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# Smart People Do Doubt Evolution

by Jeffrey Stueber

Evolutionists proclaim only the ignorant have doubts about evolution. However, some very intelligent non-creationists like Richard Milton, David Stove, Norman Macbeth, David Berlinski, and Michael Denton have shown otherwise.

Stephen Gould has claimed that “professionally trained scientists ... understand the factual basis of evolution and don’t dispute it” and that “no biologist questions the importance of natural selection.” Furthermore, “evolution is a theory [and] a fact” and a fact is something “confirmed to such a degree that it would be perverse to withhold provisional assent.”<sup>1</sup> Richard Dawkins has asserted that “if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid or insane.”<sup>2</sup> Gould and Dawkins have not always agreed on everything, but if you integrate their views you’ll find them claiming that to be doubtful of evolution is to be willingly misled about the truth of evolution. However, there are a number of non-creationists who have serious reservations about its truth. To really capture what they have to say it would be best to contrast their thoughts with those of evolutionists.

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1. Stephen Gould, *Hen’s Teeth and Horses Toes* (New York: Norton, 1983), 254-255; on the cover of John Ashton, *In Six Days: Why Fifty Scientists Choose to Believe in Creation* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2000)

2. Richard Dawkins, “Ignorance Is No Crime,” *Free Inquiry Magazine* 21:3 (Summer, 2001), reproduced at the Council for Secular Humanism’s website [http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/dawkins\\_21\\_3.html](http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/dawkins_21_3.html) (February 13, 2004), accessed December 15, 2011.

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The fossil record is supposedly one of the most potent evidences for evolution. The oldest, simplest organisms are on the very bottom of strata which are said to be billions of years old while the more complex animals exist in higher strata. It is difficult for evolutionists not to assume that there is a process of progression from simple to complex during those billions of years from then until now.

Any dating method depends upon knowledge of several factors: the value of the process when it began, that the process has continued at a steady rate throughout the life of the process and nothing has interfered with that process to change the values of that process, and the rate at which the process has progressed. Richard Milton, a science journalist and member of MENSAs and the Geologists’ Association, disputes the confidence in radiometric dating. One example he cites will suffice to explain such doubt. Uranium decays into radiogenic lead which is distinctive from the lead that is already in the rock, and the amount of decay into this lead is constant. At first glance this method might appear as a likely candidate for dating rock, but Melvin Cook (professor of metallurgy at Utah University and author of *Prehistory and Earth Models*) has postulated a way by which common lead can be transmuted into a form which is indistinguishable from radiogenic lead: the capture of free neutrons which occurs in

a process of fission in a uranium ore deposit. So the uranium-lead method fails the test of whether there are no outside agencies or processes that can interfere with our dating method. If we don't account for this error in this dating method, we will be left with an extremely old date for our rocks.

Evolutionists frequently assert that not only can evolution be revealed in the rocks but in everyday observable changes. Theistic evolutionist and theologian Langdon Gilkey, who covered the 1981 creationist trial in Little Rock, Arkansas (in which the ACLU challenged Arkansas Act 590 which required equal time for teaching creation-science and evolution-science) succumbed to this view. Evolutionist Francisco Ayala, a witness at the trial, professes that in modern science a species is a population capable of interbreeding. These populations change over time, with the result that some of them can no longer breed with the others, and, in such a case, a new species develops. This type of species change is observable, he says. Then Gilkey invites anybody to come to his lab to view such a process. He comments:

Those of us lay people who were listening realized that 'observing evolution' did not mean the unreal claim to have watched an early form of primate change into a hominid some three to four million years ago [but] it meant ... observing and checking similar, if not identical, changes illustrating the same principle in a current laboratory situation; and it meant making predictions according to these same principles that could be checked in our own future experience.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Langdon Gilkey, *Creationism on Trial: Evolution and God at Little Rock* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 139-140.

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Similarly, theistic evolutionist Kenneth Miller balks at protests that the only evolution we can see is microevolution and is willing to assume that small changes will eventually add up to big ones. He suggests that if microevolution can redesign one gene in fewer than two hundred generations in bacteria, for instance, there should be no principle of biochemistry or molecular biology that would prevent it from redesigning dozens or hundreds of them over a few weeks or months to produce a new species.<sup>4</sup>

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4. Kenneth Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (New York, NY: Cliff St., 1999), 108.

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Milton, however, disputes this claim. There have been attempts to improve the sugar content in beets or the number of bristles on the fruit fly *Drosophila*, but in both cases there was a limit to variability. Milton quotes evolutionist Ernst Mayr as saying: "Any drastic improvement under selection must seriously deplete the store of genetic variability [and] the most frequent correlated response of one-sided selection is a drop in general fitness. This plagues virtually every breeding experiment." Darwin knew of this limit and, because he could not account for the agent of change either, Milton says that "Darwinism had almost been consigned to the scientific scrap heap by the beginning of the twentieth century." However, the rediscovery of Mendel's experiments in plant breeding and their combination with Hugo de Vries' idea of mutations into a new synthetic theory changed everything. Mutation provided the engine of evolution to leap beyond the bounds of genetic homeostasis with natural selection preserving the fittest animals, and evolutionists presumed that minor changes in animals (like changes in finch beak size) could be

extrapolated into producing larger ones (like changes from one-celled organisms into a vertebrate).

After much debate in the first half of the twentieth century, a group of evolutionists including Ernst Mayr and Theodosius Dobzhansky defined a species to be a group of animals or plants which are able to interbreed and produce offspring and are reproductively isolated from other groups. That definition was unworkable in some instances because many plants do not reproduce sexually and some groups of animals cannot interbreed even though they are genetically identical. Aware of the problems with this definition, Mayr and Dobzhansky redefined it loosely as groups of populations which actually or potentially interbreed and are reproductively isolated from other groups.

That this revision is crucial to Darwinist trickiness, Milton shows with a perfect example. Researchers have studied changes in finches on the Galapagos Islands where Darwin made his voyage, and they have noticed that sometimes different finches mated and sometimes they did not. In cases where different finches bred, it was described as “hybridization” which is the mating of animals of different species. However, if we adopt the first definition of species (a group of animals or plants that are able to interbreed and produce offspring and are reproductively isolated from other groups), we could conclude that these finches were different members of the same species and that no speciation had indeed occurred. Evolutionists have since abandoned breeding as a test for membership in a species, and when they find variation they describe it as an instance of evolution producing new species rather than change within a species.<sup>5</sup> What Ayala seems to suggest is that any change is evidence for evolution even if no test has been made to determine whether there are any limits to change or whether some variants can breed and are still members of the same species.

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5. Richard Milton, *Shattering the Myths of Darwinism* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 1997), chapters 12-13.

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Nor is Milton a lone non-creationist voice on this. As early as 1971, Norman Macbeth cast stones at the whole idea. Macbeth stated that Darwin recognized the limits to variability as early as 1844, but extrapolated small changes into larger ones when arguing that “Slow though the process of selection may be, if feeble man can do so much by his powers of artificial selection, I can see no limit to the amount of change ... which may be effected in the long course of time by nature’s power of selection.” Macbeth points out that extrapolation is a dangerous game worth indulging in only if you have reasons to pursue it, and that Darwin’s extrapolation appears to be unjustified. Macbeth cites German biologist Bernhard Rensch, author of *Evolution Above the Species Level*, as saying that he did not have any examples of macroevolution — although he asserted that macro changes should not be regarded as impossible. Such changes over time require many intermediate forms and Darwin assumed that over time they would be found, but over time they were not. This lack of evidence pushed Richard Goldschmidt to propose the idea of the “hopeful monster” in which genetic changes happened rather quickly so that transitionals were not needed.<sup>6</sup> This missing evidence even led Steven Stanley in 1981 to propose a “new evolutionary timetable” in which animals evolved rapidly leaving few transitional. So the animals did evolve over time — just rapidly.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Norman Macbeth, *Darwin Retried: An Appeal to Reason* (Boston, MA: Harvard Common Press, 1971), 29-33.

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

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Michael Denton has also lobbed his own complaints. There are plenty of examples of rapid changes in species (e.g., the Hawaiian honeycreepers); but just because some change is possible it does not follow that unlimited change is possible. Denton compares complex animal systems to sentences and geological features. You may be able to convert one sentence into another by changing one letter at a time, but there may be a limit as to what sentences we can create, and we may need sophisticated design to create new ones. Likewise, wind or water may cause some changes in nature by processes such as erosion, but it would never create a portrait of a president such as those on Mount Rushmore.**8**

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8. Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Chevy Chase, MD: Adler & Adler, 1985), chapter 4.

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Here is where Macbeth makes his biggest contribution by citing David Fischer who describes “the fallacy of the possible proof” as an attempt to demonstrate that a statement is true or false by establishing the possibility of it being true or false.**9** This is exactly how Darwinists today argue when they postulate that even though evolution may not be possible, with enough time the impossible becomes possible. Some evolutionists even go further than this and explain away the fine tuning of the universe as a result of chance operating in an unlimited array of universes. Given enough universes, eventually one will arise that looks designed but is not actually designed. However, this is fallacious reasoning; the mere possibility of something happening does not mean that it did or that it can or will.**10**

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9. Macbeth, 32.

10. For an example of this line of reasoning, I offer George Wald who has said: “Time is in fact the hero of the plot... What we regard as impossible on the basis of human experience is meaningless here. Given so much time, the ‘impossible’ becomes possible, the possible probable, and the probable virtually certain. One has only to wait; time itself performs the miracles” [quoted in Ken Ham, ed., *The New Answers Book 3* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009), 156. In other words, although evolution is impossible, given enough time for it to happen, it is certain to happen (*sic!*).

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There is an unwarranted philosophical assumption which leads Miller to ask for evidence that natural selection cannot go beyond mere antibacterial resistance, rather than providing evidence that it does. He assumes that only evolution’s doubters must be the one who must produce evidence for their case because one must presuppose that natural processes are capable of generating life in all its complexity.

However, as the convert to theism Antony Flew has shown, there is good reason to start with the assumption that a mind or intelligence created the universe and life, and to demand that the evolutionists must be the ones to prove their case. Flew cites philosopher Alvin Plantinga who “introduced the idea that theism is a properly basic belief” which means “that belief in God is similar to belief in other basic

truths, such as belief in other minds or perception (seeing a tree) or memory (belief in the past).” People take certain propositions as basic and others as derivative of those, and belief in God is one of those basic beliefs. Flew also cites Ralph McInerny who reasoned that it is natural to believe in God because of the orderliness of the universe, and concluded that the idea of a god is innate. So Platinga argued that theists did not bear the burden of proof, and McInerny argued that the burden of proof must fall on atheists!**11**

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11. Antony Flew, *There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed his Mind* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2007), 55-56.

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So in this case, since the idea that simple morphological changes can be extrapolated into larger ones is the whole “story” of evolution (a key tenet of atheism), and atheism undermines belief in God, and belief in God is a basic belief innate in every human, then the burden of proof rests on Miller to show that the small changes in bacteria can be extrapolated into the larger ones. He must show this even though he is not specifically arguing for the truth of atheism.**12**

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12. I say this because belief in a creator is innate, so we should presuppose a creator and ask for evidence that overturns our presupposition (even if we do not presuppose the Christian God).

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Duane Gish has been notorious for questioning whether or not the fossil record is evidence for evolution. Denton has, too. His chapter on that topic in his much-quoted *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* begins with a comment from Steven Stanley (the same one who postulated that there are gaps populated by punctuated equilibrium) that if our knowledge of biology were restricted to those species presently on earth, we might wonder whether evolution would be nothing but an outrageous hypothesis. Darwin met challenges to the veracity of the fossil record by arguing that the fossils which were missing in his day would eventually be found, yet Denton estimates that our discoveries have been so vast that 99.9% of all paleontological work has been carried out since 1860 (i.e., after the 1859 publication of Darwin’s famous *On the Origins of the Species*). Unfortunately for the evolutionist, discoveries have not yielded positive results. Denton concludes the chapter by noting that paleontology “does not provide convincing grounds for believing that the phenomenon of life conforms to a continuous pattern. The gaps have not been explained away.”**13**

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13. Denton, chapter 8.

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Since evolution is said to explain the existence of all biological life, mankind must also be a product of evolution. That means that human social constructs such as religion, morality, violence, and altruistic acts must be explained using Darwinian processes. How, then, do we explain how mankind — which at one time was competitive to the point only the fittest survived — now has a moral and altruistic nature?

Three methods have been proposed to explain this, and David Stove has criticized them all. The “cave man” approach claims that mankind was once

ruthless in competing, but is no longer. Stove says that this is really not any explanation at all because Darwin's theory of natural selection is a generalization about how life is, and if it is not true now, then it is not true. The "hard man" method claims that life is truly a competition among humans now even though every scrap of life proves otherwise. The "soft man" approach simply refuses to admit that there is any inconsistency. Neither of these is persuasive, and we must suppose that there is an internal contradiction in evolutionary theory which cannot be reconciled.<sup>14</sup>

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14. David Stove, *Darwinian Fairytales: Selfish Genes, Errors of Heredity, and Other Fables of Evolution* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 1995), essay #1.

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Stove is not referring to a reasoning relic of the past. As recently as 2009, Fred Edwards explained in *The Humanist* that the practice of ethnic cleansing confers genetic benefits on the victors by eliminating genetic competition, and that civilization is mankind's "effort to repeal the law of the jungle" which is "a conspiracy of the weak against the strong for the benefit of all." So, using the cave man approach, Edwards suggests that earlier in human history we practiced genocide which conferred benefits on mankind, but now we are civilized which confers different benefits on mankind.<sup>15</sup> Robert Wright, focusing on Bill Clinton's sexual improprieties, suggests that men engage in sexual affairs which do not create offspring because they are saddled with primitive urges where more sex meant more offspring.<sup>16</sup> In other words, pre-civilized mankind used to engage in genocide, but not any longer, and rampant sexual activity used to foster more offspring, but not any longer — even though we sometimes may be saddled with those urges. We used to behave like cave men, but we don't anymore.

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15. Fred Edwards, "Why Genocide?" *The Humanist: A Magazine of Critical Inquiry and Social Concern* (January/February 2009); also published at <http://thehumanist.org/january-february-2009/why-genocide>, accessed December 15, 2011.

16. Robert Wright, "Politics Made Me Do It," *Time* (February 2, 1998); also published by CNN Politics, <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1998/01/26/time/wright.html>, accessed December 15, 2011.

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There is a certain philosophical mistake which has plagued historical ideas: puppetry theories. I'm not referring to anything having to do with Howdy Doody! What Stove means is the attribution of our behavior not to individual choices but to forces beyond our control. Dawkins first dived headfirst into this philosophy when he proposed that we were controlled by selfish genes, and now he has expanded his theory to *memes*, which Stove defines as "anything which can be transmitted by non-genetic means from one human being to another."<sup>17</sup>

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17. Stove, 188.

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Stove says Dawkins' "discovery" (if you can call it that) is one of the most "effortless" discoveries ever made. This is a mere philosophical pseudo-discovery, Stove says, which reveals Dawkins' own version of "the devil made me do it."<sup>18</sup>

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18. Stove, essay #7.

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David Berlinski suggests that questions of what evolution can accomplish multiply like party guests. Why, for instance, is the pitcher plant carnivorous but not the thorn bush? Why does the Pacific salmon require fresh water to spawn but not the Chilean sea bass? Evolution cannot explain such things. George Wald's response that various organisms try various things is unconvincing.

Neither can evolution explain how life developed. Evolutionists frequently rely on explanations which invoke the very same intelligent programmer or creator which the theory of evolution was supposed to eliminate. Berlinski's summary judgment suggests that ... unable to say *what* evolution has accomplished, biologists now find themselves unable to say *whether* evolution has accomplished it. This leaves evolutionary theory in the doubly damned position of having compromised the concepts needed to make sense of life – complexity, adaptation, design – while simultaneously conceding that the theory does little to explain them.**19**

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19. David Berlinski, "The Deniable Darwin," *Commentary* (June 1996), 19-29.

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Evolutionists have often asserted that they have a monopoly on all the clear thinking. This essay shows that often those who do not believe in evolution have better arguments, whether they are creationists or non-creationists. *LSI*

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