

# Politics and evolution — one recent skirmish (FWIW)

[http://voices.washingtonpost.com/political-bookworm/2010/04/cupp\\_skips\\_the\\_facts\\_in\\_arguin.html](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/political-bookworm/2010/04/cupp_skips_the_facts_in_arguin.html)



## Cupp skips the facts in arguing against evolution

You can find S.E. Cupp’s commentaries on Tucker Carlson’s new conservative website The Daily Caller. You can read her in the online New York Daily News, and you can see her in her role as TV personality/commentator on Fox and CNN.

Now she has a new book due out next week called “Losing Our Religion: The Liberal Media’s Attack on Christianity,” with a foreword by Mike Huckabee. The former presidential candidate vouches for Cupp’s devotion to facts in arguing her points: She “uses the sharp blade of careful research, thoughtful reasoning, and brilliant logic,” he writes, adding “she reaches a level of substance many writers twice and thrice her age only hope for.”

The thrust of Cupp’s argument is summed up in her introduction in which she says the American media, “with careful, covert nudges from the Obama administration,” are leading a revolution. “This revolution, already in full throttle around the country,” she writes, “is being waged against you and me and every other American, and its goal is simple: to overthrow God, and silence Christian America for good.” It is important to distinguish between rhetoric and fact and to hold authors accountable for the information they impart to the public. Statements of fact should have no trouble withstanding educated scrutiny. Mike Huckabee endorses Cupp’s methods. Her “substance,” as Huckabee terms it, is scattered throughout the book. So let’s single out one chapter to zero in on, as a measure of the entire work. I have chosen Chapter Four – Thou Shalt Evolve. In this chapter, Cupp sums up her take on evolution like this: “The debate over the legitimacy of evolution isn’t really about a battle between fact and fiction. It’s about Christianity, and the liberal media’s attempt to eradicate it from all corners of society.”

As I don’t have the credentials to assess Cupp’s understanding of evolution, I have called on an expert in the field. I asked Joshua Rosenau to weigh in on Cupp’s scholarship. Rosenau is public information project director at the National Center for Science Education, which is a not-for-profit organization devoted to the teaching of evolution in public schools. Among its 4,000 members are scientists, teachers, clergy, and people holding a variety of religious beliefs.

Here is Rosenau’s response to Cupp’s chapter on evolution.

*By Joshua Rosenau*

[Further comments are inserted at a few points.]

S.E. Cupp's handling of science and religion misrepresents the nature of evolution, obscures the science of biology, and dismisses the deeply-held religious views of most Christians outside of the fundamentalist subculture. This is the sort of misrepresentation which leads her to concoct an anti-Christian conspiracy on the part of reporters, and – bizarrely – to say that Darwin is “quite literally the Anti-Christ” for liberals.

Cupp presents creationism as “a counter-argument” to evolution, yet never provides a clear account of what evolution is, nor what she thinks creationism means.

Creationism is certainly not a scientific argument of any sort. Scientists, teachers, federal courts, and reporters all recognize that creationism is a religious argument that abuses specific sciences and science as an enterprise. In addition to evolution – the foundation of modern biology – many young earth creationists [*i.e.*, proponents of the theory that the earth is only a few thousand years old] reject conventional plate tectonics (the basis of modern geology), and the basic physics behind radioisotopic dating methods. Conservation of mass and energy, not to mention basic thermodynamics, go out the window to concoct scenarios by which a global flood could transpire. All this abuses science as a way of testing claims about the world, twisting it to allow supernatural religious claims to supersede empirical science [the issue here is not whether one should believe there is a scientific explanation for everything, but instead it is whether one is incorrectly claiming that scientific explanations for certain alleged events are possible when the theories are not supported, or not supportable, with scientific evidence].

Cupp presents evolution — and science more generally — as the enemy of religion. Reporters’ “propping up of science,” she writes, is an “attack on Christianity.” If anything, it is Cupp’s approach which insults Christians. Research detailed in Elaine Ecklund’s forthcoming “Science vs. Religion,” shows that many scientists are religious themselves and do not generally regard science and religion as enemies.

Nor do Christian non-scientists, as illustrated by a string of powerful statements from the leadership of Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopalian, and Presbyterian denominations, among others. Their views were put eloquently in a letter signed by more than 12,000 Christian clergy: “We the undersigned, Christian clergy from many different traditions, believe that the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may comfortably coexist. ... [T]he theory of evolution is a foundational scientific truth.... To reject this truth or to treat it as ‘one theory among others’ is to deliberately embrace scientific ignorance ... We believe that among God’s good gifts are human minds capable of critical thought and that the failure to fully employ this gift is a rejection of the will of our Creator. To argue that God’s loving plan of salvation for humanity precludes the full employment of the God-given faculty of reason is to attempt to limit God, an act of hubris. ... We ask that science remain science and that religion remain religion, two very different, but complementary, forms of truth.”

Cupp’s deepest offense against science comes in treating opinion polls as measures of scientific validity. Creationism belongs in science classes, she claims, because it is “not a conspiracy theory,” and “half the American population believes it.” The former claim is dubious at best [in any case, it does not contain verifiable or falsifiable scientific explanations; problems with evolutionary theory are not in themselves valid arguments for unsupported alternatives], and the latter is simply irrelevant.

Scientific truth is universal [*i.e.*, independent of culture], and Cupp wrongly focuses only on American polls. A 2006 analysis found that America was the second-least accepting of evolution among 35

industrialized nations, ahead of Turkey but behind scientific powerhouses like Cyprus, not to mention [traditionally] religious nations like Italy, Poland, and Ireland.

Regardless of polling, a scientific theory is measured by its ability to make testable and correct predictions, and to be accepted by scientists as a useful tool. Evolution [is currently the most effective and comprehensive scientific framework for explaining empirical observations and making verifiable predictions, and because of this it] is the foundation of modern biology, biotechnology, and medicine, and a vital component of agriculture, engineering, and other sciences crucial to American economic competitiveness, and polls cannot change the truth [“existing scientific evidence” might be a better choice of words].

Cupp might have done her readers a service by even glancingly noting the scientific basis for evolution’s nearly uniform acceptance among practicing biologists, or at least looked to the more meaningful surveys of scientists’ opinion.

Cupp claims that statements about evolution’s support among scientists are themselves “another way of saying faith and science are incompatible and believers are on the losing side of the argument.” This argument insults the many Christians – scientists and non-scientists – who accept evolution and find science and religion [potentially] compatible. [Strictly speaking, statements on the acceptance of evolution are only about science unless they specifically mention religion, and they should not be interpreted as saying religion and science are incompatible unless they make explicit statements about *all* forms of religion.]

On top of misrepresenting the nature of science and the nature of religion, Cupp’s coverage does violence not just to the science of evolution, but to the public’s expectations of science journalists and science teachers. She misreports recent history and legal proceedings. She twists math itself to claim that 44 percent is “not a minority.”

She concludes by complaining that “the liberal media is not interested in acknowledging our nation as a deeply religious one,” and repeats her claim that evolution is [basically just] a weapon used to attack Christians.

In fact, Cupp is the one who seems uninterested in acknowledging the nature of American religious faith. Many Americans find that evolution deepens and informs their faith, and reject the anti-science stance Cupp (an avowed atheist) attributes to religion. That many Americans do find evolution contrary to their religion does not, in any event, change the scientific truth of the matter.

Whether our nation is or isn’t “deeply religious” does not change what science is or how it works, and does not change the century and a half of meticulous research which has convinced scientists that evolution is essential to biology and biology education.

By Steven E. Levingston | April 21, 2010; 5:30 AM ET

[ **Note:** S. E. (Sarah Elizabeth) Cupp is a political columnist, commentator and culture critic who has contributed frequently to politically conservative web sites, magazines and television shows during the past few years (and to a lesser extent has also contributed to a variety of other media outlets). She and Brett Joshpe also co-authored the book, “Why You’re Wrong About the Right : Behind the Myths: The Surprising Truth About Conservatives,” which was published by Simon and Schuster Threshold Editions in 2008. ]

**Déjà vu.** For an earlier book controversy of the same type, see the link below and its continuations (further links are given near the end of the article).

<http://www.talkreason.org/articles/coulter1.cfm>

**DISCLAIMER.** None of the preceding is posted with the intention of advocating for any specific political viewpoint or agenda aside from accurate public discussions of scientific issues. To repeat a frequently quoted statement (attributed to several people), “Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts.”