

CRITICAL REVIEWS OF SPECIES OF ORIGINS

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Species of Origins: Americas Search for a Creation Story is a book with a somewhat modest agenda that does all that it sets out to do, and indeed does it so successfully that it rather transcends the task that the authors set for themselves. It is a work on the science religion relationship, specifically on the evolution-creation controversy, that does not claim to have new insights or new solutions, that is not going to settle things once and for all, that is not going to leave the reader amazed that such a dazzling exit can be found for so long a disagreement. Rather, the authors want to survey the origins debate, especially as it is found in modern America, and to give to the reader the tools needed to plunge into the discussion well-informed and ready to make a contribution.

Throughout, the authors show unfailing politeness and good humor, wading as they have done through endless stacks of turgid argumentation to which piles, I confess, I have made my own at-times-seemingly-never-ending contribution. The result is a simply invaluable primer on the subject that should be made compulsory reading for all who have ever thought on science-and-religion. If I say that Karl W. Giberson (editor of *Research News*) and Donald A. Yerxa, both professors at Eastern Nazarene College, must be the kind of teachers whom one remembers with joy and thankfulness until ones dying day, it is no less than justice. They are people who read every line of every student paper and find merit somewhere, somehow, in all.

The book is divided into 10 chapters. The authors begin with the whole question of origins and creation, trying to spell out the debate as it is going on especially in the United States today. How people differ over the beginnings of organisms and how there is debate between the evolutionists and the (what I will call for want of a better word) extreme, biblically focused Evangelical Christians. We then move on to the claims of the evolutionists a nice survey this and to the responses, theological and scientific (or what old creationist-bashers like myself would call scientific) made by the literalists. Next comes a chapter that, in respects, I believe is the best in the whole book, where the authors consider the council of despair promoted by so many modern scientists like Edward O. Wilson and Stephen Jay Gould. Anyone who doubts that atheism is being promoted today under the guise of good science should read this chapter. It is not that people should not be atheists if they wish, but rather that so many are staking out atheism under the name of disinterested objective inquiry, which is quite another matter.

We move then to people who have tried to take a more central position than extreme six-days literalism or extreme God denial. Some considerable time is spent on the claims of the so-called intelligent design enthusiasts like Michael Behe and William Dembski. As always, the authors try to take a non-partisan position, and they succeed admirably well. I kept wanting them to put the knife in. Finally, there is a brief survey of design arguments and their history. Frankly, I think this is too brief to be of real value, and speaking as a professional philosopher, I wish more time had been spent on Plato and Aristotle. But then, I have yet to read a book where I did not think that more time should be spent on Plato and Aristotle.

This is not always an easy or fun book to read. The authors suffer from a galloping case of graduate-studentitis

they have never met an idea that they found unworthy of being footnoted and referenced to death. Tackling *Species of Origins* was a bit like watching Wimbledon. Your eyes flick back and forth non-stop between the page of text and the page of references, until you feel like you have been subjected to one of those bizarre exercises that are supposed to obviate the need for spectacles. But that, I suppose, is the nature of the beast. If you are going to have a survey, then survey is what you should get. And if reading the references gives you theological understanding into the meaning of eternity, then so be it.

Let me simply say again that I can think of no better place to start into the debate about origins creationism or evolution than with this book. Read it, and then say to hell with fairness and join me and Johnson and Dawkins and all of the others in the punch-up! Giberson and Yerxa will pick you up and bind your wounds and report on you in their second edition no matter which side you choose.

Reviewers note: I was given strict instructions to write a review of about half of the length given above, and told not to exceed the limit or it might seem as though the editor was deliberately commissioning a review of his own work that gave him undue prominence. The readers of this newspaper will know that I have not done anything yet within its pages that could be construed as proper and appropriate, and I do not intend to start now. Giberson and Yerxa put a lot of hard work into *Species of Origins*, and they have produced something of benefit to us all. They have earned the attention.