FAITH TRUMPS ALL ON HUMAN ORIGINS, MOST THINK WITH THEIR HEARTS:

Darwinian evolution comes straight from the head. Biblical creationism comes straight from the heart. Intelligent design also comes from the heart, but is routed through the head. That's what makes it more dangerous. It's belief masquerading as thought.

A sequel to the famous Scopes "monkey trial" is now underway in Dover, Pa. There, a judge will decide whether the local school district can introduce into science classrooms the notion that the universe was planned. I agree with the plaintiffs that irrationalism has no place in public science classrooms. I also agree with the defendants that intelligent design is a totally reasonable postulate, although an unscientific one.

In Pennsylvania, expert witnesses debate whether molecules can self-assemble into proteins. Meanwhile, in Cincinnati, fundamentalists are building a Disneyesque "science" museum to illustrate the seven-day biblical account of creation. The mob of annual visitors they expect will come from the nearly half of adult Americans who -- at least in polls -- believe that Genesis is God's literal truth and that humans have no biological connection to apes.

Why do so many intelligent Americans sail upwind against scientific proofs so strong that members of the science intelligentsia are dumbfounded? The answer is that, for most people, faith trumps everything, including reason. As Jesus of Nazareth might have said, "Man does not live by evidence alone."

Several years ago I got into the habit of introducing each beginning geology course with a mini-lecture about four separate ways of knowing: faith, tradition, intuition and reason. Each way occupies its own parallel universe.

Consider the question "How do you know something?" Faith answers, "I know it because I believe it." Tradition, which I interpret as ritualized habit, answers, "I know it because we've always done it this way." This explains why religious iconography and ceremony are so stable, and why my Norwegian American mother keeps a kitchen troll. Intuition answers, "I know it because I feel it." Who has not been moved emotionally by the solitude of a mountaintop, the power of the sea, the clarity of a desert night or the rush of a new idea? Reason answers, "I know it because I can prove it."

Though reason is the linchpin of science, many scientists (including me) use irrational ways of knowing as well. The greatest ideas usually come through intuitive "eureka" moments. Hence, when science is described as 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration, it's the 1 percent that's irrational. Scientists also use faith in their ideas to get them through the 99 percent of their jobs that is spent framing testable questions, following step-by-step logic, collecting evidence, presenting it to colleagues and, worst of all, attending meetings. The only irrational way of knowing, one that scientists don't use much, is traditional thinking. What matters most to them are new ideas, not old ones. When push comes to shove, the guy with information beats out the one with authority.

The majority of Americans who want biblical creationism taught in schools are not a fringe group of sloppy thinkers. They just prefer to think with their hearts (faith, tradition and intuition) rather than with their heads (reason) on the issue of human origin and purpose. The minority of Americans who understand that all life is descended from a common ancestor have relied on their heads and have found the evidence irrefutable. The dangerous group are the intelligent designers, who first decide in their hearts, then argue with their heads.
From my perspective, the best way to keep a tidal wave of creationist pseudoscience out of American classrooms is for the intelligentsia in general, and scientists in particular, to stop treating the majority of voters like toddlers and teenagers. Instead of saying "You're wrong" or "You just don't get it," we should respectfully remind them that the Founding Fathers included a golden rule in the U.S. Constitution: Church and state must remain separated.

True-blue creationists don't care about the clever arguments of the intelligent designers. They already know they are right. The problem is, they just can't prove it.