

CRITICAL REVIEWS OF SPECIES OF ORIGINS

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I hope it will not be taken as a sign of disrespect to refer to this book as "Ronald Numbers Lite." In *Species of Origins: America's Search for a Creation Story*, two professors at Eastern Nazarene College, Karl W. Giberson (physics) and Donald A. Yerxa (history), have taken on the admirable task of creating an accessible introduction to the religious and scientific debates that have structured the American popular understanding of evolution and creationism over the past thirty years. Specialists may fill their cups from the Noachian deluge of monographs and creationist reprints that Numbers has unleashed over the past decades, but general readers will appreciate these authors' brevity as they explore the intellectual history of the recent "origins" debate.

At the heart of the book lies this conundrum: The United States is the most scientifically advanced nation in the world, with evolutionary thought and a materialistic methodology providing the essential and unremarkable foundation for almost all inquiry into geology, biology, medicine. At the same time, in poll after poll during recent decades, just under half of all Americans profess belief in a "young earth" creationism that stands directly at odds with the scientists' conclusions, and well over half reject the naturalistic assumptions that undergird modern scientific inquiry (pp. 5356).

Giberson and Yerxa place part of the blame for this gap on the small cadre of scientific popularizers particularly

Richard Dawkins and E. O. Wilson, who make up what the authors call a "Council of Despair," as they seek to replace the Christian faith in God's immanence with their own sense of the universe's contingency and purposelessness. Dawkins's aggressive atheism, in particular, has done little to help pious Americans digest his evolutionary ideas.

On the other hand, Giberson and Yerxa are familiar enough with the American creationist community to recognize that the Council of Despair's rhetorical flourishes are largely beside the point. Indeed, the best part of the book is an extended treatment of Henry M. Morris, whose co-authorship of *The Genesis Flood* in 1961 launched the modern movement for young earth creationism and whose tireless leadership of the creationist movement since that time has played the central role in maintaining or even widening the gap between evolutionary scientists and "Main Street America." For the large number of Americans who want their Bible undiluted and literal, Morris has provided both a mechanism for explaining away evolution (i.e., the "world wide flood" in Genesis 6:11 created the appearance but not the fact of a long geological and evolutionary record) and a rationale for rejecting compromise with evolutionary scientists: from Nimrod's priests in the Babylonian empire to Richard Dawkins in his redoubt at Oxford, Morris claims, they have been the literal servants of Satan, manifest and active on the earthly plane (p. 108).

Despite such hyperbole, Giberson and Yerxa take Morris and such allies as Phillip E. Johnson and Michael Behe seriously as thinkers and as activists and properly so. The leading creationists represent an abiding impulse in American intellectual life, and they have had an enormous influence on the "culture wars" of recent times. The authors' own sentiments seem to lie somewhere in the complex middle ground between Morris's biblical supremacy and Dawkins's materialistic reductionism. Whether their lucid

survey of this vast territory will help narrow the intellectual gap in America is uncertain, but they have provided a clear introduction for those who hope to understand the lay of the land.