



Picking Bones

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Topic: Blinded by Science

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If you are reading this article, then you indubitably have bones. That is not to say that literacy is entirely bone-dependent, but bones play a large part in the process. For instance, if you did not have bones, then the eyes you are reading with would be covered with large flaps of your face, or they might be displaced from their sockets by the pressure of your head collapsing into a loose wrap of flesh around your neck. Not to mention, your neck wouldn't be much more than a limp tube connecting your squishy head to the rest of your squishy body. Suffice it to say: bones are important.

To contradict that last statement – it is not sufficient to say bones are important. Bones are really important. Of course, deriving the importance of bones by imagining their absence is not only gross but also quite meaningless. The human species could not have developed and/or been created without utilizing bones. In fact, the original draft of Genesis described how God initially tried Styrofoam[®], rebar, carbon fiber, and LEGOs[®] as a skeletal structure for humans, but He settled on bone as the most cost-effective building material.

Bones also provide a good basis for understanding the path that intelligent design took after God relinquished control of the process to Mother Nature and Father Time, around four billion years ago. Though it has become clear that Father Time and Mother Nature padded their resumes in order to get hired on with God's creation department, they've since demonstrated that they are a capable middle-management team.

The evidence of Nature's and Time's management techniques is in the remains of their creations. All things that are alive do a number of similar things. They live, eat, poop, and die. In these activities, living things leave notable traces, including tracks, burrows, poop,

and conveniently, themselves, usually in the form of bones.

The people who study these traces are called paleontologists, and they are some of the most hard-core nerds in science. Respect. Paleontologists study fossils, which used to be bones; ichnites, which used to be tracks; and, of course, everyone's favorite – coprolites, which were once ancient Browns headed to a prehistoric Super Bowl.

Paleontology is the study of ancient life, even though it has been dead for some time. The study of ancient dead things began, appropriately, with people who subsequently became ancient dead things themselves. The Greek Xenophanes and Chinese Shen Kuo both observed very early in history that some rocks had bones and shells carved into them, and they deduced that this was probably not the work of tiny sculptors.

With the 17th century came the amusingly classified “Age of Reason.” This is the same age that brought with it the Atlantic slave trade, colonial subjugation, and judging from the overwhelming whiteness of the era, probably mayonnaise. Despite the pervasive reasonableness in this century, the formative work of naturalists such as John Ray and Martin Lister was largely ignored. Ray and Lister proposed that fossils looked like bones because they used to be bones, but this theory was considered highly counterintuitive. Most people stuck with the more reasonable conclusion that, despite their clear similarity to bones, fossils are just clever rocks and have no organic origin whatsoever.

For centuries, the natural sciences competed with theology to explain why the heck God left all these crazy, bone-looking rocks laying around. Christian theologians explained concisely that God left these rocks here because He freaking felt like it, and if you ask again, we'll send an inquisitor to beat some faith into you. This explanation was not satisfactory to some, and they endeavored to find more compelling explanations that required less beating to understand.

The conclusion that fossils are actually bones was eventually accepted. The problem that remained was that some of these fossils clearly did not come from any species that still lived. What kind of critter dies and leaves its bones, but doesn't bother to reproduce so that its offspring have the opportunity to do the same? This question was eventually answered, but as with most answers, it didn't satisfy everyone asking.

Charles Darwin, better known as Chuck D, published *The Origin of Species* in 1859. In so doing, Chuck pissed off the Western world on a scale we didn't see again until Hollywood destroyed Heinlein's classic novel *Starship Troopers* by turning it into a feature-length episode of *Saved by the Bell*.

The Origin of Species discussed what Chuck found when he chartered a Beagle conspicuously named *H.M.S. Boat* to paddle to the Galapagos Islands and bring back several finches. When the Beagle returned, Chuck found that the various finches on these islands had developed in such extreme isolation that they had become unique species.

Chuck used his findings to support a radical new theory: evolution. Evolution is the heretical idea that God did not use clay and magic to create life, but instead, He set in motion a complex developmental system based on physical laws which allows for perpetual alteration of creatures in response to their environment. Later, Chuck pissed more people off when he synthesized these ideas to encompass human biological development in his book *The Descent of Man*, a title his wife suggested as an alternative to the book's original title *It's All Pink on the Inside*.

Subscribers to Chuck's theories initially faced ridicule and threats of excommunication. Even today, Chuck's theories are scrutinized and debated. Supporters and opponents of evolution have come to utilize various bastardizations of the Ichthus, the Christian fish icon, to proudly display their common ignorance of symbolism and eagerness to segregate themselves by ideology. Though the respectable scientific community has declined to debate zealots on the issue, less respectable kooks are perfectly willing to fill the void and provide lively, bizarre, and non sequitur arguments so that people who don't like to think can feel their positions are well represented.

In their quest to unearth evidence and truth about the history of life on earth, modern paleontologists employ seismic imaging, chemistry, and techniques learned from extensive studies of the *Where's Waldo?* series. Patient, methodical surveys and digs, tireless cataloguing and analysis, and brilliant scientific observations and deduction lead to new discoveries in the field every year, yet paleontology is still very far from providing a clear and irrefutable explanation of how and why God created life. Unfortunately, all paleontologists are atheists, Cretans, and likely drug users, so they are unlikely to do anything other than piss off God enough to cause another mass extinction. Then His creations can get back to evolution without humanity constantly asking stupid questions about their existence.

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