

## Junk Science

Why do teachers so often force-feed kids one-sided facts and theories about the world? Wouldn't education be much more stimulating if schools focused on broad underlying debates, instead of assumed dogma?

For example, over the years my children have all gotten scary lectures on "global warming." They learn that global temperatures could rise 5 to 10 degrees Celsius in the next fifty years mostly because of burning fossil fuels. Polar ice-caps could melt. Oceans might flood coastal cities. No wonder kids want to be tucked in at night!

A thorough teacher would have told them this was just one dismal theory; there is no convincing scientific proof of global warming. In a 1993 poll of U.S. meteorologists, 49% said there has been no global warming, 33% said "don't know," and only 18% thought there had been some. While we have more carbon-dioxide in the atmosphere than a few decades ago, we had a ton more a few million years ago - and maybe could use a lot more: global warming would be a boon to food production worldwide.

This teacher could also add that any global warming may only be part of a huge natural cycle (trees once grew near both north and south poles); that we have just finished a mini ice age; that a melting north polar ice-cap won't flood anything because when ice floating in water melts, the water does not rise - Archimedes Law - (and even a global rise of 10 degrees will only raise polar averages to -40C). That when Mount Pinatubo blew up, it spewed more greenhouse gas into the atmosphere than all human activity since the industrial revolution. And anyway, natural fluctuations of carbon dioxide absorption in the oceans and biomass dwarf anything humans produce. Of high interest, too, is that "global cooling" theory predicting a new ice age may be on the comeback because warming (if true) could create more snow and ice at the poles, locking up more of the earth's moisture, and...lowering the oceans.

Now, children, let's discuss all this...

It's the same with acid rain. Sure, it exists. Class notes give the standard equations for conversion of greenhouse gas into acid rain. O.K. But that doesn't explain why coring samples of 800 year-old sediments (long before the industrial age) from fresh water lakes both in Scandinavia, Nova Scotia, and the Adirondacks of the North Eastern USA show acidity levels higher than today. Or why, as Illinois soil scientist Edward C. Krug put it, "the magnitude of

acidic surface waters in areas without acid rain dwarfs that of areas supposedly 'devastated' by acid rain." But I bet your kids won't hear this.

Over-population is another dogma in the schools. Children can be relied upon to inform their parents, with teacher-induced pugnacious confidence, that the world has "too many people." They should ask their teachers this question: "If the world has a surplus population - are you part of the surplus? And if not, how do you know?" They're not told no one has a clue on future population: in 1992 the U.N. Population Division forecasted a world population for the year 2150 ranging from 27 billion down to 4 billion - less than today. More worrisome, they're not told that Canada, and most other democracies, are not reproducing themselves. Expect a massive die-off and birth-death.

Also, density creates wealth. The most densely-populated countries and cities on average tend to be the most wealthy. Although many U.S. catastrophist Paul Erlich predicted in 1965 that 60 million Americans would die of starvation by the year 2,000 - in fact world food production has outstripped population growth ever since 1977. And imagine this: allowing a coffin-sized space for each person, the entire 5 billion-plus people on earth could be stuffed into a single box just over a mile square and shoved over the Grand Canyon - and you'd still look down on it! It's a surprise to learn that only about 1% of the earth's land surface is actually used for human habitation.

And then there is Darwin. Children are regularly told to learn Darwin's 1859 theory of evolution (you know: from non-life, to cell, to invertebrate, to fish, to amphibian, to reptile, to mammal, to primate, to man) as a scientific fact, instead of as a mere theory, which is what Darwin knew it was. He was certain that completion of the fossil record would eventually show a regular evolutionary gradation, instead of separate species with huge gaps between them. But - surprise - no transitional types have been found. All animal and plant species appeared suddenly in the fossil record, and are as separate as ever. Species do not change into other species. Even Harvard's Stephen Jay Gould, an evolutionist, says the highly embarrassing absence of transitional forms is "the trade secret of paleontology."

The really exciting educational fact here is that Darwin's theory of evolution has been attacked with increasing severity and power this century by prestigious paleontologists, geologists, transformed cladists, discontinuists, molecular biologists, creationists (religious as well as atheistic), and proponents of intelligent design. How exciting. Here is a field that shook the world, getting shaken down itself. A theory that shook religion...has become a religion!

But you wouldn't know it to read most school textbooks or class notes. There you find more interest in confining students to stale theories, junk science, and politicized social theory, than offering the far more interesting and complicated truth. Too bad.

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