


**RELIGION AND SCIENCE
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The teaching of evolution theory is under threat in some European countries.

North Santee, California. Prominent US creationists are also frequently invited by the group to give talks.

Jones has just returned from the Istanbul book fair, where he says many creationist publications were on sale, and proving extremely popular. "Creationism is a major issue in Turkish politics; the debate is much more tense than in the United States," he says. "All biology textbooks now used in schools are creationist in tone."

There is debate over the size of the threat posed to science in Europe by the various creationist movements. The creationists' main goal is to have their views included in school curricula. But, unlike in the United States, many pupils in European schools receive religious education anyway and are therefore familiar with the theme of divine creation. Some think this may steal the thunder of the creationist movement in Europe — why force creationism into science classes if it is already taught in religious education?

Moreover, Europeans do seem to be more enlightened than Americans when it comes to evolution. According to a 2005 US study³, just 40% of Americans accepted the theory of evolution, down from 45% in 1985. In Europe, that figure has increased, from 65% in 1992 to 70% in 2005, although numbers vary widely across the region⁴.

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Others warn that scientists can't afford to be complacent. "The anti-evolution movement does undermine public understanding of science," argues Ulrich Kutschera, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Kassel in Germany and vice-president of the Association of German Biologists. "In Germany and other European countries, anti-evolutionists with different religious backgrounds promote their ideology via colourful web pages that are appealing to students and people without a scientific background. Perception of evolutionary biology, in particular, is seriously undermined by these activities." He suggests that biologists should devote more time to counteracting its spread by explaining their theories to the public.

Jones says that, despite his dislike of creationism — "it annoys and depresses me that intelligent students persist in holding irrational views" — he doesn't think that such arguments are set to undermine science in countries such as Britain. "But I am not so optimistic about Turkey." ■

1. Giertych, M. *Nature* **444**, 265 (2006).
2. *Nature* **428**, 595 (2004).
3. Miller, J. D. et al. *Science* **313**, 765–766 (2006).
4. Special Eurobarometer *Europeans, Science & Technology* http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_224_report_en.pdf (Eur. Comm., 2005).

Q&A PETER KOREVAAR

Peter Korevaar is head of the physics and cosmology working group of Germany's Studiengemeinschaft Wort und Wissen, one of the largest creationist groups in Europe. He holds a PhD in astrophysics and now works at IBM in Mannheim. **Quirin Schiermeier** asks him about his group's aims.

What are your main goals?

We are a Protestant group. We want to do accurate and honest scientific work under the premise that God has created the world. Scientific naturalism as we know it doesn't allow for a creator who can interfere with the physical world. Evolution should be taught in schools, and creation discussed along with it.

How would you describe your relationship with scientists?

You don't have to agree on everything to do good, accurate science together with [non-creationist] scientists. We use the same methods as other scientists,

namely falsifying and verifying hypotheses. We don't want to put anyone down. We would very much like to have an open discussion with evolutionary biologists about the issues at stake. But we feel constantly misunderstood. Scientists — and the media — always say we are dilettantes, Christian fundamentalists. This is mean. 'Fundamentalism' is immediately associated with Islamic fundamentalism: read terrorism. Fighting against these prejudices



is extremely hard.

What about evolution?

Microevolution, the adaptation of species to their environment, is an observed scientific fact, which we of course do not deny.

But macroevolution, the gradual process of development of new species, is a mere conclusion, there's no observational evidence for that.

How would you compare your group with creationists

in the United States?

We are aware of other creationist groups in Europe and the United States. But we don't collaborate too much with any of them. The US debate is more aggressive, there is more foul play from both sides. This is not helpful.

Do you advocate intelligent design?

There's an open question about how the many complex structures observed in the Universe came into being. Intelligent design gives an alternative answer to this question. We can subscribe to most of its arguments.