LITERATURE REVIEWS

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CAN WE FIND A MESSAGE IN THE PATTERN OF LIFE?

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THE BIOTIC MESSAGE: EVOLUTION VERSUS MESSAGE THEORY. Walter James ReMine. 1993. St. Paul, MN: Saint Paul Science. 538 p. Cloth, $44.95.

The major thesis of this book is that biodiversity was created in a pattern that was designed to resist naturalistic explanations. This pattern reveals the existence of a supernatural designer; thus it is called the "biotic message." The biotic message has a two-part structure: a unifying component and a non-naturalistic component. The unifying component is seen in the similarities among organisms, which are intended to show that all life comes from a single designer. The non-naturalistic component is seen in such features as morphological convergence and the lack of identifiable ancestors. This component is intended to show that diversity must be the result of a supernatural process.

The idea of a "biotic message" is an original and intriguing concept. It seems entirely reasonable that a supernatural designer might create biodiversity in a pattern that contained a message. The question then is, does biodiversity convey the biotic message as ReMine claims?

The book consists of 26 chapters and 4 appendices. The principal focus of the book is evolutionary biology. Among the issues addressed are the nature of science, the origin of life, Darwinian selection, systematics, the problems of the fossil record, and molecular evolution. Lesser-known topics include Haldane's Dilemma, error catastrophe, and horizontal gene transfer.

ReMine attempts to cover a wide range of topics, with mixed success. I felt that he spent an inordinate amount of time trying to show that evolution (naturalism) was not scientific, when most of his criticisms were actually against naturalistic philosophy. This theme is repeated throughout the book, adding unnecessarily to its length and apparently stimulating numerous side-excursions. It seemed to me that he also spent too much time speculating on the motives of others, including both the evolutionists and the designer. Many of his arguments were based on processes not understood, such as frequencies of non-neutral mutations, rather than on known processes. He often criticized evolution for only explaining, but not predicting, certain phenomena. I regard this as a problem inherent in the nature of historical science.

On the other hand, there are several points worthy of commendation. ReMine has taken the trouble to become acquainted with a wide body of evolutionary literature. The bibliography runs to nearly 500 references, virtually all by evolutionists. This has permitted ReMine to demonstrate the diversity — and frequent contradiction — of viewpoints represented by the term "evolution." He repeatedly holds up statements for close scrutiny and points out the presuppositions upon which they are based, the lack of convincing evidence to indicate that they are true, and their contradictions with other evolutionary statements. He points out numerous weaknesses in the evolutionary view, such as its failure to explain satisfactorily: the lack of identifiable ancestors; the origins of morphological novelties; the problem of error catastrophe in the origin of life and its diversification; the problem of Haldane's dilemma; and the enigma of developmental patterns.

ReMine not only points out some of the problems with evolutionary theory; he contributes toward development of creationist theory. His thesis of the biotic message may or may not be correct, but he has produced an interesting idea that should stimulate further thought and analysis by other creationists. His suggestions for research using discontinuity systematics are worth developing further.

The overly handsome, clothbound book runs some 538 pages. I did not notice a single diagram or photograph. I was rather distracted by the large blank areas on many of the pages. If these were all removed, the book might be shortened several pages. Some topics were treated in multiple chapters, sometimes separated by chapters on other topics. It should be possible to streamline the presentation by uniting the material on a particular topic. Developing this kind of focus might also help identify

places where the author became diverted by side issues. Removing side issues, streamlining the presentation, and removing unnecessary blank areas would reduce the length of the book noticeably. Reducing the size of the book and substituting a paper cover might bring the price of the book more into line with what people would expect a book of this type to cost. In its present form, I think the book would be of interest primarily to creationists with at least an undergraduate degree in biology and an interest in speciation and natural selection.