

engagement and reflective critical thinking. Our point is that if schools do choose to teach religion — a decision we leave to administrators and teachers — some ways are more consistent with the basic aims of public education than are others.

The stance of the two books is also somewhat different. We write largely as critical observers, describing what we see and commenting on its merits or problems according to certain internal standards for public education. These include the promotion of critical engagement and self-reflection, as well as the disposition to listen to alternative views. Stenmark stands more as an advocate, but what she advocates — a respect for difference — is certainly compatible with our point of view.

Stenmark's comments about the individualism of her students and their disconnection from religion and communal tradition is an important reminder that our book is limited in its focus on teachers and curriculum, and that a more complete account would explore the world of the students and the impact that religion courses have on them. Her observation that many of her students lack a connection to any tradition other than individualism is an important claim, and it would be interesting to probe that "individualism" to see just what functions it serves for students. One possibility is that it represents a public language that allows them to connect with one another in spite of their different commitments; another possibility is that the utilitarian emphasis of modern universities fosters a kind of materialism that leads to a neglect of communal commitment. I do not know what such a probe might find but Stenmark has clearly identified an important topic for investigation.

Response to Walter Feinberg

doi:10.1017/S1755048315000437

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Walter Feinberg correctly summarizes my position as advocating a more equal relationship between religion and science in public discourse. But I want to emphasize the word *public*, because scientific and religious statements need not be given equal weight in all discourse, merely in *public* discourse where the goal is to exchange a plurality of perspectives in

order to exercise sound public judgment. Truth claims — scientific and religious — are anathema to this goal because, to paraphrase Hannah Arendt, they are despotic, imposing themselves on public life and superseding public judgment. Unfortunately, those who recognize the despotic nature of religious truth claims often don't recognize the similar impact of scientific claims, and the assertion that "science has proven" functions much like "the Bible says" because both exclude alternative perspectives, threatening plurality and undermining the exchange of reasons.

Feinberg, for example, acknowledges that religious perspectives should not be excluded from public discourse, but then worries that (some?) religious reasons might be put "on par" or given "parity" with scientific claims. He justifies granting science a kind of epistemic priority because it is vulnerable to counter-evidence and supports productive research. This claim that science is self-correcting is often used to support the veracity of science — although I find it odd that scientific truth-claims should be considered trustworthy because they might later turn out to be wrong — but this does not make science unique. Religion, for example, is also self-correcting, through reformations, iconoclasm, mystical traditions and the like. Scientists also get caught up in "received theories" (i.e., paradigms) and ignore certain evidence: Copernicus, Galileo, Darwin, and Einstein all had problems accepting what their discoveries meant for existing theories, and Einstein suppressed information in favor of the dominant paradigms. Moreover, scientific theories are often rejected on scientific grounds. Of course, this is legitimate for scientific discourse, but it does highlight my point about the similarities between truth claims (scientific, religious and otherwise).

More to the point, scientific truth claims — much like religious ones — can do a lot of damage before they are corrected, and there is a disastrous history of using "science" to justify public policy. This includes eugenics in the early twentieth century, which was not fringe science but well-established, included in textbooks (such as Hunter's *Civic Biology*, the focus of the *Scopes* trial), and used as the basis for state laws and Supreme Court decisions (e.g., *Buck v. Bell*, which supported forced sterilization with support from "science" and "experts").

I do not advocate excluding scientific claims from public discourse, nor do I think all religious perspectives are helpful. But wrong, and even dangerous ideas, cannot be summarily excluded from public discourse merely because they are deemed wrong or dangerous. Science and religion are diverse practices, and that diversity is essential to public discourse, as important (perhaps more so) than veracity. We can't decide ahead of time

which perspectives will be included or excluded particularly if our judgments are based on which is more “reasonable” in regards to scientific claims. At issue is who gets to challenge science in *public* discourse and on what grounds. Is it legitimate to reject the science in *Civic Biology* on the grounds of racial justice? If so, it is not clear how these claims differ from religious claims, particularly when claims about racial justice are often intertwined with religious truth claims. We *need* voices that challenge the givens of scientific rationality — including religious voices — not because we have to accept them, but because public discourse needs this kind of disputation. Religious perspectives have been on the wrong side of science and the right side of history on more than one occasion, including on issues of race, the environment and even on the issue of homosexuality (challenging scientific orthodoxy which deemed it a disorder). They were often criticized as irrational and just plain nuts, but it is these challenges that are part of scientific self-correction and, more importantly, part of sound public judgment.