

THOSE TRANSITIONAL FORMS?

Dear Editor,

I have to disagree with Dr Kurt Wise when he suggests that creationists should not be concerned with the issue of 'transitional forms'.¹ It has long been recognised that in any battle one should attack the enemy at his weakest point. The creation-evolution issue is a battle, and the lack of transitional forms in the fossil record has long been recognised as evolution's biggest weakness. Darwin himself wrote that the lack of fossil intermediates was

*'perhaps . . . the most serious objection which can be urged against my theory.'*²

More recently, Professor Stephen J. Gould admitted that the lack of transitional forms *'persists as the trade secret of paleontology.'*³

It is not necessary for creationists to expend resources on a 'world tour of museums' to investigate the fossil record. One only has to read the writings of evolutionary palaeontologists, including such classic books as Romer's **Vertebrate Paleontology**,⁴ and the many other frequent and frank admissions of the lack of fossil intermediates, to realise this is a major weakness in the evolutionists' case. I believe strongly, therefore, that creationists should continue to expose this fact. Indeed, to withdraw from this area of the battle-front would no doubt be welcomed enthusiastically by many evolutionists, and they could go on deluding the public into believing that the fossil record supports evolution. I think we should be grateful to those creationists who have worked so hard to publicise the lack of transitions in the fossil record, for example, Dr Duane Gish and his classic **Evolution: The Challenge of the Fossil Record**.⁵ Of course, a lot more research and refining of the creationist interpretation of the fossil record needs to be done, but I for one will happily and confidently go on using the evidence we already have as a valid argument against evolution.

Kurt Wise suggested that evidences such as the beauty and complexity of organisms should take priority over the problem of the missing transitional fossils. The weakness of this view is that theistic evolutionists are only too happy to accept these evidences as pointing to the existence of a Creator, but still claim He used evolution as His method. Therefore, demonstrating that the fossil record does not support the evolution model is an important part of the creationist case against both theistic and atheistic evolution.

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Dear Editor,

Having recently read Michael Denton's book **Evolution: A Theory in Crisis**,¹ it struck me as somewhat incongruous to pick up the **Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal** and read in Kurt Wise's paper on transitional forms that these are *'surely strong evidence for macro evolutionary theory'*? I do appreciate the main point being made that the biblical creation view does not predict transitional forms (stratomorphic intermediates) as such, and that we need to be able to explain what they are as well as declaring and demonstrating what they are not, but surely we should not appear to give more credibility to the evolution myth than even some ardent evolutionists do themselves.

The Wise paper, for example, mentions (morphological) intermediates between reptiles and mammals. Denton, as an evolutionist, downplays these, observing that although there is a mixture of reptile and mammal character traits in the alleged intermediates, the individual characteristics themselves are not in any realistic sense transitional between the two types. His conclusion is that while these forms are somewhat anomalous in terms of a creationist-based typology, they, nevertheless, cannot be construed as evolutionary links except in the vaguest sort of way. Is it not better to take this approach rather than constructing a new category in which the only meaningful members are purely hypothetical (Wise: *'no known example exists'*)? Will we ever be able to account for God's sovereignty in the design of 'mosaics'? I don't think so, but neither are they strong evidence for a continuous view of nature.

It's also useful to remember that skeletal characteristics alone are insufficient for designating a particular organism or species as intermediate because probably 90 per cent or more of the biology of most organisms resides in their soft anatomy, which is largely inaccessible in a fossil (for example, the major difference between amphibians and reptiles lies in their reproductive systems; and the soft anatomy of the Coelacanth delivered a body blow to Rhipidistian conjectures through not being what was expected of a tetrapod ancestor). Since, then, there are formidable problems in interpreting evidence for continuity on the basis of skeletal remains, so the transitional forms fossil evidence would need to be vastly more convincing than it is in order to even begin to make out a macroevolutionary case.

Considering the total number of known fossil species is at least 250,000,⁴ the fact that the only remotely convincing morphological sequences are a handful of cases, like the horse where the difference between *Eohippus* and the modern horse is relatively trivial, only serves to emphasise the

weakness (not the strength) of the evidence for major evolutionary transformations in the fossil record.

If subscribers to the evolutionary ideology like Denton are pretty well dismissive of transitional forms, how does it make sense if creationists, even if wishing to be scrupulously objective, are more generous with their interpretation of the evidence? I am not denying that the revised terminology of the paper is an improvement over 'transitional form', but what I do take exception to is the statement that the macroevolutionary evidence is strong. Evidence might qualify for various forms of stratomorphic intermediates as defined, but it still does not constitute '*a very good evolutionary argument*'.⁵

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The Author Replies ...

In the midst of a remodelling project in our home, I found myself searching through my tools for some item to accomplish the task before me. As I searched, I found some tools which would be of no use at all, some which I **might** be able to use, and still others which would likely do the trick. I noted and found it interesting that in an earlier phase of the project (the deconstruction phase) I had a very different prioritisation of the very same tools. Mr Chapman and Mr Johnston take exception with my classification and prioritisation of 'transitional forms' arguments merely because they are focused on very different tasks than I. Both Mr Chapman and Mr Johnston

seem intent on attacking (deconstructing) evolutionary theory, whereas I am interested in building a creation model. As a result we use the tools of the 'traditional transitional forms' argument differently.

Allow me first to rephrase their concerns in the language of my article. Mr Chapman feels that the 'rarity of stratomorphic intermediates' argument has historically been, and continues to be, a substantial challenge to current evolutionary theory. Mr Johnston feels that both the 'chimeromorphic nature of morphological traits and features' and the 'rarity of stratomorphic intermediates' are substantial challenges to current evolutionary theory. I deny neither of these claims, and for those who are focused on merely attacking evolutionary theory these are reasonable tools.

In contrast, those who are involved in theory construction rather than theory deconstruction will utilise the available tools of argument very differently than Messrs Chapman and Johnston. Evolutionary theorists, for example, would point to the very **existence** of stratomorphic intermediates (rare or common; chimeromorphic or not) as evidence for their theory. In fact, stratomorphic intermediates would be understood to be powerful evidence because alternate theories (for example, creation theory) do **not** predict them. More specifically, as explained in my article, traditional evolutionary theory has predicted at least four different types of stratomorphic intermediates (those between species, those of species, those of higher taxa, and series of them). Examples of three of these categories of evidence have been found. This has been heralded as powerful evidence of macroevolutionary theory and **should** be considered powerful evidence of macroevolutionary theory. This is true regardless of how difficult the rarity and chimeromorphic nature of those stratomorphic intermediates might be for macroevolutionary theory to explain. To an objective macro-evolutionist the **existence** of the stratomorphic intermediates would be

powerful evidence that macroevolution actually occurred, and the rarity and chimeromorphic nature of those stratomorphic intermediates might be evidence that a better **mechanism** of macroevolution is still needed. This is more or less the position of Michael Denton, for example, and not really very far from the current position of even Stephen Jay Gould.

Young-age creation theorists, in contrast, will use the tools of the 'traditional transitional forms' argument differently from **both** the anti-evolutionists and the evolutionists. I suggested in my article that, as positive theory-builders, we should begin by explaining the major features of the fossil record. In the provisional list in the article I included both the 'chimeromorphic nature of morphological traits and features' and the 'rarity of stratomorphic intermediates'. I believe that not only are these substantial challenges for modern macroevolutionary theory (as do Messrs Chapman and Johnston), but that they are major features of the fossil record of the Earth. As such, it is incumbent upon us as creation theorists to explain why it is that these features characterise the Earth's fossil record.

Messrs Chapman and Johnston wish to use these two arguments to 'bash' evolution. My article argued (1) that we should **not** focus on showing that there are **no** stratomorphic intermediates; and (2) rather than using them as a weapon, we should focus on using these two particular arguments as a pry-bar to open the door to a creationist understanding of the fossil record, and as a hammer to building a creation model.

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