

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 CREATIONIST BOOK FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OF PANDAS AND PEOPLE: THE CENTRAL QUESTION OF BIOLOGICAL ORIGINS. 1989. P. Davis, D.H. Kenyon, and C.B. Thaxton. Dallas, TX: Haughton Publishing Company. 166 p. Cloth, \$18.50.

Reviewed by L. James Gibson, Geoscience Research Institute

Many Americans feel that creationism should be discussed in high-school science classes. However, few textbooks are available that present a creationist view based on observations from science. Written to help fill that gap, this book is intended as a supplement to the biology textbook. The text attempts to provide evidence for intelligent design in nature, but does not discuss the potential religious implications of such a theory.

The book has a somewhat unusual organization. The first chapter is actually an overview of the material of the entire book. A little more than 25% of the book is devoted to this overview. Following this, six topics are treated in more detail, each in a separate "excursion chapter." These six chapters have the following titles: "The Origin of Life"; "Genetics and Evolution"; "The Origin of Species"; "The Fossil Record"; "Homology"; and "Biochemical Similarities." A brief, one-page glossary is included at the back of the book, followed by a short chapter entitled "A Word to the Teacher." The book is hard-bound, with a cover photograph of a giant panda. There is an index, and the book is well-illustrated. A seven-page Teacher's Guide contains a well-prepared list of study goals and discussion questions.

The treatment of the origin of life is well done and includes a discussion of the Miller-Urey experiments and the proteinoids of Sidney Fox. The authors conclude that life is most reasonably explained as the result of intelligent design. Mutation, natural selection and adaptation are the topics of the second "excursion chapter." Intelligent design seems the best explanation for the existence of biological adaptations such as

the neck of the giraffe and certain plants known as “living stones.” The following chapter discusses genetic drift and reproductive isolation, and concludes that speciation is generally accompanied by genetic loss rather than genetic gain. Intelligent design is the best explanation for the origin of genetic information, with subsequent genetic loss accounting for the relatively minor changes seen in species.

In a chapter on the fossil record the authors point out that most phyla originate early in the fossil record, which is just the opposite of what would be expected if species originated by progressive evolutionary development leading toward greater complexity. The lack of change within fossil “lineages” and the existence of gaps between fossil groups are also emphasized. Examples of gaps include the same examples usually presented by evolutionists as evolutionary links, such as *Archaeopteryx*, the therapsid reptiles, and *Australopithecus*. The distinction between intermediate and transitional fossils, made in the discussion of *Archaeopteryx*, is a particularly helpful concept.

The problem of accurate identification of homologies is illustrated in the fifth “excursion chapter.” Non-homologous similarities, such as between the Tasmanian “wolf” and the ordinary wolf, or between the red panda and giant panda, are described. Similarities in organisms can just as easily be interpreted as the result of intelligent design. The discussion of similarities in organisms is extended to biochemical similarities in the next (and final) chapter. The failure of molecular sequences to form a series of intermediates is underscored in this chapter, using cytochrome c as an example. The molecular clock hypothesis is briefly explained and rejected. In the conclusion, the authors acknowledge that no theory of origins is complete and without problems, but point out there is impressive evidence to support the theory of intelligent design.

Naturally, the book is not free of errors. I found several typos, some of them annoying, but perhaps this is to be expected in the first edition of a book. Of more concern were the few, relatively minor, errors of fact present in the book. However, I did not find any errors that would materially affect either the conclusions of the authors or the arguments used to support the conclusions. In several places, statements were made for which references were not supplied. I was unable to locate the footnotes until I accidentally discovered them in the Teacher’s Guide.

There are other places where the text could be improved, but this should not obscure the fact that there is much useful material in the book. It is attractively designed, and generally presents good arguments for the characteristics of life as strong evidence for the origin of life as a result of intelligent design rather than by purely natural processes. The authors leave open the question of the age of life, recognizing that adherents of the theory of intelligent design do not all agree on this question. Fortunately, another book is available which discusses this question within a biblical context (Webster 1989). I would not want to be without both these books for teaching secondary-school biology.

Of Pandas and People provides a fair-minded, non-sectarian discussion of evidence for origin by intelligent design that should be suitable for every public school.

LITERATURE CITED

Webster CL. 1989. *The Earth: Origins and Early History*. Distributed by the Office of Education, North American Division, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600.