

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Readers are invited to submit reviews of current literature relating to origins. Mailing address: ORIGINS, Geoscience Research Institute, 11060 Campus St., Loma Linda, California 92350 USA. The Institute does not distribute the publications reviewed; please contact the publisher directly.

A REFERENCE ON CREATIONISM

SCIENTIFIC CREATIONISM (Public School Edition). Henry M. Morris, editor. San Diego, CA: Creation-Life Publishers. 230 p.

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The recent interest in achieving a fair and appropriately balanced treatment of origins in the public schools has brought a realization of the inadequacy of educational material that presents creationism from a scientific viewpoint. *Scientific Creationism* is the result of an effort by a team of 23 scientists, theologians and teachers to provide a reference book suitable for presentation of creationism on a non-sectarian basis in the public schools. Any effort to produce such a book is to be commended. Knowledge in the natural sciences has progressed to a point at which it should be possible to prepare a treatment that places the creation approach to origins in a respectable and favorable position from a scientific viewpoint.

Scientific Creationism will undoubtedly serve in the accomplishment of much good, but unfortunately it does not measure up to expectations. The authors have not succeeded in presenting creation concepts on a purely philosophical and scientific basis. Viewpoints unique to one major religious document (the Bible) and characteristic of one particular school of Christian thought (ultra-conservative evangelical theology) are taken for granted as essential features of a scientific creationism suitable for presentation in public schools. For example, much effort has been exerted to “prove” that scientific evidence supports an age of only a few thousand years for the material universe. Among devout, Bible-believing Christians who are conversant with the scientific data related to this view, there are few (relatively speaking) who would suggest that it has any basis of origin other than in the testimony of Moses.

Without the Bible and any religious disposition whatsoever, one could logically (scientifically) propose that the material universe and the life it

supports were created by a superior intelligence. There is a rapidly increasing and impressive body of scientific evidence that may be conformed more readily to this view than to the view that undirected, random behavior of inanimate elementary matter, given sufficient time, is adequate to account for the present complexity of the universe. But we are indebted to what may be described as religious sources for the concept that these features are of quantifiably recent and coincident origin.

One may wish for the assurance that his particular views are “proven by science,” particularly if he experiences a need for affirmation of these views in a hostile intellectual environment. Attempts to orient scientific data with a religious viewpoint in an intellectually satisfactory manner are a legitimate and necessary activity on the part of believers. But in any material intended for use in the public schools it is important to make a clear distinction between evaluation of scientific data from the viewpoints of diverse basic interpretive concepts, and efforts to fit such data into a particular religious viewpoint. The former has a justifiable place in science and philosophy courses; the latter only in a study of religious subculture groups (sociology) and theology.

Some of the discussion presented by Morris in support of a recent creation clearly indicates a recent origin for many of the present features of our planet’s surface and its inhabitants. Other portions of this discussion may be expected to weaken efforts to defend the creation viewpoint among individuals who are conversant with the scientific data involved. Analysis of the numerous examples of inaccurate presentation of data and misunderstanding of the related scientific principles that such individuals may find in many sections of this book would extend beyond the normal limits of a book review. Three examples from one chapter may be given for illustration.

The statement on page 142 that “literally all of the so-called radiogenic isotopes of lead found in uranium-thorium systems anywhere can be accounted for by this process [neutron capture] alone” will dismay readers who are acquainted with the related evidence. In the model proposed by the authors this statement requires that the observed positive correlation between thorium 232 and lead 208 in uranium-thorium minerals be accounted for by localized exposure to fast neutrons proportional to the thorium concentration, and without contribution from in situ radioactive transformation of thorium to lead or from daughter-product lead incorporated with parent thorium in the formation of the mineral. This model is also contradicted by the observation that lead associated with uranium generally has a *lower* proportion of lead 208 and lead 207 to lead 206 than

does common lead. Furthermore, there is no evidence for a naturally occurring process that would produce as much as 1/10,000 the neutrons required by this model (see Cook, as cited by Morris, p 61-62). Consideration of the probability for neutron capture by a lead nucleus introduces an additional factor of magnitude of 10^{-24} , making the model all the less probable.

The assertions that the K-Ar method of radiometric dating “must be calibrated by uranium-lead dating” (p 145), and that the Rb-Sr method “must be calibrated against the uranium method” (p 148) are without support in theory or practice. While there are numerous and significant cases of agreement within experimental errors (concordance) between the results of applying these techniques to a rock sample, the complete independence of each with respect to the others is demonstrated by the disagreement (discordance) between them that is commonly encountered.

On page 162 highly questionable evidence for a change of less than one percent in the radioactive transformation rate of carbon 14 at concentrations many orders of magnitude greater than could be expected under natural circumstances is cited as proof “that C-14 decay rates actually could have varied in the past to an extent which would render invalid most radiocarbon ‘ages’.” (Most C-14 ages are not determined within an accuracy or a precision of one percent.)

The treatment in this book covers a broad range of topics, including space science, cosmology, geochemistry, thermodynamics, radiometric dating, geology, paleontology, molecular biology, genetics, anthropology and population growth. The discriminating reader can find much useful material on many of these topics, but to recommend the book to someone who is not equipped to evaluate its contents would be questionable.

The authors are to be commended for their efforts to meet a high priority need. It is unfortunate that the literature on the creation viewpoint was not more fully developed at the time their manuscripts were prepared.