

Did creationists 'hijack' Gould's idea?

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'Eminent biologist hits back at the creationists who "hijacked" his theory for their own ends.'

So says the headline of an article by Steve Connor, Science Editor in *The Independent* (UK), 9 April 2002, referring to the imminent release of Professor Stephen Jay Gould's new book, a 1,400 page treatise called *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory*.¹ Gould† was a high-profile professor of zoology from Harvard University, well-known for promoting the controversial view that the fossil record contradicts the slow-and-gradual transformation idea of classical Darwinism. More recently, he had become more famous for revealing Darwin's real message,² but at the same time trying to pacify 'religious' people by asserting that religion and science have 'non-overlapping magisteria' (NOMA).^{3,4} The following quotes are from Connor's article.

'Professor Gould accuses creationists of having exploited the sometimes bitter dispute between him and his fellow Darwinists ...'

Yes, creationists have used Gould's candid thoughts about the meaning of the fossils, etc. It seems that Gould would have it that only evolutionists be permitted to use the arguments of evolutionists. Only those 'in the club' can legitimately discuss these things, it would appear.

Ever since Darwin, evolutionists have almost universally maintained that the supposed change from one basic type of organism to another occurred slowly, gradually, in tiny steps. The fossils did not support this idea, and Darwin blamed incompleteness of the record. Others repeated this excuse, right up to the present day, including Richard Dawkins, the 'archbishop of

atheism' at Oxford University in the UK.⁵

Gould and Niles Eldredge, a former student of Gould, actually faced up to the fossil record and decided it did not support the gradualist dogma.⁶ They argued strongly against some of the classical claims of gradual transformation. In doing this they were inadvertently agreeing with creationists. Naturally, creationists used their admissions.

In 1977 Gould wrote,

'The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of paleontology. ... to preserve our favored account of evolution by natural selection we view our data as so bad that we never see the very process we profess to study.'⁷

In 1980 Gould said,

'The absence of fossil evidence for intermediary stages between major transitions in organic design, indeed our inability, even in our imagination, to construct functional intermediates in many cases, has been a persistent and nagging problem for gradualistic accounts of evolution.'⁸

It would be difficult to find franker admissions to the lack of evidence for gradual transitions in the fossil record.

Now it is a powerful and legitimate debating tactic, employed by all, to use the admissions of 'hostile witnesses'. Clearly, Gould is not a creationist and has no sympathies whatsoever with us. He appeared on behalf of the evolutionary thought police, the ACLU (which incongruously contains the word 'liberties' in its title), at the 1981 trial over the teaching of origins in schools in Arkansas. Both he and Eldredge have used quite intemperate, insulting language in referring to creationists, especially since 1981. A refutation of Eldredge's latest anti-creationist foray was recently published in *TJ*.⁹

We make no apology for using the admissions of evolutionists about the true nature of the fossil record. Other evolutionists have also admitted the problems.¹⁰

'Professor Gould says creationists have unwittingly misinterpreted or deliberately misquoted his work ...'

Recognizing the non-gradualist nature of the fossil record, in 1972 Gould and Eldredge published a radical new theory of evolution that supposedly fitted the observations of the fossil record. They described the fossil record as representing long periods of *equilibrium* or stasis (things staying much the same), which are *punctuated* by the relatively sudden appearance of new forms. Hence they dubbed their new theory 'punctuated equilibrium' (PE). Fossils showing transitions from one form to another are missing, and to establish the need for the new theory of evolution, Gould and Eldredge argued very forcibly against supposed examples of gradual change in the fossils. For example, Eldredge had studied trilobites at length, looking for the classical gradual transformations, but without success—one of the many dead ends that evolutionary thinking has led to. (Nor did he solve the problem of how possibly the most sophisticated eye of all time could have evolved supposedly right at the beginning of complex animal life.¹¹)

Of course Gould and Eldredge are wedded to materialist philosophy (and self-servingly make this a defining characteristic of 'science'¹²), so the data cannot for them mean that evolution did not occur. It's 'a fact'.

They reasoned that evolution must have happened in such a way that transitional fossils are absent or very rare. They proposed that the changes must have occurred in small populations and relatively rapidly. The latter has to be understood in terms of the supposed mega-years of the evolutionary view—that is, the changes occurred over thousands of years, which, compared to the hundreds of millions of years of the fossil record, is a 'rapid' change. This new theory supposedly accounted for the origin of new *species*; it was claimed to be not about the origin of radically different body plans (such as phyla). Nevertheless, if PE and its proposed mechanisms are an accurate

† Stephen Jay Gould died at the age of 60, on the afternoon of Monday 21 May 2002, after a long fight with cancer.

description of the basic mode of operation of evolution, as Eldredge and Gould originally argued, then it must also account for the origin of basic body plans, because evolution supposedly accounts for all the variation in living things. However, on several occasions Gould has suggested that some basically different mechanism must operate to account for fundamentally different body plans.

In this regard, Gould spoke favourably of the ideas of Richard Goldschmidt,¹³ a German paleontologist from the mid-1900s, who also faced up to the lack of transitional fossils, and listed a number of complex structures that couldn't have been built by small advantageous steps. Goldschmidt agonized over the big picture of the fossil record—where the major categories of living things, the phyla, appear fully formed, without any evidence of a graded series of transitions from some common ancestor of all. Goldschmidt proposed a theory where the major body plans were seen as arising suddenly, by some sort of macromutation. This was popularly portrayed as being like a bird emerging out of a reptile egg—a 'hopeful monster' theory.

Perhaps some creationists have misconstrued Gould's work, conflating Gould's writings on speciation and macroevolution, and then characterizing PE as a 'hopeful monster' theory. But some evolutionists have 'misunderstood' Gould too. Maybe this is not surprising, since Gould's article had the term in its title, and he said:

'I do, however, predict that during the next decade Goldschmidt will be largely vindicated in the world of evolutionary biology.'

However, I know of no mainstream creationists *deliberately misquoting* his work; that is something else. Evolutionists often make these sweeping claims without substantiation.

For a detailed review of Gould and Eldredge's PE, and how it has fared, see 'Punctuated Equilibrium: come of age?' originally published in this Journal.¹⁴ This will demonstrate to

any fair-minded reader that we have not misconstrued or deliberately misquoted Gould's work.

"I had no premonition about the hubbub that punctuated equilibrium would generate," Professor Gould said. Some "absurdly-hyped popular accounts" proclaimed the death of Darwinism, with punctuated equilibrium as the primary assassin, he says.

"Our theory became the public symbol and stalking horse for all debate within evolutionary theory. Moreover, since popular impression now falsely linked the supposed 'trouble' within evolutionary theory to the rise of creationism, some intemperate colleagues began to blame Eldredge and me for the growing strength of creationism."

"Thus, we stood falsely accused by some colleagues both for dishonestly exaggerating our theory to proclaim the death of Darwin (presumably for our own cynical quest for fame), and for unwittingly fostering the scourge of creationism as well," he said.

"Not every scientist, however, would agree that Professor Gould was innocent in the dispute ..."

Perhaps this explains the vitriolic denunciations of creationists since the 1981 Arkansas trial—Gould endeavouring to close ranks with other materialists, to repair the breach, to prove that he is just as caustic in his criticism of creationists as any of his colleagues in a competition to be 'more anti-creationist than thou'. There is nothing like a common enemy to bring solidarity.

Gould protested about popular accounts that used PE to proclaim the death of Darwinism, but these accounts often simply reflected the enthusiasm Gould portrayed for his ideas on PE as an *alternative* to standard Darwinism. He was indeed proclaiming the death of orthodox (neo-) Darwinism. In recent years Gould and Eldredge moderated their claims from PE being a new theory to *replace* gradualism to being an *additional* concept to be added to the 'grab bag' of evolutionary tools used to

'explain' all and sundry observations. Evolutionist Levinton recognized this change, saying in response to Gould and Eldredge's review of PE¹⁵ published in 1993:

'Gould and Eldredge have devolved their claims of punctuation from an "alternative" to being "complementary" [to gradualism].'¹⁶

Also, Ernst Mayr, whose ideas Gould critiqued as representative of gradualism, dismissed Gould's ideas as merely a variant of his own theory of allopatric speciation (i.e. geographical isolation leading to reproductive isolation).

The addition of PE to the evolutionist's tool kit makes evolution even more untestable than ever, as a pretender to be a scientific theory. Darwin predicted gradualism in the fossils. After 110 years of hoping that the fossils would be found, evolutionists were forced by Gould and Eldredge (mainly) to face up to the evidence. The transitional fossils had not been found. This contradicted the most basic prediction of Darwinism. It should have meant the death of the idea, if it were truly a scientific theory. However, Darwinism is part of the atheist/materialist worldview. Richard Dawkins, a vigorous critic of Gould, said that Darwinism made atheism intellectually respectable.¹⁷ On this point they undoubtedly agreed. Karl Popper, the philosopher of science, said, 'Darwinism is not a testable scientific theory, but a metaphysical [i.e. religious] research programme ...'.¹⁸ As a well-known current philosopher of science, Michael Ruse, said,

'Evolution is promoted by its practitioners as more than mere science. Evolution is promulgated as an ideology, a secular religion—a full-fledged alternative to Christianity, with meaning and morality. ... Evolution is a religion. This was true of evolution in the beginning, and it is true of evolution still today. ... Evolution therefore came into being as a kind of secular ideology, an explicit substitute for Christianity.'¹⁹

This is especially significant because Ruse had also testified with the ACLU against creationists in the same trial as Gould, and at that time argued *against* the idea that evolution was religion.

Consequently, Darwinism will not die while ever there are atheists wanting to be ‘intellectually respectable’. Darwinism/evolution has come to mean simply ‘naturalistic (that is, Creator-less) origins theory’. Since in the minds of Dawkins, Gould and co. there is no Creator in the *real* world, then ‘evolution’ (naturalism) is a fact.

Gould and Eldredge provided an escape route from the evidence against the normal gradualist concept of evolution—PE. As they said in their 1993 review, they gave ‘theoretical space’ to stasis and abrupt appearance. Long argued by creationists as evidence against evolution, stasis and abrupt appearance now became the evidence *for* evolution by PE! So how can evolution be refuted in the minds of its proponents? It can’t. If a series of fossils showing transformation can be found,²⁰ then this is claimed as evidence for ‘evolution’ (gradualism), but if such cannot be found, then this is also claimed as evidence for ‘evolution’ (PE). ‘Heads we [evolutionists] win; tails you [creationists] lose’!

Gould’s writings *have* encouraged many creationists. It’s nice that stasis and abrupt appearance, the actual data of the fossils, have been given ‘theoretical space’ by a prominent evolutionist. If it were not for the growth of the modern creation movement, many other evolutionists might have joined with Gould and Eldredge in facing up to the data. Initially some did, such as Vrba and Stanley. That’s much less likely since 1981. Darwinian fundamentalists like Dawkins (a non-paleontologist) continue to refuse to allow the fossil evidence to speak. As a biologist, Dawkins made his reputation on just-so story-telling for the slow-and-gradual neo-Darwinian myth. He probably also realizes that the information problem in living things is difficult enough to solve in neo-Darwinism,²¹ but it would be impossible with PE, so he fights the

fossil experts such as Gould who would rock the boat.

It seems that the real data of the fossils has once again been pushed into the background. It just fits the Creation/Flood teaching of the Bible too well.

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2. Wieland, C., Darwin’s real message: have you missed it? *Creation* **14**(4):16–19, 1992.
3. Sarfati, J., AiG’s response to PBS-TV series Evolution, Episode 1: Darwin’s Dangerous Idea, <www.answersingenesis.org/pbs_nova/0924ep1.asp#noma>.
4. Gould provides nothing original in this idea—18th century ‘Enlightenment’ philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that religion and science were two separate domains that must be kept apart.
5. Dawkins actually occupies the Charles Simonyi Chair of Public Understanding of Science, but he uses his position not to promote understanding of real operational science at all (see, Sarfati, J., Who’s really pushing ‘bad science’? A response to: Lerner, L.S., *Good Science, Bad Science: Teaching Evolution in the States*, <www.answersingenesis.org/news/lerner_resp.asp#Naturalism> (1 June 2002), such as physics or chemistry, but instead to flagrantly promote atheism.
See also critiques of Dawkins at <www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/faq/critics.asp#design>.
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8. Gould, S.J., Is a new and general theory of evolution emerging? *Paleobiology* **6**:119–130, 1980; p. 127.
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10. Are there any transitional fossils? <www.answersingenesis.org/docs/3076.asp>, 1 June 2002.
11. Stammers, C., Trilobite technology, *Creation* **21**(1):23, 1999.
12. Wieland, C., The rules of the game: as the

‘rules’ of science are now defined, creation is forbidden as a conclusion—even if true, *Creation* **11**(1):47–50, 1989.

13. For example, Gould, S.J., The return of hopeful monsters, *Natural History* **86**(6): 22–30, 1977.
14. Batten, D., Punctuated Equilibrium: come of age? *CEN Tech. J.* **8**(2):131–137, 1994, <www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/magazines/tj/docs/v8n2_punc_equilibrium.asp>.
15. Gould, S.J. and Eldredge, N., Punctuated equilibrium comes of age, *Nature* **366**: 223–227, 1993.
16. Levinton, J., Scientific correspondence, *Nature* **368**:407, 1994.
17. On this point alone it is strange indeed that various bishops in the Anglican Church in England have sided with the atheist Dawkins in advocating the teaching of evolution only to children in schools in the U.K. Do these bishops want the education system to turn out atheists?
18. Popper, K., *Unended Quest*, Fontana, Collins, Glasgow, p. 151, 1976.
19. Michael Ruse, professor of philosophy and zoology at the University of Guelph, Canada (*National Post*, 13 May 2000, pp. B1, B3, B7).
20. Some transitional series of fossils are expected in creationist thinking, as animals and plants adapt to different environments in the post-Flood world, but the transformations seen will be limited to within the created kind, or ‘*baramin*’, e.g. horses (see Sarfati, J., The non-evolution of the horse: special creation or evolved rock badger? *Creation* **21**(3): 28–31, 1999). Transformations between major categories in design will not be found.
21. For a critique of Dawkins’ attempt to solve the information problem see: Truman, R., The problem of information: has Dawkins really solved it? <www.trueorigin.org/dawkinfo.asp>, 1 June 2002.