

LITERATURE REVIEWS

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TWO REVIEWS OF A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW — A

THE CREATION-EVOLUTION CONTROVERSY. R.L. Wysong.
1976. East Lansing, MI: Inquiry Press. 455 p.

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Ever since the modern theory of evolution by natural selection was proposed by Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin, discussion and debate have raged as to which theory — creation or evolution — more fully explains the extant empirical data. The debate, which tends to be characterized by a high degree of emotionalism on both sides, peaked in the 20s with the Scopes trial and was relatively dormant in the 30s and 40s. The formation of several creationist movements in the early 60s and the reexamination of some difficulties with the evolutionary position has produced a strong resurgence of this debate. Evidence can be seen in the recent establishment and growth of a large number of creationist organizations, many of which are on college campuses.

Today there are literally hundreds of books that espouse the various “creationist” positions. Unfortunately, writers in this area tend to dichotomize their views when discussing this subject. Many of the more vocal creationists advertise their position as being the most scientifically correct concept and the evolutionary position as a plot by God-hating atheists. On the other hand, many evolutionists preach the evolutionary position to be the only scientifically correct position and picture the creationists as being uninformed, unaware, ignorant and uneducated.

It is common for adherents of each side to devour volumes of material which support their beliefs and then conclude that one must be absolutely stupid to accept any other hypothesis. Tragically, people on both sides often never study in depth the “other side.” Furthermore, many neither have an intellectual understanding of the other side, nor even realize it can be believed by the intelligent and informed. Much of this antagonism is unnecessary. There are logical, rational arguments for both theories.

Both reveal strengths and weaknesses in answering the data. Stacking the cards is easy for both sides but does little to reduce antagonism or permanently convince one's opponents. Honestly attempting an objective look at all of the data is the only way this debate will be solved.

Wysong's *The Creation-Evolution Controversy* is one of the few recent attempts to present *both* sides in a logical, understanding manner so the reader can be informed on the issues, regardless of the position for which he opts. In reality, most of us are somewhere between the two extremes of "atheistic evolution" and "instant, divine fiat creationism." While Wysong takes the creationist position, he is able, in most cases, to present the evolutionary position adequately and fairly, for he was a committed evolutionist during most of his undergraduate and graduate studies.

Each chapter defines the terms and presents the necessary background material for a specific area. After the subject is discussed, the evidence for evolution is presented, followed by the evidence for creation. Because much has already been published in this area, it is impossible for the author to present a complete discussion within the scope of this book. He is therefore forced to skim only the highlights of the chemical and mechanical principles and laws relative to the origin and development of plant and animal life.

The book begins with a discussion of methodology, i.e., the scientific method and other "methods of knowing." This background material is necessary for us to understand the controversy adequately. Unfortunately, many of those with definite opinions are not familiar with the nuances of the scientific method and especially the techniques used to evaluate a source of data. In this area, emotions strongly influence many of our views. Wysong attempts to eliminate emotional distortions (and the irrationalities that result) by a clear separation of verifiable data and suppositions based upon emotions, desires, and even defense mechanisms.

A key element in Wysong's discussion is his commendable use of reasoning and semi-formal logic. Complex suppositions are broken down into the basic problem, the data are presented on each side, and then conclusions are postulated. The effort to incorporate a large amount of "pure reasoning" is somewhat unusual in discussions of this kind. While reasoning of some type is included in most discussions, it is more a flow of ideas designed to reach a predetermined conclusion. Though evolutionary theories are almost always based on scholarly erudition, there is typically a lack of serious consideration of various alternative viewpoints.

Wysong's discussion of biochemistry illustrates this technique. He explains that there are two main amino acid enantiomers (amino acids

which are alike atomically but are different mechanically), the L and D forms. Although amino acids can exist in both forms, all proteins derived from living organisms, with insignificant exceptions, are composed of only the L forms. Yet, when amino acids are synthesized in the laboratory for commercial use (or when they are formed under conditions theoretically duplicating those found on the primitive earth), there is always a 50-50% mixture of the D and L forms. Creationists use this to support the contention that amino acids were formed by design. On the other hand evolutionists argue that the L and D forms exist randomly, but natural selection has selected the D forms. But since both the D and L forms function in the life process in identical ways, neither theory provides an adequate reason as to why L forms are preferred in nature to D forms.

This reviewer believes that the creationist position has a great deal of scientific validity behind it, but unfortunately many creationist writers either do not, or cannot, discuss this position adequately and scientifically. All too often creationists resort to name-calling or ignoring evidence which their theory cannot explain. Probably most evolutionists also would have difficulty defending their views in the presence of an informed creationist. Neither side has considered the other viewpoint as a viable concept, and a correct conclusion cannot be made until both views are considered fairly and impartially and until both sides acknowledge the existence of presently unanswerable problems. Wysong's book is a step in this direction.

The occasional bias towards creationism in the text and some of the diagrams is not a major detriment to the book, but may alienate those who are oriented towards the theory of evolution. This reviewer looks forward to a revision of the book where some of the current flaws can be corrected. Possibly then this book can become a standard text used to bridge the gap between the two extremes in this important field.

Crisp, clear thinking with logical conclusions characterize Wysong's approach. Many of the stock arguments for creationism, including the complexity and variety of life (and the inability of the evolution hypothesis to account for this) and the uselessness of an organ such as the eye until fully developed, are cited. In addition, many original ideas are developed from logic, using logic to a greater degree than many books in this area. Wysong is in a particularly good position to examine evolutionary evidence. As a licensed and practicing veterinarian, his studies have included similarities and differences of the various types of animals.

The ease with which mathematics can be applied to a science is a measure of its "scientificness." Wysong makes extensive use of mathematics to help understand the creation-evolution issue, especially in his arguments using probability theory. According to the evolutionists' own

rules, probability theory should be able to be strictly applied, but it is difficult in that the probabilities for so many occurrences happening by chance are astronomical — a problem solved by the argument of “given enough time, anything will happen.” Though this argument sounds plausible, it simply is not true. Events occur according to laws, i.e., they are a result of a set of antecedent events and always follow according to the specific set of antecedent events. Time permits them to happen but does not cause them. We have difficulty predicting outcomes because we do not know all the antecedent events. The search should be for more data instead of a dogmatic assurance that “evolution did it” or even that “creation did it.”

A large number of visual aids, charts and diagrams clarify the discussion. This, along with the author’s effort to discuss complex scientific ideas in a clear, readable fashion, enables the book to be utilized with profit by laymen and scientists alike. Because the book has amassed a wide variety of information about creationism with hundreds of references, many from secular sources and reputable journals, the book is a good general review of the evolution-creation debate for both the beginning and advanced student. A large number of quotes from respected scientific publications bolsters the validity of the arguments the author presents. Probably a complaint of the book is that it covers too much material — he uses an impressive array of information from biochemistry, anatomy, history, geology, and philosophy, and therefore cannot cover any material in depth. But Wysong’s purpose was to introduce the field, and for this purpose the book is well suited.

As a whole, the book is excellent in producing a better-documented, substantial overview of the creation-evolution controversy. By and large, criticisms and name-calling are avoided, even though Wysong sometimes loses his admirable objectivity. As the number of scholarly works supporting creationism increase, this book will probably take an important place among them.