

LITERATURE REVIEWS

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TRACING THE TALES

THE TWO-TALED DINOSAUR. Gerald Wheeler. 1975. Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Assn. 224 p.

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As the title cleverly suggests, this book attempts to show that the remains of dinosaurs in the rocks (along with all of the other fossils) can be interpreted in at least two ways. The primary thrust of the author is to trace the historical development of ideas relating to the interpretation of the fossil record. In a limited sense, he has written a Christian version of *The Death of Adam* (Greene JC. 1961. NY: The New American Library). However, after exploring this theme from ancient times through the nineteenth century in the first five chapters, the author jumps to current controversies about the teaching of creation and textbooks in public schools in the United States. Then he shifts to an exposition of the limitations of the scientific method, particularly the limitations of scientists themselves. Finally, we are offered two appendices in which the author expounds on his own views concerning the inspiration of the Genesis account of creation and a scientific approach to the fossil record as the product of a worldwide flood.

Although there is a certain flow of thought and relationship throughout the book, one is left with the feeling that the author has made a book out of a collection of somewhat unrelated essays written relatively independently. There is a certain disjointedness and discontinuity that leaves one slightly bothered for not very good reasons! This is not to say that the author does not make a useful, even significant contribution in all the areas he touches; one is just left wishing that he had developed his theme more completely.

Personally, I found the first five chapters the most interesting, even though the author's style is a little boring at times (as is the reviewer's). Being in no sense an authority in this field, some of the information was new to me and some of the interpretations and insights were distinctly original and innovative. Starting with the Egyptians and the Greeks,

Wheeler presents the history of the development of ideas about origins and the fossil record through the medieval period to Reformation times. The conceptual framework in which Darwin and Wallace worked is well presented and contrasted with the views of Paley and others of those times who developed the so-called natural theology. The decline of diluvialism and the rise of uniformitarianism which followed is clearly portrayed. This historical section of the book concludes with a chapter devoted to the view that a theory is a personal thing, with Darwin and Huxley as star examples.

Wheeler shifts gears in the next two chapters. Instead of continuing his historical approach into the events of the twentieth century in the evolution-creation controversy, he jumps into the current textbook controversy in California and elsewhere. I suppose this is intended as a sample of recent history, but I would have preferred a more comprehensive analysis of the last seventy years. Although the uniformitarian hypothesis has dominated the field in these recent years, it would be useful to bring together the work of isolated scientists around the world who have supported the creation viewpoint in their publications. This would probably require a good deal more research in the original literature than was necessary to write the first five chapters. Most of the information in these chapters is available in the secondary sources cited by Wheeler.

The last chapter entitled “Science Is No Greater Than the Scientist” makes many good points, but I must take issue with the implications of the title. Science *is* greater than the scientist. As a practicing scientist in at least a modest way, I am probably more intimately aware than is Wheeler of the fact that science is a very human enterprise. Individual scientists are often ambitious and devoted to proving their pet theories. But to imply that science as a collective enterprise is no better than the individual scientist in this respect is a fundamental error. In nearly every area of research we find several scientists or groups of scientists attacking the same problem. They rarely agree on all the details and often not on major findings in the field. Their associates in the discipline who hear their reports or read their papers are thus provided with a spectrum of data and theory. Ultimately, a viewpoint in the field is synthesized which is greater by far in intrinsic scientific merit and even truth than that of any one scientist. This situation is not unique to science; in any field of scholarly endeavor the broad concepts and information are significantly greater than those of any one scholar with his human failings.

Wheeler is not the first apologist for the creationist position to adopt this viewpoint of science as proof that we must turn to inspiration as our only source of definitive knowledge of origins. But Wheeler and his associates tend to ignore the fact that a scholarly approach to inspired documents might have the same problem. To paraphrase Wheeler, “Theology is no

greater than the theologian.” But the collective conservative scholarship which has been applied to Genesis surely exceeds the biased scholarship of a single investigator. It has been remarked that creationism has been impeded by the messianic complexes of its proponents. But creationism, too, can be greater than the creationist. All the foregoing should not be construed to mean that I do not consider science to be limited in its ability to arrive at truth as Wheeler, in fact, points out quite well in this chapter.

The two appendices to the book could have been regular chapters, since they are as relevant to the theme of the book as some of the other chapters. Appendix A presents a well-reasoned defense of the inspiration of the Genesis creation account as compared to other early documents with their many absurdities and inconsistencies. The author is to be commended for attempting an exposition of the basic philosophical position of creationists on the value and nature of inspired sources. Some other recent authors have failed to treat this area and left the reader to assume their rationale.

Appendix B presents Wheeler’s view of the flood theory paradigm. He makes many good points but does not follow the scholarly approach of earlier chapters. It is unfortunate that he passed up an excellent opportunity to write a current historical analysis of this area which would have complemented the earlier sections of the book. The previous contributions of creationist scholars to this flood paradigm are not mentioned or referenced. This oversight poses him as the only source of a flood paradigm with the implication that no one else has ever thought about this or written anything on it.

The most glaring omission in the book, however, is the absence of even the slightest reference to the time frame for earth history and the scientific dating of the fossil record. One infers Wheeler’s acceptance of a short chronology for earth history but wonders how he managed to exclude so thoroughly all reference to the opposing viewpoint. From the standpoint of the evolutionist, there is another tale that the dinosaur tells which Wheeler chooses to ignore. Considering the complexity and the sophistication of the field of radiometric dating, one can understand that he might be reluctant to undertake a historical analysis of this area. But to not even acknowledge the problem seems unwise.

I undoubtedly owe an apology to Wheeler and those who have been helped by the book for writing the preceding several paragraphs. Wheeler has made a significant contribution to scholarship in the field of creationism, particularly in terms of the history and development of the evolution-creation controversy. As further study of some of the other areas is undertaken by the growing body of well-trained creationist scientists, it should become possible to present a more definitive tale of the dinosaur in which inspiration and science find deep agreement.