

The Propaganda of Steven Jay Gould

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Stephen Gould is an American paleontologist, evolutionary biologist, and science writer. Gould graduated from Antioch College in 1963 and then went on to get a Ph.D. in paleontology from Columbia University in 1967. That same year he joined the faculty at Harvard University and became a professor there in 1973. In 2000, he became president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.¹ If anyone should know the evidence for evolution, it should be Gould.

In 1981, in an article for *Discover* magazine, Gould offered three pieces of evidence for evolution. Despite his obvious scientific acumen, his arguments were not only philosophically illogical but contrary to the available evidence and his own writing. These show Lutherans, and all creationists, an example of how evolutionists can vigorously argue for their beliefs while using fundamentally flawed logic and evidence.

Gould's 1st Evidence: Microevolution

Gould's first argument rests on evidence for microevolution.²

Our confidence that evolution occurred centers upon three general arguments. First, we have abundant, direct, observational evidence of evolution in action, from both field and laboratory. This evidence ranges from countless experiments on change in nearly everything about fruit flies subjected to artificial selection in the laboratory to the

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Stephen-Jay-Gould>.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_American_Association_for_the_Advancement_of_Science

² By "microevolution" I refer to changes in the genome that are minor compared to the macroevolution needed to power evolution. Changes in the color of moths or beak size in birds are examples of microevolution.

famous populations of British moths that became black when industrial soot darkened the trees upon which the moths rest.³

In response to this argument, creationists, Gould says, have “tightened their act” and claimed that animals come from different kinds.⁴ However, I have never seen any evidence that creationists have made such claims because of the microevolution Gould cites. Rather, they have done so because the Bible claims that God created distinctive types of animals. For example, Frank Lewis Marsh, in an article published prior to 1971 and at least ten years prior to Gould’s statement says,

It is obvious that from the wording in Genesis that the expression “after his kind” includes both morphological and physiological characteristics. That is to say, when the plants and animals appeared upon the earth the individuals of each basic type were distinctly different in the details of their form, structure, and internal chemistry from the individuals of all other basic types. To express it mildly, in the light of Genesis 1:12 it is difficult to understand how a basic type could transmute into a new basic type or could give rise to a new basic type if its reproductive performance was such as to bring forth additional individuals of the same kind as their parents.⁵

Another author, Henry Morris, also writing before Gould, says much the same thing,

Even though there may be uncertainty as to what is meant by “kind” (Hebrew *min*), it is obvious that the word does have a definite and fixed meaning. One “kind” could not transform itself into another “kind.” There is certainly no thought here of an evolutionary continuity of all forms of life, but rather one of definite and distinct categories. Fur-

³ Stephen Gould, *Hen’s Teeth and Horses Toes* (New York: Norton, 1983), 257.

⁴ Gould, 257.

⁵ Frank Lewis Marsh, “The Genesis Kinds in the Modern World,” Walter Lammerts, ed., *Scientific Studies in Special Creation* (Creation Research Society, 1990), 140. The first edition was published in 1971.

thermore, the sense of the passage is that a great many different kinds were created in each of the nine major groups (excluding man) that are specifically listed. There is certainly room for variations within each kind, as is obvious from the fact that all the different races and nations of men, with all their wide variety of physical characteristics, are descended from the first man and are therefore all included within the human “kind.” The same must be true for the other kinds. Many different varieties can emerge within the basic framework of each kind, but at the same time such variations can never extend beyond that framework.⁶

The evolutionist way of fooling us

Cite minor changes in nature, extrapolate,
then proclaim unlimited evolution is true.

The main problem with Gould’s argument, however, is that change is limited. Regarding the moths Gould cites, Jonathan Wells calls these one of many “icons of evolution” that don’t demonstrate the truth of evolution at all. In the early 1950s, British physician and biologist Bernard Kettlewell performed experiments on moths to demonstrate that predatory birds ate light-colored moths which rested on dark-colored polluted tree trunks. Because the dark-colored moths could not be seen as well, they would be less likely to be eaten and, supposedly, this demonstrated the power of natural selection to bring about new species. This was the best evidence available for evolution at that time, but problems with the evidence came later. Population distribution of moths suggested factors other than color and presence of birds were responsible for the survival of dark-colored moths, and evidence has accumulated that peppered moths do not normally rest on tree trunks. Following the passage of anti-pollu-

⁶ Henry Morris, *Scientific Creationism*, 2nd ed., (El Cajon: CA, Master Books, 1985), 217. The first edition was published in 1974.

tion legislation in the 1950s, the percentage of dark-colored moths declined, and the change in the moths never went beyond a change in color.⁷

In 1973, Pete and Rosemary Grant visited Daphne Major, one of the islands in the Galapagos which Darwin visited, to study beak size changes in Darwin's finches. They returned every year for four decades. In 1977 a drought hit the island, and many finches died because they could not crack open large seeds. Within a few years the finch population recovered but the average beak depth had increased from 9.2 mm to 9.7 mm. In 1982, heavy rains came to the island, and the finches with smaller beaks had the advantage because of the increase in availability of smaller seeds. In just a few generations the beak size decreased by 2.5 percent. The depth of beaks changed from 1975 to 2000, fluctuating between larger and smaller beaks, but never showing unlimited change of size.⁸

A college textbook describes the tremendous success of animal breeding, while also pointing out the limits of breeding. Milk production in the Netherlands increased from 1945 to 2000. Selective breeding of broiler hens tripled the hens' body weight. Laying hens, after selective breeding, lay more eggs, lay larger eggs, and lay them sooner. Through selective breeding, racehorses became faster before reaching a limit. A limit in breeding lighter chickens has been reached as well.⁹

However, this textbook also notes that not all breeding is good: "There are also examples where selective breeding has not only improved certain performances, but simultaneously and unintendedly also deteriorated other performances that were not under selection: the so-called negative correlated responses." It's noted that the problems are "structural" — meaning that increasing one part of an animal may cause failure of another part. The authors of this article give examples of this in dog breeding such

7 Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth?: Why Much of What We Teach About Evolution is Wrong* (Washington DC, Regnery, 2000), Chap. 7.

8 Roberts and Company, *Natural Selection: Empirical Studies in the Wild*, Chapter Eight, <https://ncse.com/files/pub/evolution/excerpt--evolution.pdf>.

9 Kor Oldenbroek and Liesbeth van der Waaij, *Textbook Animal Breeding and Genetics for BSc students*, Centre for Genetic Resources The Netherlands and Animal Breeding and Genomics Centre, 2015, chap. 1.12, 13.4. Groen Kennisnet: <https://wiki.groenkennisnet.nl/display/TAB/> (accessed Oct 11, 2017)

as eyes that pop out of eye sockets because the skull is too small or dogs that can't eat properly because of malformed jaws. Some dogs have been bred for larger ears with an increase in ear infections.¹⁰ This demonstrates a fundamental flaw in any search for further evolution. A change in one part of the animal may have unforeseen negative consequences that do not provide the animal any benefit to survival.

Ernst Mayr was “considered one of the world’s leading evolutionary biologists, he was sometimes referred to as the ‘Darwin of the 20th century.’”¹¹ Author Norman Macbeth quotes Mayr as saying animals have a resistance to change, which Mayr calls “genetic homeostasis.” Mayr provides an example: Researchers were able to decrease the bristles in the fruit fly *Drosophila melanogaster* to 25 bristles, but then the line became sterile and died out. Bristle count was raised to 56 with sterility once again occurring. Macbeth suggests Mayr believes these results are normal and quotes Mayr as saying “Obviously any drastic improvement under selection must seriously deplete the store of genetic variability. ...The most frequent correlated response of one-sided selection is a drop in general fitness. This plagues virtually every breeding experiment.”¹²

Evolutionist Jeremy Rifkin quotes two evolutionists, Loren Eiseley and Douglas Scott Falconer, who also say there are limits to the evolutionary change nature can achieve.¹³

It would appear that careful domestic breeding, whatever it may do to improve the quality of race horses or cabbages, is not actually in itself the road to the endless biological deviation which is evolution. [Eiseley]

The improvements that have been made by selection in these [domesticated breeds] have clearly been accompanied by a reduction of fitness for life under natural conditions, and only the fact that domesticated animals and

¹⁰ Oldenbroek and Waaij, chap. 1.13.

¹¹ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ernst-Mayr>

¹² Norman Macbeth, *Darwin Retried: an appeal to reason* (Boston: The Harvard Common Press, 1971), 34-35.

¹³ Jeremy Rifkin, *Algeny* (New York: Viking, 1983), 130, 133.

plants do not live under natural conditions has allowed these improvements to be made. [Falconer]

Many biologists do not share Darwin's confidence that the limited changes observed in plants and animals are actually unlimited. German zoologist Bernhard Rensch has provided a long list of authorities who maintain that macroevolution cannot be explained by microevolution. Author Michael Denton quotes world-famous evolutionist Ernst Mayr as saying that "The proponents of the synthetic theory maintain that all evolution is due to the accumulation of small genetic changes, guided by natural selection, and that transpecific evolution is nothing but an extrapolation and magnification of the events that take place within populations and species." Despite that, Mayr says, there are some evolutionists who have claimed the origin of new "types" could not be explained by known facts.¹⁴

Gould seems to understand these limits. He says that "few systems are more resistant to basic change than the strongly differentiated, highly specified, complex adults of 'higher' animal groups." How could you ever, for instance, convert an adult rhinoceros or a mosquito into something different, he asks. Yet, he says transitions between major groups of animals have happened.¹⁵ To show the vanity of such a search for transitions, Gould quotes classical scholar D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson as saying,

An algebraic curve has its fundamental formula, which defines the family to which it belongs. ... We never think of "transforming" a helicoid into an ellipsoid, or a circle into a frequency curve. So it is with the forms of animals. We cannot transform an invertebrate into a vertebrate, nor a coelenterate into a worm, by any simple and legitimate deformation. ... Nature proceeds from one type to another. ... To seek for steppingstones across the gaps between is to seek in vain, forever.¹⁶

¹⁴ Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, Maryland: Adler&Adler, 1986), 86-87.

¹⁵ Stephen Gould, *The Panda's Thumb* (New York: Norton, 1980), 192-193.

¹⁶ Gould, 193.

If these comments were not enough, three years later James Gleick, writing for the *New York Times*, quotes Gould as saying “We’re not just evolving slowly ...for all practical purposes we’re not evolving. There’s no reason to think we’re going to get bigger brains or smaller toes or whatever—we are what we are.”¹⁷ Gould often departs from his Darwinist allies, because of the strong evidence against evolution. Of course, Gould still remains a staunch defender of evolution.

Given these limits, a skeptic of Darwinism, like me, could and should ask how evolutionists can argue for unlimited naturalistic change. Evolutionist Richard Dawkins shows us. Dawkins also talks about the success of breeding experiments, the creation of new breeds of dogs, for instance, and is impressed by how quickly evolutionary change can progress. “If so much evolutionary change can be achieved in just a few centuries or even decades, just think of what might be achieved in ten or a hundred million years,” he remarks.¹⁸

This is the standard evolutionist way of fooling us. They cite minor changes nature can make, proclaim it as evolution, extrapolate those changes beyond what they show is possible, and then proclaim that unlimited evolution is true.

Gould’s 2nd Evidence: Imperfections of Nature

Gould’s second argument rests on the imperfections of nature.

The second argument—that the imperfections of nature reveal evolution—strikes many people as ironic, for they feel that evolution should be most elegantly displayed in the nearly perfect adaptation expressed by some organisms—the camber of a gull’s wing, or the butterflies that cannot be seen in ground litter because they mimic leaves so precisely. But perfection could be imposed by a wise

¹⁷ James Gleick, “Breaking Tradition With Darwin,” *The New York Times* (November 20, 1983), <http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/11/09/home/gould-magazine.html>.

¹⁸ Richard Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 37.

creator or evolved by natural selection. Perfection covers the tracks of past history. And past history —the evidence of descent —is the mark of evolution.¹⁹

There is a philosophical problem with Gould's approach. Although evolutionists at times argue that defects in biological systems are evidence for evolution, they often argue the opposite: That nature appears craftily designed in a way that could support claims of divine design.

Famous evolutionist Richard Dawkins tried to demonstrate that undirected mutations can lead to increased complexity in animals, by suggesting that a computer program simulating monkeys typing on a keyboard can produce the phrase “Methinks it is like a weasel.” What kind of computer program did he use to demonstrate this? Of course, it was a program which knew the target phrase, and then kept each randomly generated phrase that most closely matched the target.²⁰ Dawkins is, in essence, smuggling design and intention into his argument against divine design and intention. Gould himself falls to this temptation when he writes,

The essence of Darwinism lies in a single phrase: natural selection is the major creative force of evolutionary change. No one denies that natural selection will play a negative role in eliminating the unfit. Darwinian theories require that it create the fit as well. Selection must do this by building adaptations in a series of steps, preserving at each stage the advantageous part in a random spectrum of genetic variability. Selection must superintend the process of creation, not just toss out the misfits after some other force suddenly produces a new species, fully formed in pristine perfection.²¹

Assume that I argued that wind, water, and erosion could produce a mud hut and told you that these natural processes *create* the correct ar-

¹⁹ Gould, *Hen's Teeth*, 258.

²⁰ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: Norton, 1987), 46-47.

²¹ Gould, *Panda's Thumb*, 190.

rangements of mud, *build* different stages of hut up from the beginning, *preserve* the best arrangements of each level of hut, *superintend* the process of hut building, and *toss out* the wrong arrangements. Would you be more convinced that wind, water, and erosion could produce that mud hut or would you feel that I had cleverly smuggled in words into my apologetic that insinuated that natural processes had design capabilities? My guess is you would say I smuggled in those words, and you should think the same of Gould.

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READ WHAT THEY WRITE.**

However, let's assume that evolutionists were united in claiming that defects in life were evidence that an undirected process produced life. They would have to refute the overwhelming evidence that animals have been assembled by someone or something with an understanding of the sciences. In Jonathan Sarfati's *By Design* book, we learn that the flippers of humpback whales are bumpy, and this design is superior to smooth flippers because these bumps, or tubercles, provide better lift and less drag. This is a design aircraft designers can learn from. Dolphins use echolocation that is the envy of the U.S. Navy. It took an expert in chaos theory to show that the dolphin's "click" pattern is mathematically designed to give the best information. Ants rely on advanced mathematical computations to decide where to go.²² These facts, and many more, are consistent with intelligent design divine creation and not unintelligent evolution.

Gould later argues, rather sloppily, that "The principle of imperfection extends to all historical sciences. When we recognize the etymolo-

²² Jonathan Sarfati, *By Design* (Creation Book Publishers, 2008), 47, 81, 93.

gy of September, October, November, and December . . . we know that the year once started in March, or that two additional months must have been added to an original calendar of ten months.”

Gould’s 3rd Evidence: Continuity of The Fossil Record

This brings Gould to his third argument that “transitions are often found in the fossil record.”²³ *Gould is arguing for the continuity of the fossil record displayed in the same way our calendar months are continuous. However, Gould knows this is not true.*

In 1972, he and Niles Eldredge proposed the theory of punctuated equilibrium that explained away gaps in the fossil record. Gould, in the book *Punctuated Equilibrium*, quotes himself and Eldredge as suggesting that, in 1977, they “wondered why evolutionary paleontologists have continued to seek for over a century and almost always in vain, the ‘insensibly graded series’ that Darwin told us to find” and that it was time for evolutionary theory to “confront the phenomenon of evolutionary non-change.”²⁴ Gould quotes George Gaylord Simpson, whom Gould says is “the greatest and most biologically astute paleontologist of the 20th century,” as saying, at the 1959 Chicago centennial celebration for the *Origin of the Species*, that:

It is a feature of the known fossil record that most taxa appear abruptly. They are not, as a rule, led up to by a sequence of almost imperceptibly changing forerunners such as Darwin believed should be usual in evolution. A great many sequences of two or a few temporally intergrading species are known, but even at this level most species appear without known intermediate ancestors, and really, perfectly complete sequences of numerous species are exceedingly rare. . . . These peculiarities of the record pose one of the most important theoretical prob-

²³ Gould, *Hen’s Teeth*, 258-259.

²⁴ Stephen Gould, *Punctuated Equilibrium* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 22. Material comes from chapters one and nine of Gould’s book *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory*.

lems in the whole history of life: is the sudden appearance ...a phenomenon of evolution or of the record only, due to sampling bias or other inadequacies?²⁵

The situation became so desperate that Gould wrote an article where he backed Richard Goldschmidt, who suggested that macromutations (large scale mutations) are normally harmful, producing what he called “monsters.” However, now and then a macromutation might result in a benefit to the animal, a “hopeful monster.” Gould chose to defend Goldschmidt by arguing not just that macroevolution is microevolution extrapolated, or “(flies in bottles) extended” as he put it, but that “major structural transitions can occur rapidly without a smooth series of intermediate steps.” Gould suggests, instead, that these large changes can happen from small changes in the timing of development in embryos.²⁶ The result of his arguments, then, is to explain away gaps in the fossil record.

Paleontologist and evolutionary biologist Steven Stanley, devoted a book on the extent to which the fossil record displays discontinuity. Stanley immediately, in the introduction to the book, summarizes the peril evolution is in:

Thus, the new message offered by the ancient remains of humans, horses, and many other animals is that evolution has occurred episodically. Most change has taken place so rapidly and in such confined geographic areas that it is simply not documented by our imperfect model. The resulting view of evolution has become known as the punctuational model, while the contrasting traditional view has been labeled the gradualistic model. The punctuational model is not incompatible with what we now know of modern life on Earth. There is good evidence that certain distinctive living species of animals have formed since the dawning of modern civilization in the Middle East.

The punctuational model might appear to represent a

²⁵ Gould, 26

²⁶ Gould, *Panda's Thumb*, 186-193.

minor modification of the traditional scheme of evolution—an esoteric adjustment that should interest only specialized practitioners of biological science. In fact, its consequences reach much farther. The punctuational view implies, among other things, that evolution is often ineffective at perfecting the adaptations of animals and plants; that there is no real ecological balance of nature; that most large-scale evolutionary trends are not produced by the gradual reshaping of established species, but are the net result of many rapid steps of evolution, not all of which have moved in the same direction; and that sexual reproduction does not prevail in the world for the reasons that have traditionally been offered.²⁷

So as we have seen, before Gould suggested that transitions in evolutionary history were as discernible as the months of the year, it was well known this wasn't true. In fact, the situation was so bad that Gould had previously worked to explain away the gaps.

Conclusion

Gould's arguments are masterful works of propaganda that are intended to deceive people into believing in evolution when, in fact, Gould's arguments are frail. All you have to do, to find out how frail most evolutionists' arguments are, is to read what they write—which is what I have done with Gould.

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²⁷ Steven Stanley, *The New Evolutionary Timetable* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 5.