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THE PUBLIC SCHOOL'S HIDDEN PERSUADERS* AGAINST GOD

OCCASION: Monkey trial II, on PBS/TV's "Nova," premier (which I videoed) last night, & will soon show to a ministerium as preparation for leading a discussion on the topic stated in this Thinksheet's title. The Nova title? "God, Darwin, and the Dinosaurs." Subject? The current public controversy over teaching evolution(ism) &/or creation(ism) in the PS....I dreaded watching, knowing how painful the distortions would be to me. Distortions on both sides. Spiritually benighted evolutionists; scientifically benighted creationists; & philosophically benighted, both. And I wasn't disappointed. I mean I **was** disappointed, though I got what I expected....SURPRISE! The benightedness on the left (evolutionists) was slightly worse than the benightedness on the right (creationists).

1. As I feared, no one spoke for a **religion-neutral** teaching of origins. What do I mean? A religion-neutral public-school text would sound something like this: *What do you think it would be like if, going to a play, you missed the first & last acts & saw only Act II? Do you think, from your narrow experience, you could figure out much of the two acts you missed? That's how it is with us in the universe. We don't know how it began, but both science & religion believe it had a beginning. We don't know how it will end; but again, religion & science generally agree it will end. But of course what do "beginning" & "end" mean when we stretch them so far out of our experience? ¶ When we think of universe time as a play, we are using a picture. Pictures are what we have to think with when we are thinking big. Often the thinking takes the form of a jump, called an inference. Then we have to decide whether a particular inference is leading us astray or into more knowledge--whether it is invalid or valid, appropriate or inappropriate. For example: Would it be proper to infer, from our play, that just as our play had a playwright, so the play we call "the universe" has a playwright, a super-author, a designing & supervising intelligence whether or not called God? § That is not a question science can help you with. It's a question for philosophy & religion, not for science. This is a course in science, and you should know right off that science doesn't have all the answers; it doesn't even have all the questions. Part of growing up is learning where to go with your questions, & where not to go. § But suppose you ask a scientist the question about God, the universal playwright? Does science requires that the scientist say nothing about it? No, science requires only this: that whatever the answer the scientist gives, the scientist not claim that the answer is "scientific." Besides being a scientist, the scientist is a person, & the answer to this question will be personal. § Does that mean that the scientist doesn't "know" the answer? No, only that the answer is not a science kind of knowledge. There are many ways of knowing. § What, then, is the science kind of knowing? It's a way of checking on ideas (theories) of how things are. But you can check on whether somebody loves you: would that be science? No, because the highly complex reality we call love does not meet the requirements for scientific enquiry--that there be continuity without personal intervention (because science is rational & can explore only areas of logical process). § Yes, there are different ways of knowing; and they depend on different ways of seeing--religion, art, philosophy, science. Each way of seeing is important & can help us in the other ways of seeing. This course is on the science way of seeing. § Imagine four experts, one in each of the ways of seeing, discussing among themselves the question, Why is there something instead of nothing? Each will present one or more "theories," which is the Greek word for a "seeing," a picture or story that helps you to say "I see!" No picture or story can say it all, no one of the experts can free you from the need of hearing the other three. It is in you that the four ways of seeing should come together, and formal education is to help you to "understand," to put it all together and make of it the sense that seems best to you. This sense-making is a lifelong process to which everything you feel & think & do & experience will contribute. It is your life, & your mind. May you grow in its joy & wisdom.*

2. Why don't most public-school science courses begin with such disclaimers & wider contexting? Because of ignorance & arrogance. **Ignorance:** Our science teachers, instead of being taught to "teach science" in the contexts of all knowledge & all of life, are taught narrowly to be "science teachers"--as other teachers are taught, equally fragmentarily, to teach their specialties. A doleful accompaniment of this

* Yes, thanks to Vance Packard's consciousness-raising on commercial advertising.

pedagogy, both in teacher-training & in the p.-s.-science classroom, is **arrogance**: One who is taught a way of seeing will, if not told it's only a way of seeing, assume that it's the way of seeing, & other claimant ways of seeing are at least useless if not also false. So ancient Roman arrogance destroyed the great public library of Alexandria, Egypt. Centuries later, after the library had been reestablished, the Muslims destroyed it, saying (1) that where it confirmed the Koran it was unnecessary & (2) that where it conflicted with the Koran it was evil--the mentality we now see at work in the murderous tyrant of Iran, Khomeini.

3. Our public schools should serve to deliver the populace from ignorance & arrogance. Both tasks are impossible when "separation of church & state" is overread as separation of public education from life's widest context & deepest concern, the realm broadly called religion. To neglect this realm is educational: what's left out of public-school education is educational. The children are being educated negatively, to know what's not important. SYLLOGISM: School teaches what's important (the teachers say so!); school does not teach religion; therefore, religion is not important. Now note again this Thinksheet's title. "The public school's hidden persuaders against God" are (1) **negatively**, the absence of God (as holophrase here for religion), the left-out being unimportant, & (2) **positively**, the answering of nonsecular questions as though the questions were secular, ie, encompassed without remainder within the secular, God-absent paradigm. Now I'm not complaining that all questions can't be answered within that paradigm. Of course they can. All questions can be answered within any worldpicture ("paradigm," "Weltbild," "Weltanschauung," of my just plain "way of seeing the world"). What we the public must press upon the public-school establishment are two questions, one philosophical & the other cultural-political. The **philosophical** question: Given the historical & contemporary options, is the Enlightenment-secular the most adequate for p.-s. education in America today? The **cultural-political** question: Is that paradigm the most appropriate to our history & here-&-now (ie, would it pass the test of being called "the American paradigm"?). IRONY: The U.S. is often & rightly called, among the nations (at least of the West), the most religious in both foundation & in life today; yet most of America's children are given no public help to understand the God who is behind, above, & within our national instruments & institutions. And since religion is the motor of morality, our children are publicly taught no coherent moral vision. It would be miraculous if our media & entertainments were not an irreligious & immoral wasteland. The public school's hidden persuaders against God lead to a public that is, albeit unwittingly, persuaded against God--droves even of our churchgoers being intellectual atheists (ie, when pressed, admitting that they don't believe in God with their minds but only with their "hearts").

4. Why is the p.-s.-science teaching of **origins** (universe, life) so crucial here? Because whosoever is not in on the takeoff will not be in on the landing: if the origins picture has no room for God, how make room later? & how deal with the fact that a later-intruder god would be incompatible with the biblical God? In §1 I showed it's unnecessary, in teaching science theories of origins, to leave no room for God; indeed, it's necessary to leave room for God if the godless picture is not to become (as it is, eg, in the case of Carl Sagan) itself a religion.

5. Those who tell the origins stories in a way to shut God out by nonmention hypocritically accuse the "scientific creationists" (as in the NOVA documentary) of telling the origins stories in a way to include God in by implicative nonmention. Each correctly accuses the other of ignorance & arrogance. Lord, may the middle way soon emerge & take the field!

6. I've written a dozen Thinksheets on this theme. Esp. pertinent to this one are these:....#1957 ("Where to enlist in the creation/evolution war") contrasts authentic religion-&-evolution with the dogmas of evolutionism & creationism....#1617 ("What stories shall we tell the children? Spiritual formation in a 'secular' age") parallel-columns a primal tribe, Darwinism, & the Bible. [NB: Darwin was a deist, Darwinism is atheist.]....#1980....#1600.4....#1610.2....#1611....#1649 (response to distraught pastor's letter)....#1508 ("The Bible 'through the eyes of...within the limits of...").