

SENATOR SAM BROWNBAC IS CONFUSED ABOUT EVOLUTION

Enlightened reason, taken captive by faith, receives life from faith

.. . . [this reason] does not fight against faith but promotes it.

--Martin Luther

Evil things are done with God himself setting them in motion.

--Martin Luther

Conservative GOP Senator and presidential hopeful Sam Brownback says that he believes in evolution. This confession is either intellectually confused or it is a political ploy to gain support with a wider group of voters. I'm assuming that it is the former not the latter.

In an op-ed in "The New York Times" (5-31-07), Brownback proposes that we should give evolution the "seriousness it demands." He claims that "we cannot drive a wedge between faith and reason," and because they are complementary, "there cannot be any contradiction between the two."

As a theistic humanist, I believe that human experience itself will provide "values, meaning, and purpose," but I will respect Brownback's choice to take these on faith alone.

But I reject his odd contention that "faith purifies reason so that we might be able to see more clearly." I point out the danger of this below.

Brownback's confusion comes when he says that he only believes in microevolution within species, and he rejects the claim that new species come into being by natural selection, the crux of evolutionary theory.

Creationists accept microevolution but condemn the evolution of new species as unbiblical.

They are more consistent and intellectually honest than Brownback in affirming their belief that God created all species de novo, a position strongly implied in Brownback's column.

There is overwhelming evidence that human beings descended from a long line of ape ancestors. We share 98 percent of our genetic material with our chimp cousins. Chimps can learn sign language and teach it to their offspring, and we now have evidence that they use medicinal herbs.

As long as Brownback and creationists insist that we are unique divine creations, then their faith and reason will not get along. Brownback repeats the doctrine of special creation so often that it becomes a dogma that will brook no challenge from reason and science.

If faith purifies reason so that it sees only religious doctrine clearly, then we have Martin Luther's "enlightened reason, taken captive by faith," one that "does not fight against faith but promotes it." Luther once called reason a whore, but here it is a slave to faith.

Like many critics of evolution, Brownback assumes that belief in evolution forces one to embrace "an exclusively materialistic, deterministic vision of the world that holds no place for a guiding intelligence." To interpret science as metaphysics rather than simply a time-honored method to interpret empirical data is "scientism" not true science.

If Brownback's "guiding intelligence" is a deity that knows all of the future and causes everything to happen, then human beings have no free will, and they have just as little value as in the materialistic worldview that both he and I reject. Bringing in a traditional God causes more problems than it allegedly solves.

If God causes everything, then he produces evil as well as good. We know that sickle cell anemia evolved for a specific reason in Africa, where it protected the natives from malaria, but it became a debilitating defect for those unfortunate enough to be brought to America in chains.

Creationists, however, are left with a profound moral dilemma with this and many other similar examples. Natural selection has no moral scruples, but creationists must defend a deity who creates a myriad of things that can have both good and evil effects.

Senator Brownback is a Roman Catholic and in a recent response to his column, Robert T. Miller of Villanova's Law School finds Brownback's position confusing. Miller also demonstrates that his views of the relation of faith and reason do not conform to Catholic tradition, established by St. Thomas Aquinas 700 years ago.

If good saint were alive today, he would protect reason from slavery and not allow it to be taken captive by faith. I'm also sure that he would embrace all of evolutionary theory, not just a minor portion of it.