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ARTICLE 6:

The Case of the Missing Link

SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF COMPLEX
LIFE-FORMS POINTS TO
INTELLIGENT DESIGN

The Case of the Missing Link

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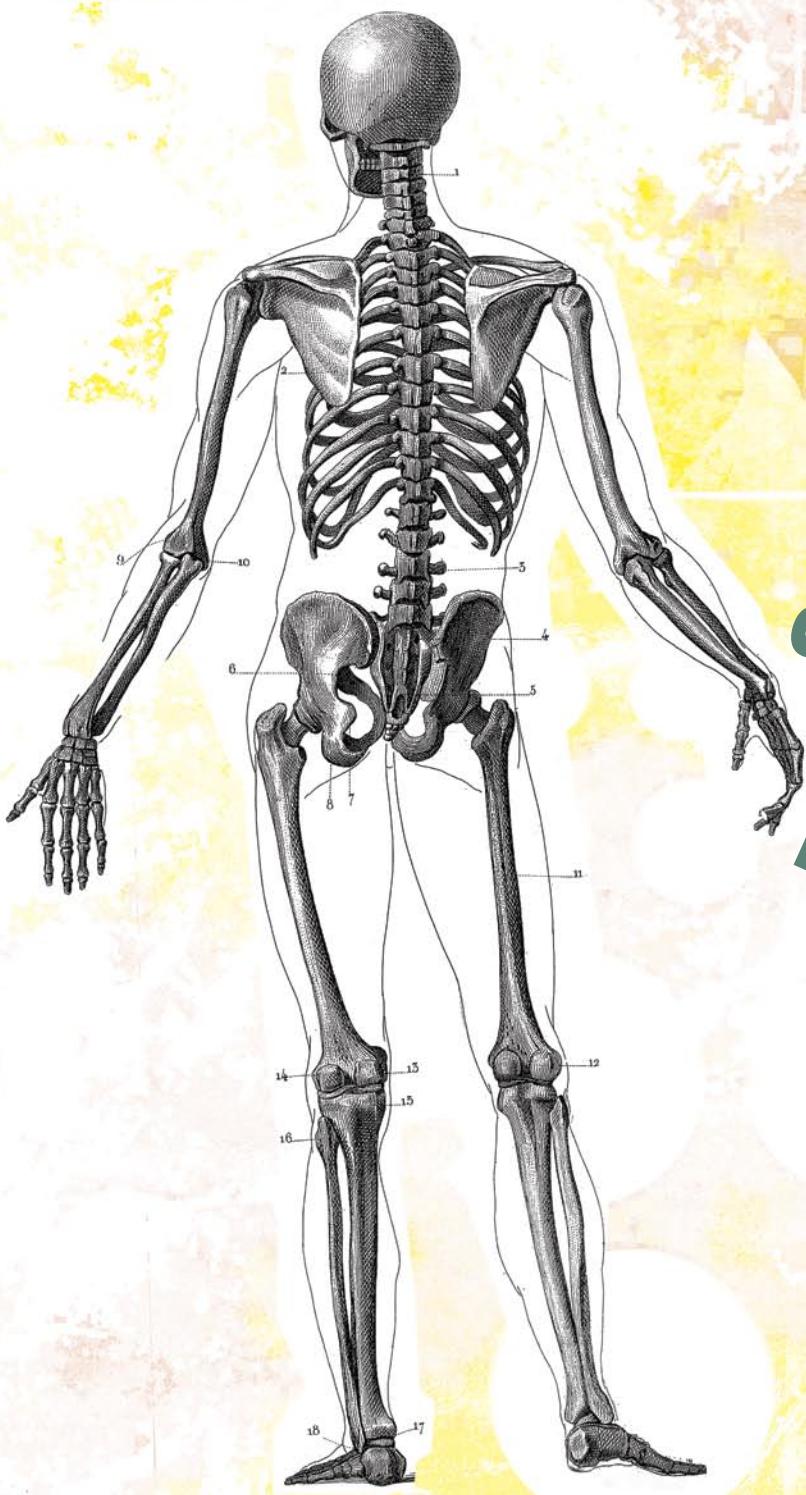
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Larry Chapman

THE CASE OF THE MISSING LINKS



*Sudden appearing
in complex life-forms
points to
intelligent design.*

The discovery of DNA has revolutionized the world of forensic evidence. Cold case files have been reopened. Criminals who thought they had beaten the system have been belatedly prosecuted by a swab of saliva or body fluids forgotten about for decades. And in some instances, the new evidence has exonerated innocent prisoners.

Herman Atkins was just 20 years old when his life began to fall apart. He was imprisoned in January, 1986 for wounding three people in a shooting spree in South-Central Los Angeles. Prior to his imprisonment a "Wanted" poster had been widely circulated.

Later, at a sheriff's substation, a 23 year-old rape victim glanced at a "Wanted" poster on a nearby table that showed a young black fugitive from Los Angeles. In court, she testified that she turned to her mother and said, "That's him," and pointed at the picture of Herman Atkins.

A clerk from an adjoining business where the attacker stopped briefly before the rape also identified Atkins. Based primarily upon these eyewitness testimonies, the jury found Herman Atkins guilty of rape and robbery. His sentence: 47 years, 8 months in prison. Atkins spent thirteen years, three months, and six days in state prison, but not for a crime he had committed. His cold case had been reopened, and the DNA evidence had revealed that Atkins was not the rapist. On February 18, 2000 he walked out a free man, the victim of mistaken identity.

Just as DNA has revolutionized criminal forensics, the work of paleontologists has shed new light on human origins. Being an honest man, Charles Darwin made no bones (pardon the pun) about predicting that the

forensic fossil evidence would ultimately prove his theory right or wrong.

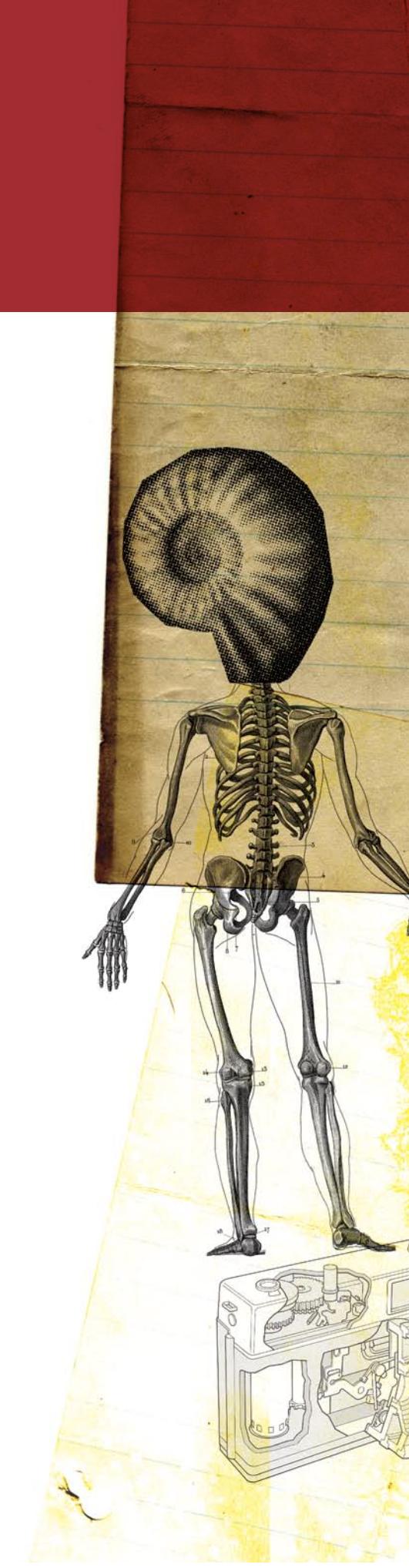
But just as experts can jump to the wrong conclusion with regard to criminal evidence, so in the world of paleontology, a tooth, jaw, or piece of skull has often created premature headlines of "Missing Link Found." Paleontologist Michael Boulter summarizes the problem with identifying fossils correctly:

It's very hard to piece together a few broken bones from a fossilized group of differentially aged primates scattered over a desert or cave floor and to be sure that they come from the same animal....It follows that the reliability of any description that attempts to recognize an actual species cannot be totally objective.¹

Boulter is alluding to the fact that, being human, most scientists look at a fossil through the lens of their own presuppositions. For example, those who wanted to make a case for humans descending from apes were quick to jump with joy over the supposed discovery of the "missing link" called Piltdown Man. Featured in the *London Times*, *New York Times*, and various science journals, they made it a textbook example of the connection between apes and humans. However, forty years later, in 1953, it was revealed as a fraud.

Frauds like the Piltdown Man are rare, and although objectivity is often lacking, there is actually a wealth of fossil evidence depicting the history of life on our planet.

So in order to see what the forensic evidence says about Darwin's theory, we need to hear from paleontologists themselves about





the evidence they have gathered during the nearly 150 years since he launched his theory. Our starting point is to clearly understand the predictions Darwin made regarding his theory and the fossils that should have resulted.

DARWIN'S TWO THEORIES

Charles Darwin was not the first to believe that life could arise by purely natural processes. In fact, the idea can be traced back as far as ancient Greece. And surely long before Darwin, people made the casual observation, "Hey, that guy kind of looks like a chimp." But it was Darwin who gave the ideas intellectual teeth, or viability, through his observation and hypothesizing of several processes, including adaptation and natural selection.

Few people realize that Darwin's theory of evolution predicts two different results: *microevolution* and *macroevolution*. We will look at microevolution first.

His micro-evolutionary theory states that variations within a species (cats, dogs, humans) can produce radical changes over time. He stated that sometimes these changes are accelerated by environmental conditions. For example, while on the Galapagos Islands, Darwin observed finches that had apparently grown slightly longer beaks during drought conditions. This confirmed his belief that creatures adapt to their environments.

Evolutionist Niles Eldredge explains the importance of adaptation to Darwin's theory: "Adaptation is the very heart and soul of

evolution. It is the scientific account of why the living world comes in so many shapes and sizes: how the giraffe got its long neck, why porpoises look so much like sharks ... how birds fly."²

Darwin believed that overpopulation of a species creates food shortages, which result in a struggle for survival, with the strongest of the species winning out. Kind of like *Survivor*, the winners pass on their genes to the next generation, improving the species, so life advances by survival of the fittest.

The evidence for Darwin's theory of change within a species is compelling. Bacteria do mutate and evolve. Cats, dogs, birds, and human beings all show evidence of variation predicted by Darwin. Some of us are tall, others short. Some thin, others...oops, better not go there.

The controversy surrounding Darwinian evolution is over his general theory of macroevolution. It states that over eons of time, all life evolved by the same process of natural selection. If true, then human beings are merely the end product of a long evolutionary chain. His belief in macroevolution is the reason Stephen Jay Gould was able to say that human beings are nothing more than "glorious evolutionary accidents."³

As we examine Darwin's general theory of macroevolution, we need to recognize that most biologists believe it provides the only scientific explanation for human origins. Materialists use this argument to reject intelligent design, saying it is "unscientific."

Biologists in general, have been far more reluctant to accept intelligent design as a valid option for the design evidenced in na

ture than their scientific counterparts in astronomy, physics, and cosmology. But that seems to be changing. In the face of stubborn opposition from the Darwinian paradigm, many biologists and paleontologists are now exposing Darwin's predictions to the scrutiny of scientific investigation, willing to follow the evidence wherever it leads. So let's see where it leads.

An increasing number of scientists are looking at the evidence from a common sense point of view. If macroevolution is right then it makes sense that the fossil record would prove Darwin right. So they begin by looking at the evidence that Darwin predicted would substantiate his claims. Darwin predicted that transitional fossil discoveries would eventually prove his theory right.

According to Darwin, these transitional fossils would provide ample evidence of gradual changes brought about by chance mutations.

The idea that one species could slowly change into another creates its own special problems, and because of these, Darwin championed the idea of favorable mutations. That is, the DNA of an organism would, on rare occasions, mutate favorably, which over time would lead to other favorable mutations, and the next thing you know, that ugly rat is now a cute little armadillo. Darwin assumed that life advanced over time from one-celled creatures all the way to humankind.

THE ROCKS TALK

We have observed examples of microevolution in which variations exist within a species. But there is little or no empirical evidence supporting Darwin's claim of macroevolution—one species evolving

into another species.⁴ More sophisticated creatures clearly do appear to arrive in later periods, but there remain yawning chasms (not mere gaps) between not only different species, but even between the highest orders of creatures, what are called phyla.

Why are the missing links essential to Darwin's theory? Couldn't gradual macroevolution have occurred without producing transitional fossils? Not according to Darwin. And certainly if countless species had undergone very gradual transitions from one category to another (for example, cats into dogs or fish into birds), then, according to Darwin, there should be countless fossils.

The abundance of transitional fossils should be demonstrable within all phyla and species, not merely a few. Certainly there should be many millions of transitional fossils, since it is estimated that over a billion species have existed in Earth's history. Again, we are not looking for microevolutionary changes of one type of bird evolving into another, or one type of horse evolving into another horse, etc.

Evolutionist Steven Stanley, a paleobiologist from Johns Hopkins, concludes in his book *Macroevolution* that, without the fossil evidence, "we might wonder whether the doctrine of evolution would qualify as anything more than an outrageous hypothesis."⁵ In other words, all the conjecture about whether Darwinian evolution is factual or not comes down to hard evidence.

Occasionally some researcher claims to have "evolved" a new species in the lab, but that is not evidence for Darwinian macroevolution. In fact, many such claims turn out to be bogus, or merely evidence for microevolution. In any case, the lab experiment involves intelligence, not chance.

For 150 years paleontologists have been busy digging, classifying, and looking for these transitional fossils in a worldwide hunt. Billions of fossils representing about 250,000 species have been scrutinized. What have the scientists discovered? Does the fossil evidence support Darwin's theory of macroevolution? If it does, the missing links Darwin predicted should no longer be missing.

We commence our fossil search with the mysterious Cambrian period, an era geologists date at around 530 million years ago.

BOOM—LIFE

Seemingly out of the blue, complex life-forms with fully developed eyes appeared during the Cambrian period. It has been called by some "biology's big bang."

Only fossils for simple life-forms have been discovered from the time prior to the Cambrian period. Then, suddenly, the fossil record is shown to be teeming with more complex life-forms than exist today. It is called the "Cambrian Explosion."

Explosion is an apt term in this case. We see the period's importance, for example, in the appearance of new phyla. Phyla are the broadest category of animals that exist. According to biologists, you are a member of a phylum that also includes gerbils and trout. The differences between phyla are even more extreme than the differences within them. For example, the slug family falls into a separate phylum from that of humans. (So feel the freedom to squish them.) In fact, organisms in different phyla are built according to entirely different body plans.

What paleontologists find in the Cambrian explosion is not simply the appearance of a few new animals but the appearance of 50 completely different body types without prior transitions or predecessors.

Darwin staked his entire theory on the belief that a species could never suddenly appear.⁷ He said, "If numerous species, belonging to the same ... families, have really started into life at once, that fact would be fatal to the theory of evolution through natural selection."⁶

Yet complex body organs such as eyes suddenly appeared during the Cambrian period. The trilobite eye has dozens of com-

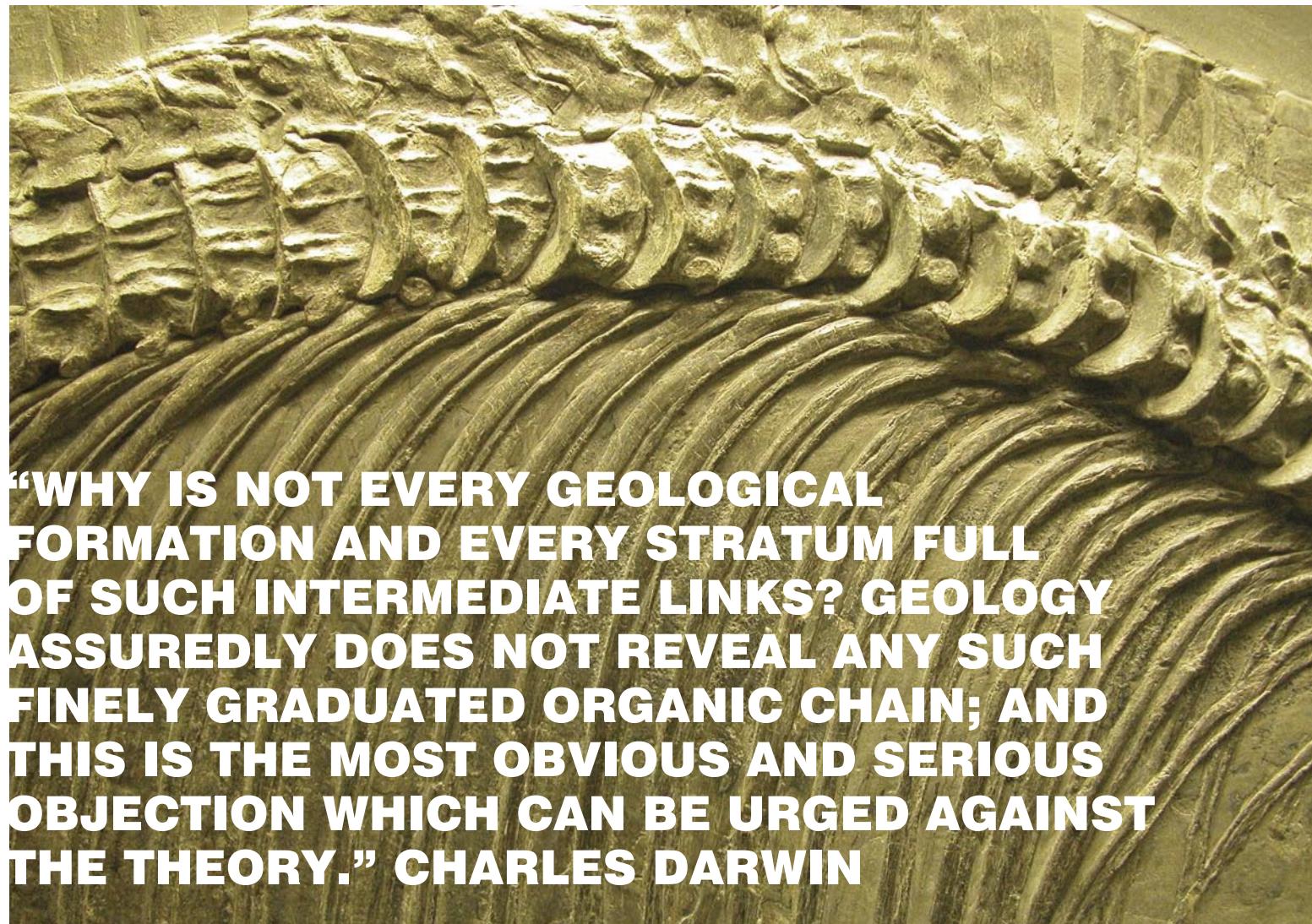
plex tubes, each with its own intricate lens. Darwinian gradualism cannot account for the sudden development of complex organs such as the fully formed eye.⁷ Evolutionists are stumped because Darwin theorized that complex organs like the eye could only develop gradually over enormous periods of time, traceable to a common ancestor. Yet five totally different phyla with no hint of a common ancestor all suddenly popped into existence during the Cambrian period, each with fully developed eyes.⁸

T. S. Kemp, curator of the zoological collections at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, is one of the world's foremost experts on Cambrian fossils. When

discussing the sudden appearances of new species, Kemp declares, "With few exceptions, radically new kinds of organisms appear for the first time in the fossil record already fully evolved. ... It is not at all what might have been expected."⁹

Certainly new organisms with eyes developing quickly is not what Darwin had in mind when his theory defined natural selection as gradual changes over vast amounts of time. Oxford zoologist Richard Dawkins—no friend to a belief in creation—affirms, "Without gradualness ... we are back to a miracle."¹⁰

Stephen Gould, a staunch advocate of ma-



jor anatomical designs so quickly. . . . The Cambrian explosion was the most remarkable and puzzling event in the history of life.”¹¹

Although the Cambrian explosion doesn’t disprove Darwin’s theory, it certainly does raise a huge question mark, and it has been a source of great frustration to materialists. But is the Cambrian explosion of suddenly appearing new species the only contradiction to Darwin’s theory of macroevolution?

The best examples evolutionists offer in defense of macroevolution are the Archaeopteryx (a bird with reptilian features), and the Tiktaalik roseae (a fish that appears to have been developing limbs). But these two debatable examples don’t explain the enormous gaps in the fossil record. Molecular biologist Michael Denton remarks, “Archaeopteryx was probably the best intermediate that Darwin was able to name, yet between reptiles and Archaeopteryx there was still a very obvious gap.”¹² Darwin expected much more evidence to support macroevolution. This has led even the most ardent materialists to question Darwin’s prediction.

Gould’s colleague, Eldredge, frankly admits the failure of the fossil record to provide evidence for macroevolution, stating, “No one has found any such in-between creatures . . . and there is a growing conviction among many scientists that these transitional forms never existed.”¹³

LIFE-FORMS IN A RUT

What the fossil record does show, according to paleontologists, is that most species don’t change but rather remain virtually

the same for millions of years. They call this phenomenon *stasis*, which basically means you should not expect to grow a second head or third arm anytime in the foreseeable future.

Kemp forcefully summarizes the findings from the fossil record: “It is now indisputable that stasis . . . occurs in . . . probably a majority of cases of fossil species. . . . Equally it seems beyond dispute that speciation [macroevolution] usually occurs so rapidly . . . that the process is below the resolution of the fossil record.”¹⁴

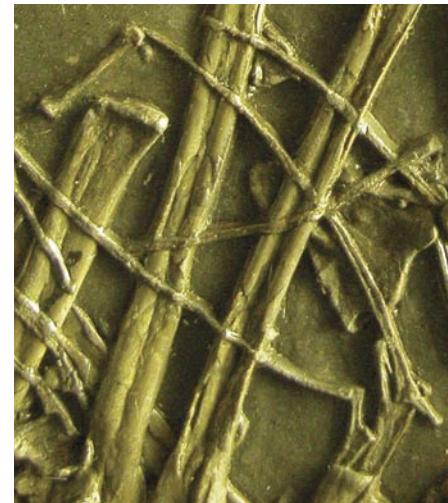
In other words evolution rarely occurs, and when it does, it occurs so rapidly it leaves no fossil trail. Eldredge remarks, “No wonder paleontologists shied away from evolution for so long. It never seems to happen.”¹⁵ But wait. Didn’t Darwin theorize that all of life gradually evolved? How do Darwinists respond to this embarrassing lack of evidence?

According to Gould, with silence: “It’s not evolution so you don’t talk about it.”¹⁶ Gould, one of Darwin’s strongest advocates, also admits, “The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of paleontology. The evolutionary trees that adorn our textbooks have data only at the tips and nodes of their branches; the rest is inference, however reasonable, not the evidence of fossils.”¹⁷

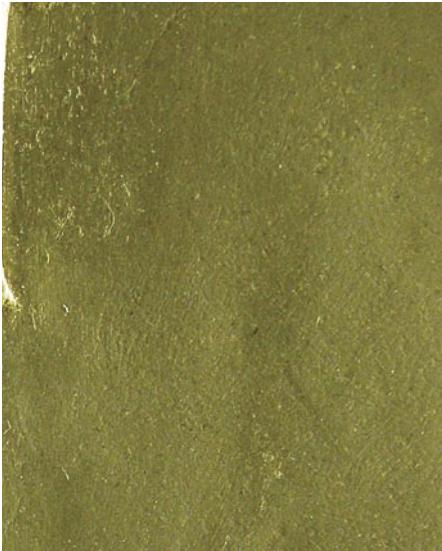
Paleontologist Whitey Hagadorn has intensely studied fossils of the early marine animal communities, looking for evidence of transitions. He remarks, “Paleontologists have the best eyes in the world. If we can’t find the fossils, sometimes you have to think that they just weren’t there.”¹⁸

“IF NUMEROUS SPECIES, BELONGING TO THE SAME . . . FAMILIES, HAVE REALLY STARTED INTO LIFE AT ONCE, THAT FACT WOULD BE FATAL TO THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION THROUGH NATURAL SELECTION.”

CHARLES DARWIN



GRADUATING FROM GRADUALISM



Eldredge discloses that the Darwinian paradigm is so strong that paleontologists refused to admit defeat by acknowledging gradualism as wrong. "Paleontologists clung to the myth of gradual adaptive transformation even in the face of plain evidence to the contrary..."¹⁹

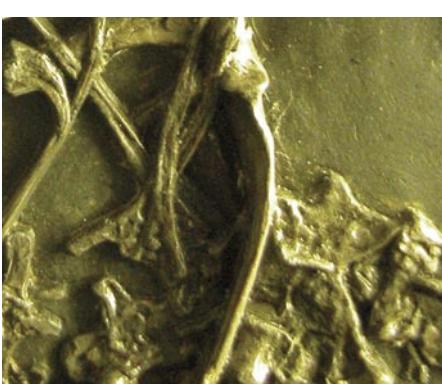
Eldredge and his colleague Gould, however, responded to the lack of transitional fossils by developing a new theory called *punctuated equilibria*, a complete departure from Darwin's basic premise of gradualism.²⁰

The punctuated equilibria theory contends that evolution, rather than being a gradual process, flourished quickly in small, isolated geographic regions, and then stabilized. But evolution was the exception, and rarely occurred.

Gould and Eldredge have argued that a sudden jump from species to species is the only way to explain the missing transitional fossils. Denton contests their conclusions are difficult to believe. "To suggest that... possibly even millions of transitional species... were all unsuccessful species occupying isolated areas and having very small population numbers is verging on the incredible."²¹

Whereas Darwin's theory required many millions of years, punctuated equilibria speculates that body forms evolved in hundreds of thousands of years, merely 100th of one percent of Earth's history. There is no known mechanism that can work so fast.

Based upon the fossil evidence, the following conclusions can be drawn:



1. Cambrian fossils contradict

Darwin's theory.

2. Transitional fossils have failed to show up.

3. Most species don't change.

4. Perplexed materialists are seeking non-Darwinian explanations.

Gerald Schroeder cites how microevolutionary examples are used by Darwinists as "proof" of macroevolution: "...when the London Museum of natural History, a bastion of Darwinian dogma, mounted a massive exhibit on evolution, occupying an entire wing of the second floor, the only examples it could show were pink daisies evolving into blue daisies, little dogs evolving into big dogs, a few dozen species of cichlid fish evolving into hundreds of species of--you guessed it--cichlid fish. They could not come up with a single major morphological change clearly recorded in the fossil record. I am not anti-evolution. And I am not pro-creation. What I am is pro-look-at-the-data-and-see-what-they-teach."²²

EVOLUTION WITH A PURPOSE?

Some scientists believe that the chemistry of life has been fine-tuned and that evolution was programmed into nature's laws. Conway Morris of Cambridge University, acknowledged as one of the foremost paleontologists of his time, has proposed a theory that combines design and evolution. Morris observes, "Far from being a random, directionless process, evolution shows deep patterns, and perhaps even a purpose."²³

In his book *Life's Solution*, Morris makes a compelling case for inherent design in life.

Morris suggests that life could not have been a mere product of time plus chance, as Darwin theorized. He sees design and purpose in biological structures, pondering:

Does evolution have a structure, an overall design, perhaps even a purpose?

Orthodox opinion recoils from this prospect. Evolution, it is widely believed, is an effectively random process where almost any outcome is possible. . . . We, like all other life, are an evolutionary accident. But is this correct? In fact the evidence points in exactly the opposite direction.²⁴

Morris cites evidence of design patterns like the eye, that exist in unrelated phyla. How did each of these unrelated animal groups develop an eye, independent of one another? Morris believes there are common patterns built into nature's laws. He calls his theory, *convergence*.

According to Morris, such common design

patterns in totally separate phyla provide compelling evidence against Darwin's theory of accidental naturalistic evolution. But is designed evolution really an option if there is little or no fossil evidence to support macroevolution?

Although, like Morris, many believe in some form of directed evolution, such theories don't adequately explain the missing transitional fossils. Macroevolution, whether by design or by accident, still requires transitional forms. Yet the intense scrutiny of billions of fossils has failed to provide clear evidence for macroevolution other than a few debatable exceptions.

What, then, is the most plausible explanation for the missing transitional forms?

There are really only three viable options:

1. *Darwin was right about macroevolution.* An abundance of transitional fossils will someday be found, or billions of transitionals were destroyed.

2. *Darwin was wrong about gradualism.*

Macroevolution occurred rapidly, explaining the missing transitions (punctuated equilibria or design).

3. *Darwin was wrong about macroevolution.* The fossils can't be found because transitions never existed (design).

Paleontologists are not in agreement on which option is correct, but there is general agreement, with a few debatable exceptions, that the fossils that Darwin predicted would be discovered in abundance are truly missing. Materialists respond by showing fossil evidence of horses gradually evolving. But that is only microevolution.

They also try to depict human evolution by assembling fragments of hominid skulls. But the origin of *Homo sapiens* has been a source of frustration and controversy. (See article 7)

As we have seen, Darwinist's best example, the *Archaeopteryx*, is a debatable transition between birds and reptiles. If Darwin was right, there should be millions of his



“Biologists would be better off following the evidence wherever it leads.”

predicted transitional fossils forthcoming by now. That would end the debate.

DARWIN'S OWN VERDICT

In the case of Herman Atkins, DNA evidence proved that the original eyewitness testimony was flawed. Is it possible, that the combination of new evidence from molecular biology and the missing transitional fossils have revealed Darwinian evolution to be a flawed theory?

Biologists Mae-Wan Ho and Peter Saunders speak for many scientists who seriously question the claims of Darwin's theory:

"It is now approximately half a century since the neo-Darwinian synthesis was formulated. A great deal of research has been carried on within the paradigm it defines. Yet the successes of the theory are limited to the minutia of evolution, such as the adaptive change in coloration of moths, while it has remarkably little to say on the questions which interest us most, such as how there came to be moths in the first place."²⁵



"THE EXTREME RARITY OF TRANSITIONAL FORMS IN THE FOSSIL RECORD PERSISTS AS THE TRADE SECRET OF PALEONTOLOGY."
STEPHEN JAY GOULD

Regardless of one's views of Charles Darwin, the geological record seems to have confirmed his worst fears; missing transitions, and the sudden appearance of new life forms. What Gould called the "trade secret" of paleontologists, the missing transitional fossils, points to the sudden appearance of new life forms, a phenomenon that Darwin said would be "fatal" to his theory of macroevolution.

Perhaps Gould's colleague Eldredge said it best when he admitted, "there is a growing conviction among many scientists that these transitional forms never existed."²⁶ And so we are left with a fossil trail that raises the question: How did these new life forms, some with fully developed eyes, appear so suddenly?

Many scientists reflect the view of Dr. Jonathan Wells, holder of PhDs in theology from Yale, and biology from Berkeley, who states, "Does this mean that biologists should devote their energies to proving the existence of a designer? I think not. It simply means that biologists should trust their common sense...biologists would be better off following the evidence wherever it leads."²⁷

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