

Book Review

Beginnings: Are Science and Scripture Partners in the Search for Origins?

Leonard Brand and David C. Jarnes, Nampa, ID.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2006, 175 pages, US\$15.99. Reviewed by Kwabena Donkor, an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute in Silver Spring, Maryland.

In this book, the authors pursue a unique line of inquiry into the relationship between science and faith. Brand and Jarnes are open about their methodological commitments. Rejecting the common approach which assumes that science and faith follow separate paths, the authors propose to seek a way in which the two fields challenge each other towards more careful study and research. Implied in this new approach is a respect for both science and faith. The authors are not prepared to relegate religion merely to values and morality, but allow it to speak to the issues of origins and the history of life on earth. Yet, they are committed to the scientific method of observation and experimentation. They only reject its naturalistic assumption that the cosmos has never known any supernatural intervention, arguing that no evidence demands its adoption. Brand and Jarnes are convinced that “neither scientific results nor the words of Scripture tell lies,” but that sometimes “we read something between the lines that isn’t really there” (p. 7-8). These methodological matters occupy the first three chapters of the book’s twelve short chapters. From these methodological perspectives, Brand and Jarnes examine issues of biological origins and history (chapter 4-8) as well as geological history (chapter 9-10). The book concludes with a discussion on why these issues matter (chapter 11) and a short concluding reflection (chapter 12).

The authors begin the discussion on the genesis of life with a consideration of the opposing options of abiogenesis (the naturalistic approach) and the interventionist approach (supernaturalist approach). The discussion is set in the context of the contemporary understanding of the complexity of the cell and molecular biology. The nature of biomolecular machines and biological molecules as information convinces the authors of the improbability of abiogenesis.

On the history of life, Brand and Jarnes look favorably to microevolution and speciation without presuming that they should lead one necessarily to accept megaevolution (the idea that genetic changes through natural selection can lead to new life forms). They believe that the supernatural origin of life, together with microevolution and speciation in the context of changed environments, explains the minor diversities such as color, size, and body proportions that we see in organisms (microevolution). Beside the serious challenge that Behe’s theory of ‘irreducibly complex systems’ and molecular embryology’s HOX genes pose for Darwinian evolution theory (85), Brand and Jarnes provide reasonable scientific evidence to counter arguments for megaevolution based on such phenomena as vestigial organs, homology (similar structural patterns), and imperfect design (chapter 6). Furthermore, the authors encourage scientists to consider carefully the scanty and unconvincing evidence on which megaevolution is based, citing in particular arguments based on variation in genes for some groups of proteins and insects’ resistance to insecticides. In view of this paucity of evidence, Brand and Jarnes suggest that “evolutionary science merely assumes the existence of a genetic process that can evolve new structures or gene complexes” (p. 84).

Without minimizing the challenge that an interventionist approach to the issue of origins faces, Brand and Jarnes consistently raise questions to force the scientific community to consider all the evidence candidly. This means that with respect to fossils, for example, the scientist must be vigilant to question the assumptions upon which radiometric (potassium-40 and carbon-14) dating are based (pp. 101-105).

Similarly, in the study of the geological column and other related geological matters such as rapid geologic activity, one should not dismiss quickly the evidence that point in the direction of short-age geology (pp. 111-115).

Brand and Jarnes should be commended for the clarity and simplicity with which they address issues that are very technical in nature. For this reason everyone may benefit from reading their work. More importantly, the value of this book to a person of faith struggling with the issues of origins and life is significant. Without avoiding the difficult questions, the authors provide plausible, albeit rudimentary, ways of looking at the facts in a different way. The challenges that science presents to religion are examined carefully. The improbability of abiogenesis is fairly discussed. Almost all the relevant challenging biological and geological questions in the faith-science debate are reasonably evaluated. Perhaps the greatest value of the book is the methodological discussion which shows that at least from this perspective, megaevolution has not yet hit a 'home run.' It is, therefore, appropriate and indeed necessary for science and faith to confront each other and thus force further research. The authors give pointers to the direction in which this kind of research could be beneficial (chapter 12).

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