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Species of Origins: America's Search for a Creation Story

by Karl W. Giberson and Donald A. Yerxa. Published by Rowman & Littlefield.

Guide Rating - ★★★★★

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Evolution and Creation

Why is there such rancorous conflict in America over creationism and evolution? Other countries don't suffer form this, so why does the United States? Is it simply a question about religion? Is it because of Christian fundamentalism?

In their recent book "Species of Origins," Karl W. Giberson and Donald A. Yerxa argue that such answers really miss the point because evolution conflict is more about culture than simply religion. Every culture needs a creation story because such stories tell us about the origins of our world and, more importantly, about our place in that world. When two incompatible creation stories come into contact, the result is personal and cultural alienation - and conflict.

In the case of America, there are two competing worldviews which are given nearly equal authority: natural science and traditional Christian religion. Unfortunately, they offer different creation stories which, for many, are entirely incompatible. Although this cultural divide is the focus of the book, the more general purpose is to explain the different positions taken by people in the debate. Secular readers will gain more insight on people's religious positions, and religious readers will better understand the perspective of natural science.

The possibility of achieving some measure of mutual understanding is crucial. Many religious believers regard those who accept evolution as fools at best, but more often as simply evil. Many scientists, on the other hand, don't believe that anyone with a modicum of intelligence can reject the results of evolutionary theory in favor of biblical literalism. This divide prevents real communication and any sort of progress. Unfortunately, the view in science is not that of the public:

Stark worldviews with no place for God do not play well in mainstream America, where almost everyone believes in God. Most people think prayer works. Most people think that morality is firmly grounded in God. The world is really supposed to make sense, to be at least approximately the way that we experience it. There is something profoundly wrong with claims that human beings are nothing but selfish genes, that minds are but pieces of meat, and that meaning is at best an illusion. Such harsh notions run counter to the folk philosophy and conventional wisdom of Main Street America.

This volume covers Scientific Creationism, Intelligent Design, and the positions of various evolutionary biologists. A crucial aspect is that it doesn't just explain what your "opponents" think, but, as is evident from the above quote, it explains what your "opponents" think **your** position really is and how it sounds **to them**. It isn't enough to understand what others believe, but also what they think **you** believe, if true reconcilliation is to be possible.

There is a tendency to assume that the debate over evolution and creationism is simply a conflict between two sides. Giberson and Yerxa, however, demonstrate that there is quite a lot more variety than is commonly thought and that multiple perspectives play a role in shaping the debate. There exists a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding, much of which may be dispelled through this book.

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