, a television documentary involving a discussion of her creation theory, *Homo sapiens: une nouvelle histoire* (*Homo sapiens: a new history*), was scheduled to be shown on the national TV channel, ARTE, in October 2005. When

"... the program was announced, Guillaume Lecointre and some of his colleagues organized a campaign to put pressure on ARTE, accusing the documentary of pushing a creationist agenda in disguise. Part of the press joined the protest, highlighting the 'scandal' it would be to broadcast a creationist documentary on public channel in a secular state" (p. 22).

In order to accommodate the opposition to creation "it was decided that the channel should host a 'debate' immediately following the program" in which "only outspoken critics were invited" who evolutionists felt could easily "discredit the documentary's scientific claims" (p. 22). This event

"... highlights the tensions provoked by any questioning of Darwinism in France. The question remains whether the Dambricourt-Malasse thesis and more generally, the conceptions of UIP [Interdisciplinary University of Paris] belong to the intelligent design movement. To many, their implicit association is evident. For example, in January 2006, under the headline "The Bible

against Darwin", several articles in a special issue of a major weekly magazine, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, described the theses defended by UIP as a French version of intelligent design. This charge was also brought in an article in *Le Monde* in 2006 entitled 'French Neo-creationism in Disguise'. Other media have been equally critical of UIP" (p. 22).

A case in Germany involved some creationist professors who were able to publish a scientific article in the international scientific literature. Specifically, they managed to publish an "article in the highly esteemed journal *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*" (p. 124).¹ Although they did not explicitly refer to creationism,

"... they wrote that 'the hypothetical descent of mankind from 'mitochondrial Eve' has been much debated Nobody was actually there If molecular evolution is really neutral at these sites, such a high mutation rate would indicate that Eve lived about 6,500 years ago" (p. 124).

Another example is the publication of an article in "the respected German scientific journal *Naturwissenschaftliche Rundschau*" that explained

"... the apparent young age of particular species of cichlids, noting that 'the biologists Junker and Scherer regard the explosive speciation events as a process that is caused by polyvalent basic types with a built-in capacity for variation.' When informed of this surreptitious promotion for a creationist model, the editor pledged not to accept such a manuscript again" (p. 124).

Yet another example was a scientist at the Max Planck Institute for Plant Breeding Research in Cologne, Germany, Wolf-Ekkehard Lönnig, who with a colleague published a review article in a high-impact journal, in which

“... they discussed the possibility of a ‘partly predetermined generation of biodiversity and new species’. They claimed that the origin of higher systematic categories depends on the ‘genesis of irreducibly complex structures’ and referred to the publications by the American intelligent design proponents Michael Behe and William Dembski. To conclude, they argued that we should ‘continue to welcome the plethora of different and diverging ideas and hypotheses on the origin of life ... wherever they may lead’” (p. 124).

Since then it has become virtually impossible for out-of-the-closet Darwin skeptics to publish in German science journals. Lönnig was even forced to shut down his ID-friendly website.

Scandinavia

Scandinavia is a “society without God” (p. 85), where a total 83% of Danes, 82% of Swedes, and 74% of Norwegians believe humans evolved from some earlier animal species (p. 85). Furthermore, only 2–5% of Scandinavians attend church on a regular basis (pp. 85–86). One factor influencing the number is that in the two decades after Darwin published his *Origin* book in 1859, all natural history museums and all five Scandinavian universities began to integrate evolution as their presupposition for all research and teaching (p. 87). Also, as is true in most of Europe, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, “which is among the largest Christian denominations outside the national churches in Scandinavia”, have aggressively promoted “their version of creationism in pamphlets and books offered free of charge” to a wide audience of persons (p. 95).

As is true of Europe, American creationist writings began to appear in Scandinavia in the 1970s (p. 90).

Several creationist organizations were formed at about this time and numerous creationist and ID books were translated into several Scandinavian languages. The editorial boards of these creation groups included several scientists with graduate degrees in science (p. 93). Also, as is true in all of Europe, a backlash soon occurred in Scandinavia. For example, the Swedish ‘conservative’ government banned the teaching

“... of creationism and intelligent design from biology classes in state-funded Christian schools. Its decision was made shortly after the passing of the Council of Europe 1580, which warned against ‘the dangers of creationism for education’ in October 2007,^[2] and it was supported by the Christian Democrats, even though some of its evangelical members aired creationist views (pp. 94–95).

In a chapter titled *The Rise of Anti-Creation in Europe*, the author documented the source of many of these anti-creation efforts as atheists, agnostics, and humanists. One result was the European Convention on Human Rights council passed resolution 1580 by a 48 to 25 vote, which urged member states to firmly oppose the presentation of any information in schools that supported creation or opposed Darwinism. The resolution was justified by claiming concerns about the potential adverse effect of

“... the spread of creationist ideas within our education systems and about the consequences for our democracies. If we are not careful, creationism could become a threat to human rights, which are a key concern of the Council of Europe” (p. 233).

The reasoning they used was that science plays a central role in the economic, technological, and social development of all European countries, and thus was “a stabilizing factor in the foundation for sustaining successful

democracies. Creationist groups were cast as antiscientific”, which is why the convention interpreted them as “one of the most serious threats to human and civic rights” in Europe today (p. 233). Furthermore, resolution 1580 added that the “war on the theory of evolution and on its proponents” often originated from

“... various forms of religious extremism closely linked to extreme right-wing political movements and thus directly to antidemocratic activism. This had to be taken seriously as it was claimed that the ‘creationist movements possess real political power’” (p. 233).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this book is an excellent, fairly balanced review of the situation of Darwin Doubters in Europe. It covers both the progress that creationism and ID has made in Europe and the sometimes militant backlash, which is often influenced by humanists, atheists, and agnostics. It also details some of the academics that are supportive of creationism, or at least are critics of Darwinism. I can here only briefly review some of the material covered in this important reference.

References

1. Loewe, L. and Scherer, S., Mitochondrial Eve: the plot thickens, *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 12(11):422–423, November 1997.
2. See critique, Sarfati, J. and Catchpoole, D., When will Europe wake up? Council of Europe ‘condemns creationism’ (but it ought to reconsider where the ‘threat to human and civic rights’ is really coming from), creation.com/Europe, 1 February 2008.