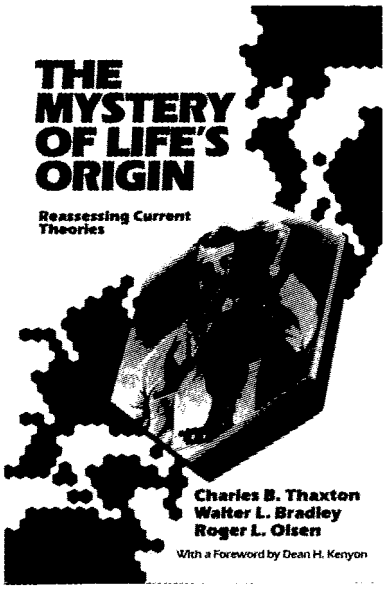
The Mystery of Life's Origin: Reassessing Current Theories

by Charles B. Thaxton, Walter L. Bradley and Roger L. Olsen
Lewis and Stanley, 1984.



Reviewed by Dr Ralph Matthews

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As the title suggests, this book focuses on major problems associated with a naturalistic explanation of the origin of life. Millions of words and many volumes have been written on this topic and a visit to a technical library will usually confirm the existence of an impressive array of books under the subject of chemical evolution. The view generally taken in these books is that because life evolved on earth by purely naturalistic means, how it happened will eventually be shown by further research. The suggestion that there can be no naturalistic explanation for the origin of life is disallowed by most of the workers in this field, since who would want to admit that one was employed in a futile activity? Yet after about forty years of intense activity, numerous well-organized conferences and the expenditure of billions of dollars of taxpayers' money, the goal of finding a naturalistic explanation for the origin of life seems no closer than the 'warm little pond' scenario proposed by Darwin more than 120 years ago. The authors systematically discuss the scientific problems that need to be properly addressed in any realistic attempt to explain the origin of life naturalistically.

As in the courtroom use of circumstantial evidence, the failure to demonstrate the implausibility of such evidence lends credibility to a scenario. It is the responsibility of the sceptic of such scenarios, to demonstrate their implausibility. Otherwise the jury (the uncommitted onlookers) will continue to be led up the garden path by pretentious popularizations. This book collects in a single volume weighty technical arguments that support what is glaringly obvious to the unbrainwashed — cars, planes, houses, telephone exchanges and so on, never have made themselves. Neither did life. The major problem for those seeking a spontaneous origin of life is not how to generate order, but how to generate complexity and information by abiotic processes. This has never been achieved.

The authors have traced the drift of research in the field since the enthusiastic achievements of amino acid syntheses by spark discharge in the 1950s to the time of their reassessment. The idea of a 'prebiotic soup' has been thoroughly discredited. Interest has been transferred from the ocean to 'more limited zones'. These limited zones are far more limited than 'warm little ponds', requiring circumstances that strain credibility. The authors show clearly that the energy sources necessary for the synthesis of molecules that are of relevance to life are increasingly likely to destroy those molecules, if their complexity increases. They do this by citations from the evolutionary literature and the application of the principles of real science.

They propose a helpful credibility scale for simulated prebiotic experimental scenarios, increasing with minimal operator interference. Most experimental evidence claimed to support chemical evolution is disqualified because of illegitimate input by intelligent operators.

Well-documented arguments are presented that the earth's atmosphere has always been oxidizing. Production of any molecules of relevance to living organisms by chemical evolution under these conditions is impossible.

The language used is conservative. The purpose of the authors was to shed light on the problem, not to generate heat, which usually happens when metaphysical assumptions are involved. The authors never question the reliability of the geological time-scale presently accepted by the establishment, so the book can be read by evolutionists without offending their belief system or trampling on their articles of faith. Thus it has been recommended by a leading evolutionist for its exposure of current evolutionary theories in the hope of leading to better (evolutionary) theories.

The importance of thermodynamics in the origin of life problem is well treated. Pure chance has been abandoned by all those who are knowledgeable in the field. Likewise, the thermodynamics of any systems at equilibrium show the impossibility of spontaneous life. The order created in systems far from equilibrium is also of little relevance to the problem, because such highly ordered arrangements of matter contain little information.

An important distinction is made between **operation** science and **origin** science. Operation science is based on

repeatable, observable phenomena; origin science is not. Operation science is tested by falsifiability. Origin science is evaluated by plausibility. Operation science is based on the belief that the universe was created by a Creator who did not capriciously interfere with the laws of nature that He created. Therefore, acts of God are disallowed in operation science. However, the authors contend that the assumption that God must be excluded from origin science is merely assumed by workers in the field and has never been demonstrated.

The case for the origin of life via chemical evolution as generally presented, especially in persuasive presentations for general consumption, sounds plausible. But by the very nature of origin science, it cannot be falsified and

> *'its apparent plausibility can easily be exaggerated beyond its true status as speculation and be regarded instead as knowledge.'*

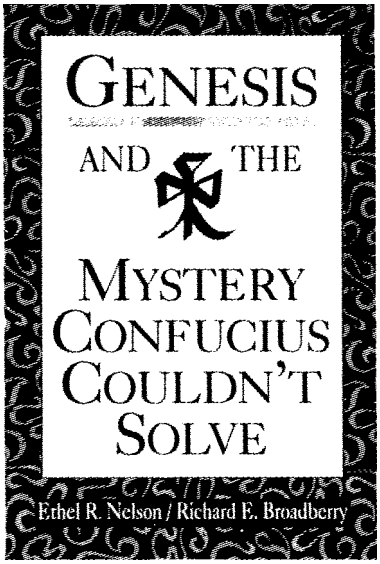
The authors do not apply this opinion to the gigantic extrapolations used in radiometric dating, the dates from which are also easily exaggerated beyond their true status as speculation.

I strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in chemical evolution.

Genesis and the Mystery Confucius Couldn't Solve

by Ethel R. Nelson and Richard E. Broadberry
Concordia Publishing House, 1994

Reviewed by Russell M. Grigg



> *'Of old in the beginning, there was the great chaos, without form and dark. The five elements* [planets] *had not begun to revolve, nor the sun and moon to shine. You, O Spiritual Sovereign first divided the grosser parts from the purer. You made heaven. You made earth. You made man. All things with their reproducing power got their being.'*

This reads something like a summary of the creation account in Genesis chapter 1. In fact, it is from the Chinese book **Shu Ching** or **Book of History,** compiled by Confucius (551–479 bc). It is part of a ceremony called the Border Sacrifice in which bullocks were sacrificed in worship of *ShangTi,* the Heavenly Ruler. This ceremony dates back to the Emperor Shun in 2230 bc, immediately following the dispersion of the nations from Babel. It was held annually for over 4,000 years, at first on the border of China, and then from the 15th century AD in Beijing, until the deposal of the Manchu Dynasty in ad 1911.

By the time of Confucius, some 1800 years after the inauguration of the ceremony, its meaning had been lost, although Confucius himself wrote,

> *'He who understands the ceremonies of the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth . . . would find the government of a kingdom as easy as to look into his palm.'*

The mystery, therefore, that Confucius could not solve was: Who was *ShangTi* and why was worship of him so important?

The authors of this book develop the thesis that the ancient Chinese were monotheists and that *ShangTi* was the Lord God Almighty, whose actions in history and interactions with humanity are described in the early chapters of Genesis, and who was self-existing, eternal and spirit — there was no image of him in the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. Compare this with the Hebrew *Shaddai* (Almighty), which is phonetically similar to *ShangTi,* especially in the Cantonese dialect, which pronounces, the *name. ShangDai,* and which is thought to be the closest to the original spoken Chinese.

Polytheism came with the introduction of Confucianism and Taoism after the 6th century bc, followed by Buddhism from India in the 1st century bc, *and ShangTi* was largely forgotten as the one and only God of the Chinese. However, all traces and knowledge of the original God of China have not been erased. The authors believe that a beautiful history of the beginnings of the human race has been preserved in the ancient character-writing of the Chinese language, which was invented simultaneously with the development of the early Chinese culture.

The earliest form of writing in Egypt, Sumeria, China and other countries of the ancient world was in picture words (pictographs). The inventor of the Chinese pictographs found that by combining two or more