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COVER: The synthetic polymer polyacetylene, a dark powder, has undergone a metamorphosis. A fortuitous lab accident produced a shiny gray film made up of many tiny fibrils. The film's ability to act as a semiconductor is opening up a host of new uses. See story p. 90. (Photo courtesy of A. J. Heeger and A. G. MacDiarmid, Univ. of Pa.)

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LETTERS

Creationism trial comments

I would offer a word of appreciation for Janet Raloff's report on the Arkansas creation/evolution trial (SN: 1/2/82, p. 12). This is the only account I have read in which the arguments of both sides are summarized without bias. The question of origins seems to be so emotionally loaded that the mass media are unable to resist simplistic "reasonable scientist versus ignorant bigot" characterizations. As Raloff's article showed, the creationists have called attention to some important scientific questions, regardless whether or not one considers their alternative explanations absurd. It's time the debate was seen in a positive light, as an opportunity not to strengthen, but to release any rigid postures — scientific or religious — and let a little intellectual humility dissolve some of our fossilized concepts. Is there anything wrong with admitting that we really don't know how we come to be here?

Richard Heinberg
Princeton, N.J.

Having read your many articles and coverage of the controversy surrounding the evolution vs. creationist theories, I read with interest your article "Of God and Darwin" (SN: 1/16/82, p. 44). While reading Section 4 of Act 590, concerning the "insufficiency of mutation and natural selection in bringing about development of all living kinds from a single organism," it occurred to me that it is very possible that all organisms did not develop from a single organism. It is possible that once minimal requirements were satisfied, life arose in different environments or microenvironments at about the same time. Thus, even on primitive earth, the forces of evolution were already operating. The interaction began, life changing the earth, the earth changing life, life converging, diverging, changing and adapting or perishing, to produce a profusion of life in its many different forms.

June M. Openshaw
Madison, Wis.

As an elementary student in Arkansas schools (about 1940) I was taught that the Aurora was caused by light reflection from the polar ice cap. At the same time I was taught (in church) the creation doctrine. The later encounter of evidence to the contrary was not any more traumatic for one or the other of these concepts. I have come to accept trapped particle dumping and evolution as our best current explanations.

When science and religion are used to try to enforce or contradict each other both are done a disservice. By nature religion is based on faith and acceptance, whereas science demands that what is "known" be constantly subjected to inquiry and accepted with skepticism. When a scientific theory is found to be incomplete or weak there is a rush of talent to be among the first to disprove it. The very foundations of the two areas of human experience are so incompatible as to be immiscible.

When the scientific evidence has contradicted my religious training the conflict has been resolved in favor of science but the process has left me with a greatly expanded concept of God.

Wade Selph
Del Mar, Calif.

The separation of the religious concept of creationism from the biological concept of evolution was not logically concise in the article "Of God and Darwin" by Janet Raloff. It becomes concise when we recognize that creationist explanations of the universe, life and human-kind are basically supernatural and that scientific explanations, including evolution, are confined to natural explanations.

This distinction should become the basis for future court decisions on whether or not creationism can be taught as a scientific theory in public schools.

Richard D. Mathews
Philomath, Ore.

The following observations have been made since 1976. They directly relate to "They Call it Creation Science." In that year I assumed a minority position at the National Association of Biology Teachers convention in Denver, Colo. As a high school biology instructor, I spoke in favor of a balanced classroom approach toward the creation-evolution issue, based on the position that students should be presented with both viewpoints in an objective manner, and allowed to decide for themselves. (They would do this, anyway.) Differences between the scientific method, pseudoscience, and faith were regularly discussed. Because the high school biology course is the final opportunity for a majority of our citizens to approach this issue in a professionally presented setting, I argued that we educators and/or scientists should encourage debate.

The response of fellow biology instructors was discomfiting. A vast majority of them were not interested in listening to the points offered against neo-Darwin theory.

In a different arena now, I am completing the second year of Ph.D. studies in a Human Bioenergetics research program. The response of university scientists I have observed mirrors that of the biology instructors I faced five years ago. They are uncomfortable with anti-Darwin data and often associate it with religious fanaticism.

These experiences, though several years and many miles apart, elicit the following questions. Can a generation of scientists, having been taught themselves from an evolutionary viewpoint, view data on the origins of life objectively? Are we bending our data to meet our theory or are we bending our theory to meet our data?

The assumption of an unpopular position by Gentry and Wickramasinghe is socially and professionally courageous. The statement that the facts "... show clearly that life on earth is derived from what appears to be an all-pervasive galaxy-wide living system and continues to be driven by sources outside the earth, in direct contradiction to Darwinian theory," warrants close scrutiny.

Tolerance of divergent views is obviously a necessity, even when sacred cows such as natural selection, spontaneous generation and mutation are involved. If Wickramasinghe's creationist bent is validated at some future date, a universe as vast as ours will obviate the conclusion that our minds will never fully understand the mind of the Creator. SCIENCE NEWS treated Wickramasinghe's and Gentry's data as it ought to be treated — scientifically and objectively. As Gentry says, God speaks to different people in different ways.

Lawrence E. Armstrong
Muncie, Ind.