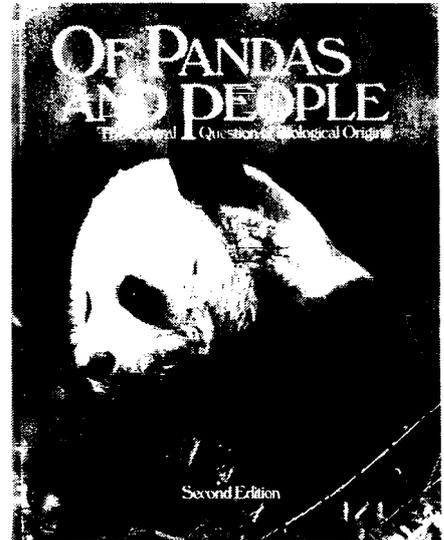


# Of Pandas and People: The Central Question of Biological Origins

Second Edition, 1993

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My background is in the physical and earth sciences, so I tend to look at biology from a mechanical point of view. Hence, a sense of wonder fills me every time I read a book or article on biology. The obvious evidence of design, the amazing adaptations, and the improbability of organic structures coming about by chance, natural selection, or any non-intelligent cause is truly overwhelming. I am convinced professional biologists every day study the results of past miracles. To me, the basic evidence from biology is overwhelmingly in favour of an intelligent designer.

**Of Pandas and People** brought that sense of awe back once again. The book is specifically designed for the public high school student in order to present a balance to the current indoctrination in evolution. However, anybody can benefit from reading the book because it covers most of the basic biological evidence for intelligent design that a layman should understand with little trouble. The more difficult concepts are often illustrated by excellent analogies.

To further aid the reader, the first chapter is an overview of the six main topics, which are expanded in the remainder of the book. A glossary, a pronunciation key for difficult words, a suggested reading list for further inquiry, and an index are available to help the reader. An introduction sets the stage

by presenting the two options for origins and the goal of the book. Since there are many misconceptions on the subject of origins, a note to teachers, written by Drs Mark Hartwig and Stephen Meyer, appears at the end of the book. This note offers helpful advice on such subjects as whether evolution is a fact, what is science, and the religious connections to the subject of origins.

The first main chapter is, of course, on the origin of life. After a brief history of the spontaneous generation theory, the authors delve into the Oparin hypothesis for chemical evolution and the subsequent origin of life experiments in the laboratory. As elsewhere in the book, the authors give evolutionists credit for their work. In this chapter credit is given for the complicated organic experiments that have been performed since Stanley Miller's pioneering work in 1953. However, there are many serious problems with origin of life scenarios, which are widely recognized by researchers, but little known to the general public. One of these is the fact that all amino acids in proteins are left handed. A brief description of the new RNA hypothesis for the origin of life, which seems to be in a state of dying enthusiasm, is presented. The chapter concludes with the case for an intelligent designer, using the excellent analogy of a primitive tribe suddenly coming upon a brand new

pickup truck. Would they think the truck evolved itself or was it the product of intelligent design?

Continuing the logical progression of the book, Chapter 2 delves into genetics and the presumed mechanism for biological evolution — mutations and natural selection. A good point is made on what is called 'adaptive packages', that is, many structures must be formed at once for an organism to function. For instance, there are many integrated structures that allow a giraffe to lower its head for a drink of water without passing out due to a blood rush. This is a very strong argument for intelligent design. Evolutionists commonly call it '*the problem of perfection*'.

The chapter ends with a discussion of the myriad gene combinations found in any type of organism, and how natural selection will favour certain gene combinations in certain environments. I was especially impressed by the example of the English sparrow. After being introduced into North America in 1850, fat ones with short extremities became predominant in the cold north and thin ones with long extremities took over in the warm south. This is not evolution but an expression of the great variety already built into the genome. Many intriguing questions, like the

differences in Darwin's finches on various Galapagos Islands, can be answered within the creationist model.

Chapter 2 dealt mainly with genetics. Chapter 3 progresses into the origin of species — Darwin's main concern in his first book. Here is where a little-appreciated scientific problem is encountered. This is the problem of what is a species. The definition appears to be quite subjective and does not correspond in many cases to the Genesis 'kind'. If you cannot define a species, it is difficult to make a case for the origin of a species. According to the imprecise definition of a species, there have been many 'speciation' events in the past. These events are not evolution in action, but likely just sub-species that became what is called 'reproductively isolated'. Especially revealing is that macroevolution needs new genetic material, while 'speciation' actually reduces the genetic variety within a species.

Chapter 4 is a good, well-written chapter on the fossil record. The fossils do not square with the expectations of evolution, but the gaps in the fossil record are as expected from the theory of intelligent design. A short section is given to the new theory of punctuated equilibrium, which could be described as an argument from lack of data. However, punctuated equilibrium cannot account for the large gaps in the fossil record. Most of the chapter is devoted to the few cases of claimed transitions, including the newly-discovered supposed transition between a mammal and a whale. A case is made that *Archaeopteryx* is a mosaic, like the

duck-billed platypus.

Chapters 5 and 6 go together and deal with the comparative anatomy 'proof' of evolution. Chapter 5 covers macrostructures and Chapter 6 is on biochemicals. For many years I mostly ignored the comparative anatomy, or similarity implies descent, argument for evolution, thinking creationists had already answered the question quite well. Using it as proof of evolution seems like a logical fallacy to me. However, the importance of comparative anatomy to the evolutionists was brought home to me when I attended my daughter's required class on evolution for her B.S. degree in biology. Much of the course dealt with the fine-detailed molecular comparisons that are used to derive evolutionary ancestry. Those similarities that do not imply ancestry were simply dismissed by lumping them into 'convergent' or 'parallel' evolution. These two chapters tell a more complete story to what can seem to the unwise like overwhelming proof of evolution in a high school or college classroom. This is where the panda enters the book and illustrates the fallacies of comparative anatomy. Although the giant panda and the red panda are very similar in many ways, these similarities do not count for deriving their evolutionary pedigree. The giant panda is classified in the bear family and the red panda in the raccoon family by most taxonomists. (Incidentally, to the credit of her evolutionist teacher, my daughter ended up with an A+ for the course, even after politely bombarding the teacher with many questions all semester and

discussing Creationism with him for several hours after class.)

As in practically all books, there are usually some flaws. I could detect only two. In the chapter on the origin of life, the authors state that within the evolutionary paradigm, atmospheric convection currents would keep synthesized amino acids high in the atmosphere to be attacked and destroyed by ultraviolet light. Actually, convection currents would allow for quicker atmospheric mixing of any newly formed organic molecules from the top to the bottom of the atmosphere. This flaw does not negate their argument that ultraviolet light would tend to destroy any organic molecule that was synthesized high in the atmosphere.

The second flaw is stating that design adherents would include *Homo erectus* with the apes. Although somewhat controversial, I believe there is much evidence to include *Homo erectus* within the family of man.<sup>1</sup> I believe most creationists have also come to this conclusion.

The book is highly recommended as a supplement for high school biology classes. It offers a well-articulated case for intelligent design — a second opinion on the subject of origins, which is a more scientific methodology. It is also good for anyone who wants a clear presentation of the major arguments for intelligent design in the field of biology.

#### REFERENCE

1. Lubenow, M. L., 1992. **Bones of Contention — A Creationist Assessment of Human Fossils**, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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#### QUOTABLE QUOTE — Palaeontology and Fossils

*'Few sciences produce such abundant returns from so few fragments of fact as palaeontology.'*

Nigel Hawkes, **The Times** (London), 23 September 1994; as quoted in **Geology Today**, vol. 11, no. 1, 1995, p. 5.