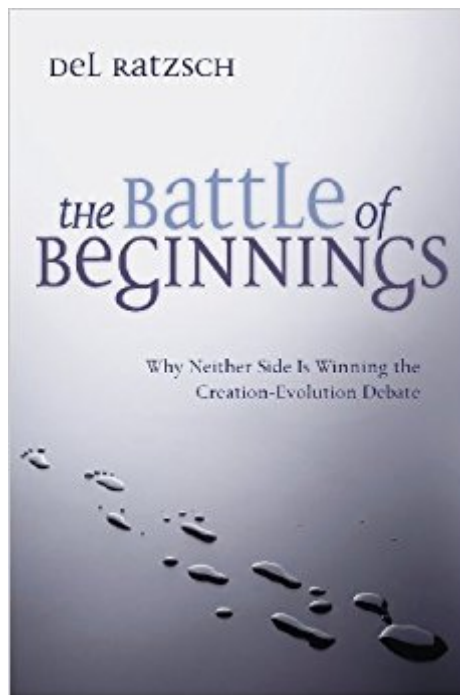




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The Battle Of Beginnings: Why Neither Side Is Winning The Creation-Evolution Debate



Synopsis

Voted one of Christianity Today's 1997 Books of the Year! Creation versus evolution. The debate is growing louder and hotter--whether in lecture halls or in between the pages of bestselling books. But neither side seems to be winning. Why? In *The Battle of Beginnings* Del Ratzsch examines the history of the debate and critiques the entrenched positions that he argues merely impede progress toward the truth. Dissatisfied with both creationist fallacies and materialist misconstruals, he seeks to lay the groundwork for more fruitful dialogue. In considerable detail Ratzsch looks at the history and development of Darwin's theory and common creationist misunderstandings of evolution. He then moves on to examine the history and development of creationist theory and pervasive evolutionist misunderstandings of it. He also discusses the nature of science and common creationist and evolutionist abuses as a prelude to showing why both sides have remained critical of theistic evolution. Above all, Ratzsch argues that until philosophical confusion, logical missteps and various other snarls have been untangled, little real progress can be made in sorting out competing theories of life and its origin. With this book he challenges and equips all of us to think more clearly.

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Customer Reviews

Two sides have squared off and voices keep getting louder - whether in lecture halls or in the spate of books addressing the controversy. But neither side seems to be winning. Neither side has mounted an argument capable of turning the tide and securing a victory. Why? Del Ratzsch examines the history of the debate and takes aim at entrenched positions that he argues impede progress from either side. Dissatisfied with both creationist fallacies and materialist misconstruals,

he seeks to lay the groundwork for more fruitful dialogue. In considerable detail he looks at the history and development of Darwin's theory and popular creationist misunderstandings of evolution, moving on to the history and development of creationist theory and popular evolutionist misunderstandings of it. He then discusses the nature of science and common creationist and evolutionist abuses as a prelude to showing why both sides have remained critical of theistic evolution. Above all, he argues that until misconstruals, philosophical confusion, logical missteps and various other snarls have been untangled, little real progress can be made in sorting out detailed analyses of scientific claims and cases.

Del Ratzsch earned a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Massachusetts. He is professor of philosophy at Calvin College and author of *The Philosophy of Science* (published by InterVarsity Press in the *Contours of Christian Philosophy* series), as well as several other books. Much of Ratzsch's work over the last seventeen years at Calvin College has sought to relate science and religion (and more recently creation and evolution) in a way that is philosophically informed, scientifically defensible and theologically meaningful. Although Ratzsch is optimistic that design theory can avoid past mistakes in the creation-evolution controversy, he stresses that fundamental clarifying work remains to be done in this area.

I recently finished reading Del Ratzsch's book *THE BATTLE OF BEGINNINGS* and enjoyed it immensely. So why the irritation on my part referred to in this review's title? The root of my frustration lies in the fact that it would seem this fine and insightful volume on such a major issue of contention in our day has gone scandalously unnoticed! I have done a fair amount of reading and study on the creation-evolution issue, and thus far Ratzsch's treatment of the matter has been the one I regard most highly. It is of excellent overall quality, and is expertly informed. You would never know it, though, by how seldomly I see it referenced in other books on the subject. It appears to be largely a sleeper, and that is a shame. As the author squarely sets forth in the preface, his aim is not to present the case for his own view on this question, but rather, by means of his particular area of specialty (i.e. the philosophy of science) to clear away the poor (though popular) arguments commonly used and heard, in order that fruitful debate can occur. In this goal I feel he succeeds and even excels. In convincing fashion, Ratzsch demonstrates repeatedly how a dishearteningly large bulk of the clash consists of rather shallow 'sound and fury' - i.e. accusatory jabs based upon unsound assumptions. Even many of the seemingly more reasonable arguments are shown ultimately to fail by means of faulty philosophical presuppositions. For those willing to investigate

rather than just insult, TBOB is a breath of fresh air. In all my reading on this subject, I have never seen such a competent application of the philosophy of science brought to bear. I feel it filled a niche, and did so quite admirably. As should be obvious by now, that such a would-be helpful contribution to the discussion is mostly overlooked bothers me considerably. Perhaps the reason for its neglect is to be found in its subtitle: "Why Neither Side Is Winning The Creation-Evolution Debate". In other words, it occurred to me as I read that neither 'side' of the divide was likely to be happy with this book. For the secular (atheistic) evolutionists, to even admit there exists an unwon battle is, in their mind, a step toward defeat. Therefore they live in dogmatic denial. On the other hand (and I find the similarity between both extremes revealing), certain 'creationists' will likewise give the book a cool reception because it does not paint a particularly flattering portrait of many leading spokesmen of their movement (I don't mean on a personal level), and critiques many cherished lines of attack. But for those who would come to this issue with a teachable and humble mind, who desire truth and integrity more than a quick fix, TBOB is very instructive. It gets my vote for the most underappreciated book yet to appear dealing with the creation/evolution controversy. In summary, THE BATTLE OF BEGINNINGS exposes a wheelbarrow full of fallaciousness - plenty to go around - by means of a closer examination of the true nature and definition of science (more elusive than we may have assumed). I suppose we might've wished for more of a 'solution' (Ratzsch himself admits that "the more accurately one sees the issue, the more difficult is its resolution"), but perhaps cutting away bogus arguments parading as wisdom is a necessary prerequisite, and a good way to begin. BTW, the "Notes" section at the end contains many embedded nuggets, and documents the vast scope of scholarly research reflected in this work.

Del Ratzsch has written a book called, "The battle of beginnings: why neither side is winning the creation-evolution debate." This is one of the best and most objective books I have seen on the creation vs. evolution debate (including books from BOTH sides). I strongly recommend this book to be read before one wishes to criticize creationism or evolution. In it, he writes about misconceptions of what people have about both theories (they are tragically common even in science textbooks and seriously inhibit real progress) and refutes some popular arguments both sides have of accusing that their opponents' theories do not qualify as genuine science. I give it 5 stars relative to other books I have seen on this issue.

Christianity Today Book Awards chose this as the number seven book of the year for 1997. The book's goal is to expose the philosophical fallacies in the arguments of both creationists and

evolutionists in their criticisms of each other. The author himself avoids taking a position for either side, saying "I do not pretend to know which is correct" (p. 12) or "what the proper resolution to the creation-evolution dispute is" (p. 8). Rather, he seeks to show that many of the "arguments from both sides against the other fail because they are themselves defective or because no one holds the views against which they are directed" (p. 12). As Ratzsch shows, both camps spend enormous amounts of time attacking positions that no one actually holds and that have never been a part of Darwinian theory or creationist theory. (Ratzsch is a professor of philosophy at Calvin College specializing in philosophy of science.) This book outlines popular creationists' misunderstandings of Darwin's theory, and evolutionists' misunderstandings of creationist theory. Many of the creationist criticisms of evolution are irrelevant because they are based on misunderstandings of that theory, and visa versa. Ratzsch argues, convincingly, that debaters in both camps simply do not understand the philosophy of science. Perhaps the main message, besides getting a good understanding of the fallacies in the arguments, is that one must do an awful lot of homework before one steps into the ring of debate on this topic. There are way too many people in both camps who engage in the arguments who simply don't know what they are talking about. One needs to understand the philosophy of science. Since few in either camp take the time to study that, we may be doomed to continue to listen to fallacious debates for a long time to come. This book will help lay people sitting in the audiences of those debates to at least smile as they hear the illogical arguments. (Thomas N. Headland)

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