

fully sued the state of California over regulations governing the teaching of evolution in California public schools. (Seagraves wanted science teachers to be required to mention pertinent passages from the Book of Genesis.) What most people do not know is that for much of this century, and especially in recent years, scientists have been fighting among themselves about Darwin and his ideas.

Scientists are largely responsible for keeping the public in the dark about these in-house arguments. When they see themselves as beleaguered by opponents outside the citadel of science, they tend to put their differences aside and unite to defeat the heathen. The layman sees only the closed ranks. At the moment, with creationism apparently quiescent, we can, if we listen hard enough, hear fresh murmurs of dissent within the scientific walls. These debates are more complicated, perhaps, than the old contest, Science vs. Religion, but they are at least as interesting, and sometimes as heated.

One of the least publicized and least understood challenges to Darwin and the theory of evolution—and surely one of the more fascinat-

ing, in its sweep and rigor—involves a school of taxonomists called cladists. (A “clade” is a branch, from the Greek *klados*; “cladist” is pronounced with a long *a*.) Particularly interesting—vexing, evolutionary biologists would say (and do)—are those who toil in what is called transformed cladistics, and who might be thought of as agnostic evolutionists. Like many who have broken with a faith and challenged an orthodoxy, the transformed cladists are perhaps best defined by an opponent—in this case, the British biologist Beverly Halstead. Asked not long ago in a BBC interview what he thought of transformed cladistics, Halstead replied: “Well, I object to it! I mean, this is going back to Aristotle. It is not pre-Darwinian, it is Aristotelian. From Darwin’s day to the present we’ve understood there’s a time element; we’ve begun to understand evolution. What they are doing in transformed cladistics is to say, Let’s forget about evolution, let’s forget about process, let’s simply consider pattern.”

Since Darwin’s time, biologists have been absorbed in process: Where did we come from? How did everything in nature get to be what it now is? How will things continue to alter? The transformed cladists—they are sometimes called pattern cladists—are not concerned primarily with time or process. To understand why, it helps to know that they are trained in taxonomy: they are rigorous, scrupulous labelers. Their job as taxonomists is to discover and name the various groups found in nature—a task first assigned to Adam by God, according to Genesis—and put them into one category or another. Taxonomists try to determine not how groups came into existence but what groups exist, among both present-day and fossil organisms. To understand that cladists believe this knowledge must be acquired before ideas about process can be tested is to understand the natural tension that exists between taxonomists and evolutionary biologists.

The transformed cladists have escalated the battle. In the 1940s and 1950s, years which witnessed the growth of evolutionary biology, taxonomists allowed themselves what might be called a bit of artistic license. (They called it the new systematics.) This occurred in part, no doubt, because taxonomy had come to be thought of as dull and stuffy—particularly by evolutionists like Sir Julian Huxley (the grandson of Darwin’s contemporary champion Thomas Henry Huxley), who believed it was high time to cease being “bogged down in semantics and definitions.” (Sir Julian said this in 1959 at the University of Chicago during a cen-

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*A Darwinian Prehistoric Social Party (The Unevolved Club Man of the Period), by Paul Friedrich Meyerheim*