In 1859 the world got a piece of shocking news: it seems that not only is the earth not the center of the universe, as Copernicus and Galileo had amply demonstrated, but that human beings are not the pinnacle of creation after all. This dealt a big blow to our self-esteem (as Freud called it) – the second in three centuries – and it was Charles Darwin, a quiet Englishman who had made his lifelong activity the study of the natural variation of living organisms. As is well known, the publication of his On the Origin of Species caused quite a stir in academic circles and in the general public. The first kind of controversy (the scientific one) lasted for decades: by the turn of the 20th century the theory of descent with modification (Darwin called it), or evolution (as we now refer to it), was as solidly established as relativity or the theory of gases.

So for the second sort of controversy: while the general public in most European countries does not consider the notion that we are closely related to chimps and not particularly outrageous anymore, a vocal minority in the United States refuses to accept it on ideological grounds: it’s not in the Bible, so it can’t be.

How can this bizarre state of affairs persist into the 21st century? If you are a scientist, this seems as incredible as somebody seriously defending the notion that the earth is flat (which a few people belonging to the Flat Earth Society actually do!). Scientists are not in the business of questioning people’s religious beliefs, but they are also paid to teach the best of what we have good reason to believe, leaving individuals to make decisions on how to reconcile the divine with their own religious views.
Dr. J. D. was born in Tennessee in 1880 at a small town called Franklin. The Tennessee Darwin Coalition served as inspiration behind the international Darwin Day Program. The Darwin Day Program works to encourage the public to learn about evolutionary biology and to prompt scientists to get out of their ivory towers for at least a few hours and talk to the people who, after all, pay their salaries and grants. Surely this sort of communication between experts and lay people is a good idea. Bridging the gap between science and society is what the Darwin Day program is all about.

Just in case you'd like to start your own Darwin Day celebrations, let me tell you how we did in Tennessee this year.

The events started on February 11 with a workshop for local junior and high school teachers on how to use evolution as an example of critical thinking. Imagine! The teachers would be much better for students to learn about the process of science and how certain conclusions (e.g., that we did evolve from a common ancestor shared with currently living chimps) are actually reached instead of just learning facts that they have to take on faith.

On February 12 there was a whole array of events, starting with an all-day immersion in evolution, with both at the student union where faculty and graduate students will answer questions about evolution, and continuing with a documentary festival in which videos were screened by a discussion of the main ideas presented. Darwin Day 2002 in Tennessee ended with a special lecture by philosopher Elliott Sober (of the University of Wisconsin-Madison), who nicely showed why intelligent design theory is actually at all (see his paper in this anthology.)

Now, you don't have to do all this to have a Darwin Day next year, but make the advantage of your local colleges and universities - work with the community of which you are a part.

While it is astounding to see that the state of science education in this country is such that people proudly "reject" well established scientific theories simply because they don't fit with their preconceptions, there is a bright side to almost everything. The evolution-creation controversy is no exception. After my rude awakening to the realities of creationism when I moved to Tennessee, I started to study the problem and its roots. In so doing I learned quite a bit about why people believe what they believe and what shortcomings of science education are contributing to cause the problem. The result has been a better awareness of the situation and a renewed willingness to do something about it (and, presumably, to support it). The feeling is spreading, the backlash is building, and there is a new momentum on campuses all over the United States.
by attacks on their discipline from as varied sources as the religious right and the academic left—may be finally starting to realize that they have a moral obligation to come to the public and explain what they are doing, why and how. This, as the final words of Casablanca famously went, may be the beginning of a beautiful friendship. The result could be a better informed and critically thinking public, the true guarantors of a democracy… and a civilization.

[ABOUT THE AUTHOR]
Massimo Pigliucci is an Associate Professor at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, where he teaches ecology and evolutionary biology. He has published 49 technical papers and two books on evolutionary biology: *Phenotypic Evolution* with Carl Schlichting and *Beyond Nature vs. Nurture*. Dr. Pigliucci has received the Oak Ridge National Labs award for excellence in research and the prestigious Dobzhansky Prize from the Society for the Study of Evolution, of which he is now Vice President. Dr. Pigliucci is also widely published within skeptic and freethought journals, and presents lectures and debates throughout the country. A book of his essays entitled *Tales of the Rational: Skeptical Essays About Science and Nature* has been published and his monthly e-column entitled *Rationally Speaking* is hosted on numerous web sites. Massimo Pigliucci is Vice-Chair of the Darwin Day Program.

[ADDITIONAL RESOURCES]
Darwin Day at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville: http://fp.bio.utk.edu/darwin/
Massimo’s Skeptic & Humanist Web: http://fp.bio.utk.edu/skeptic/