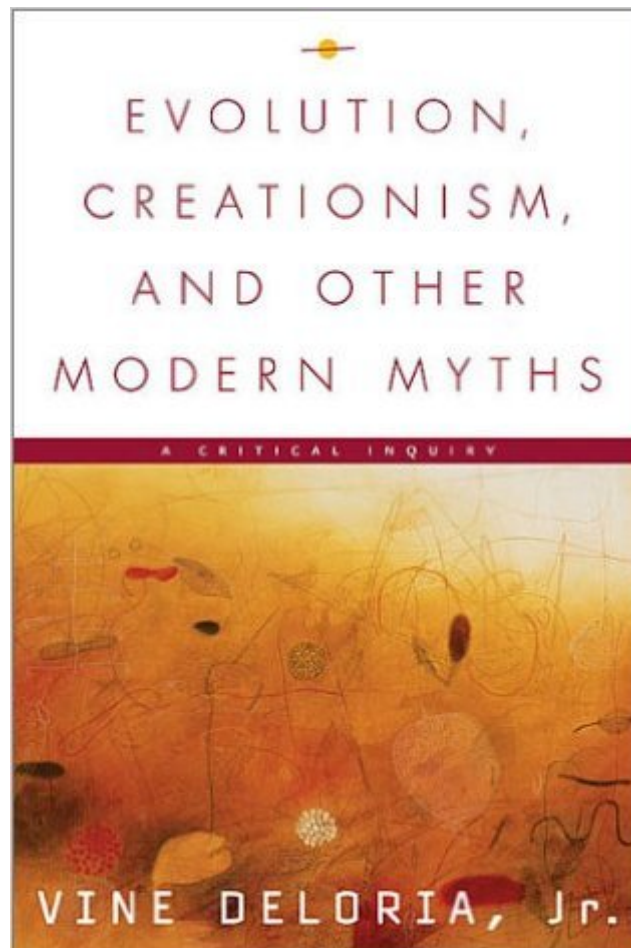


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Evolution, Creationism, And Other Modern Myths: A Critical Inquiry



Synopsis

"I offer no comfort to religious fundamentalists or evolutionists," writes Vine Deloria in his introduction to *Evolution, Creationism, and Other Modern Myths*. "Both are passÃ© and represent only a quarrel within the western belief system, not an accurate rendering of Earth history." With this salvo, Deloria, named by Time magazine as one of the eleven greatest religious thinkers of the twentieth century, launches a witty and erudite assault on the current state of evolutionary theory, science, and religion. When Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* was published in 1859, a philosophical upheaval on par with the Copernican revolution of the sixteenth century occurred. Darwin was roundly criticized for promulgating ideas inconsistent with the Bible, and many hailed the death of God and religion. For more than a century, the schism between scientists, espousing progressive theories about evolution and the Earth's beginnings, and religious fundamentalists, focusing on the inconsistencies between these theories and western religious dogma, has grown. Using the tension between evolutionists and creationists in Kansas in the late 1990s as a focal point, Deloria takes Western science and religion to task, providing a critical assessment of the flaws and anomalies in each side's arguments. Incorporating non-Western and Native American ideas, as well as the concept of "Intelligent Design," Deloria provides us with a framework to better understand our beginnings.

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Customer Reviews

DeLoria is an author I have always respected, and there is much in this book to praise, but the

presentation of some views and his critique of them is clearly biased and designed to promote a postmodern view of science and culture in which fables, stories and legends are equally as valid as results reached through experimentation and testing in science. His treatment of evolutionist theory and scientists who defend evolution is fraught with ad hominem attacks, sarcasm, nastiness and rhetorical questions. His references to evolutionist theorists such as Stephen Gould characterize them as "self-appointed high priests of evolution" and the like; on the other hand theologians and ID theorists get "the great Swedish theologian...", "the great German theologian...", or "respected theorist Behe..." (a totally scientifically discredited creationist). Why? Because attacking evolution theory, attacking even Western creationism and religion, paves the way to give equal credit with science to non-Western legends, fables, and oral history. To paraphrase many jurists who say of oral contracts, such "science" is not worth the paper it's printed on. Now, I have written articles and made presentations arguing DeLoria's point from my own perspective -- I DO believe there is much in Non-Western oral history and culture that presages modern science, and much that can be gained by melding western and non-western views, especially for ecological studies. What I object to is the constant sarcasm and lack of respect for scientists who hold views that DeLoria clearly disagrees with -- skip the snotty attitude and personal attacks (which do not exist even for the western creationist/Christians he also clearly disdains).

Deloria argues that any current understanding of complex science and any form of dogmatic "fundamentalism" are roughly equally flawed and that the middle path with heart is a spiritual intelligent design view. Deloria points out various of what he claims are widespread (yet supposedly hidden) assumptions of Western religion and Western science, and offers his own take on Native American folk wisdom and other traditions rather than natural selection as the universal acid that explains it all. His view is a hybrid of intelligent design creationism and catastrophism, where meaningful interventions and catastrophes reflect a spiritual dimension to nature. Deloria shares the basic rhetorical strategy of ID, considering as a conceptual unit the biological theory of natural selection and the cultural values widely associated with evolution, such as the Victorian ideal of social progress. This is part of the widespread assumptions that Deloria is criticizing. It is this combined notion of "emergent change" Deloria seems to refer to when he talks about the "myth of evolution," which often makes his view of evolution very different from Darwin's. If this had been a 19th century treatise on cultural assumptions surrounding the acceptance of Darwin's theories, it would have some remarkable insights. However, as a critique of biology and creationism in the 21st century it seems quaint at best.

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