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DARWINOPTERUS V. DAWKINS

PTEROSAUR ‘MISSING LINK’ POSES PROBLEMS FOR A DAWKINS’ EVOLUTIONARY STORY IN THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

BY JONATHAN SARFATI

PROMINENT ANTITHEIST AND SELF-STYLED “ATHEIST” RICHARD DAWKINS HAS WRITTEN A NEW BOOK, THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH: THE EVIDENCE FOR EVOLUTION. IRONICALLY, HE ADMITS ABOUT ALL HIS PREVIOUS PRO-EVOLUTION BOOKS:

(NEO: DAWKINS QUOTED):

“LOOKING BACK ON THESE BOOKS, I REALIZED THAT THE EVIDENCE FOR EVOLUTION IS NOWHERE EXPLICITLY SET OUT, AND THAT IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD GAP TO CLOSE.”

(NEO: SARFATI CONTINUES):

NATURALLY, CMI IS PREPARING A BOOK TO ANSWER DAWKINS’ LATEST. IN A CHAPTER ABOUT ALLEGED BAD DESIGN, DAWKINS HAD A SECTION ABOUT THE LOSS OF WINGS AND EVOLUTION OF FEATURES LIKE HALTERES, THE LITTLE DRUMSTICK-LIKE STABILIZERS BEHIND THE ONE PAIR OF WINGS ON FLIES.

TO SET THE STAGE, DAWKINS RELATED THE THEORY OF ENGLISH EVOLUTIONIST JOHN MAYNARD SMITH (1920–2004) ABOUT THE EVOLUTION OF FLYING CREATURES. MAYNARD-SMITH ARGUED THAT FLYING CREATURES EVOLVED FIRST WITH HIGH STABILITY AND LOW MANEUVERABILITY (E.G. WITH THE LONG PTEROSAUR TAIL OR AN INSECT’S LONG ABDOMEN). THEN THEY SHORTENED, WHICH CAUSED LOWER STABILITY BUT GREATER MANEUVERABILITY, AND THEY EVOLVED ADVANCED SENSORY EQUIPMENT TO STABILIZE BY FAST REACTIONS (E.G. LARGER SEMICIRCULAR CANALS IN PTEROSAURS OR HALTERES IN FLIES).

EVEN WHEN DAWKINS WROTE, THERE WERE ALREADY DRAGONFLIES IN THE OINTMENT, SO TO SPEAK, BECAUSE THEY HAVE BOTH LONG BODIES (STABILITY) BUT ARE ALSO HIGHLY MANEUVERABLE AND HAVE ADVANCED NAVIGATION SYSTEMS.

FURTHERMORE, EVEN KNOWN PTEROSAUR TYPES DIDN’T FIT THIS THEORY, AS DAWKINS ADMITTED IN PASSING. BUT AFTER WRITING OUR RESPONSE TO THIS DAWKINS “JUST-SO” STORY, THIS NEW PTEROSAUR TURNED UP, AND IT ADDS A FINAL DEMOLITION POINT. THIS NEW PTEROSAUR, WHICH TO BE FAIR DAWKINS COULD NOT HAVE KNOWN ABOUT WHEN HE WROTE, HAS THE STABILITY OF THE LONG TAIL AS WELL AS THE ADVANCED CORRECTION FEATURES BEFORE LOSS OF STABILITY SUPPOSEDLY DROVE THE SELECTION FOR THE ADVANCED FLYING SKILLS.

AS A SNEAK PEEK, TO SHOW THAT WE ARE INDEED REBUTTING DAWKINS’ CLAIMS, HERE IS A DRAFT SECTION FROM OUR FORTHCOMING BOOK ANSWERING THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH:

LOSS OF WINGS - FLIGHTLESS BIRDS

THE FLIGHTLESS CORMORANT MOST IMPRESSED DARWIN, AND IMPRESSES DAWKINS TODAY (P. 345). DAWKINS CLAIMS:

“BUT ALL FLIGHTLESS BIRDS INCLUDING OSTRICHES AND THEIR KIND, WHICH LOST THEIR WINGS A VERY LONG TIME AGO, ARE CLEARLY DESCENDED FROM ANCESTORS THAT USED THEM TO FLY. NO REASONABLE OBSERVER SHOULD DOUBT THE TRUTH OF THAT, WHICH MEANS THAT ANYONE WHO THINKS ABOUT IT SHOULD FIND IT VERY HARD — WHY NOT IMPOSSIBLE — TO DOUBT THE FACT OF EVOLUTION.” (P. 345)

HOWEVER, ONCE AGAIN, THIS IS NO PROBLEM FOR THE BIBLICAL CREATION MODEL, WHICH INCLUDES THE FALL. THAT IS, WE AGREE WITH DARWIN AND DAWKINS THAT FLIGHTLESS BIRDS (AT LEAST MOST OF THEM) DESCENDED FROM FLYING BIRDS, LOSING THEIR ABILITY TO FLY. ONCE AGAIN, THIS IS POST-FALL DEVOLUTION, NOT EVOLUTION. IF DAWKINS COULD SHOW CREATURES ACQUIRING THE POWER OF FLIGHT (OR SIGHT), THEN THIS MIGHT COUNT AS EVIDENCE FOR EVOLUTION; BUT LOSS OF FLIGHT (OR SIGHT) DOES NOT.

(NEO: BEFORE FLYING INSECTS APPEARED, NO ANIMALS ON EARTH COULD FLY. THEY OBVIOUSLY "ACQUIRED" THE POWER OF FLIGHT).

THE ARGUMENT MIGHT IMPRESS DAWKINS’ GULLIBLE CHOIR IN THE CHURCH OF SAINT DARWIN,

(NEO: RELIGIOUS BELIEVERS ARE CONSIDERED GULLIBLE BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE IN INVISIBLE, POWERFUL GHOSTS WHO CONTROL THE WORLD. SINCE THAT STATEMENT ABOUT THEIR BELIEFS IS TRUE AND CANNOT BE DENIED, YOU ARE SIMPLY THROWING THE ACCUSATION BACK AT SCIENTISTS; JUST AS A CHILD, ON A SCHOOL PLAYGROUND, WOULD ANSWER BACK TO A TAUNTER, "SO ARE YOU").

BUT IT SHOULD NOT CONVINCE ANYONE WHO DOES NOT ALREADY HAVE A RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT TO NATURALISM (MATERIALISM) AND WHO CARES TO THINK ABOUT IT.

(NEO: YOU CREATIONISTS ACCUSE SCIENCE OF RELIGIOSITY IN A NEVER-ENDING ATTEMPT TO BRING SCIENCE DOWN TO THE LEVEL OF FAITH. THAT ARGUMENT ONLY WORKS ON AUTISTICS - AND ONLY BECAUSE THEY CAN'T REPLY.

SO IN 2 CONSECUTIVE ARGUMENTS, YOU HAVE TAKEN TRUE ACCUSATIONS AGAINST RELIGION, AND THROWN THEM BACK AT SCIENCE IN A CHILDISH ATTEMPT TO DISTRACT THE READERS).

FLIGHTLESS CORMORANTS

… THE MUTATION THAT CAUSED THE FLIGHTLESS CORMORANT TO LOSE THE ABILITY TO FLY IS AN EXAMPLE OF A LOSS OF GENETIC INFORMATION. GOO-TO-YOU EVOLUTION WOULD REQUIRE CHANGES THAT RESULT IN NEW GENETIC INFORMATION.

(NEO: YOUR KINDERGARTEN TACTICS ARE REALLY GETTING EMBARRASSING - FOR YOU. THE WINGS DID NOT "LOSE INFORMATION." THE INFORMATION IN THE GENES CHANGED. THIS RESULTED IN NEW GENETIC INFORMATION. NOW THE WINGS ARE USED FOR OTHER PURPOSES THAN FLIGHT).

HERE IS OUR PREVIOUS EXPLANATION ON THAT BIRD THAT SO FASCINATED DARWIN AND DAWKINS:

“THIS IS THE ONLY VARIETY OF CORMORANT THAT LIVES ON THE GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS, AND IS THE ONLY VARIETY OF CORMORANT THAT CANNOT FLY. IT HAS EVEN BEEN CLASSIFIED AS A DIFFERENT GENUS; IT IS IN THE GENUS NANNOPTERUM WHILE ALL OTHER CORMORANTS BELONG TO THE GENUS PHALACROCORAX. THE CHANGES THAT THE FLIGHTLESS CORMORANT UNDERWENT ARE SIMILAR TO THAT OF OTHER FLIGHTLESS BIRDS; THE KEEL ON THE BREAST BONE WHICH SUPPORTS THE MUSCLES USED FOR FLIGHT IS MUCH SMALLER, AND ITS LEGS ARE MUCH STRONGER THAN THOSE OF OTHER CORMORANTS. SINCE IT DOES NOT NEED TO USE ITS WINGS FOR FLIGHT, OVER TIME THEY HAVE DETERIORATED IN WAYS THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN ELIMINATED IN FLYING BIRDS; ITS FEATHERS ARE SOFTER AND MORE HAIR-LIKE, MUCH LIKE THE FEATHERS OF OTHER FLIGHTLESS BIRDS.

“SINCE THE FLIGHTLESS CORMORANTS COULD NOT HAVE SWUM FROM THE MAINLAND TO THE ISLANDS (IT NEVER VENTURES MORE THAN 100 METRES FROM SHORE WHILE FISHING), HOW DID IT ARISE? DARWIN PROPOSED THAT IT DEVELOPED FROM CORMORANTS THAT HAD FLOWN TO THE ISLAND, BUT WHOSE DESCENDANTS HAD LOST THIS ABILITY. NOW WE REALIZE THAT THIS LOSS OCCURRED THROUGH A MUTATION, OR GENETIC COPYING MISTAKES. SUCH A MUTATION WOULD NORMALLY BE HARMFUL FOR A BIRD SPECIES, BUT MAY HAVE BEEN BENEFICIAL TO THE CORMORANTS ON THAT PARTICULAR ISLAND.

“THIS WOULD BE SIMILAR TO THE CASE OF FLIGHTLESS BEETLES ON WINDY ISLANDS THAT ARE MORE LIKELY TO SURVIVE, WHILE THE BEETLES THAT CAN FLY ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE SWEPT AWAY. OR ELSE IT MAY SIMPLY HAVE BEEN A CASE OF REDUCED SELECTION PRESSURE—WITH NONE OF THE MAINLAND PREDATORS AND PLENTIFUL FOOD IN THE SEA, LOSS OF FLIGHT WOULD BE A LESS SERIOUS DISADVANTAGE, MUCH LIKE CAVE CREATURES THAT LOSE THEIR SIGHT OVER GENERATIONS. HOWEVER, THIS WOULD NOT BE AN EXAMPLE OF EVOLUTION; THE MUTATION THAT CAUSED THE FLIGHTLESS CORMORANT TO LOSE THE ABILITY TO FLY IS AN EXAMPLE OF A LOSS OF GENETIC INFORMATION. GOO-TO-YOU EVOLUTION WOULD REQUIRE CHANGES THAT RESULT IN NEW GENETIC INFORMATION.”

(NEO: WHY CAN'T YOU GET IT IN YOUR HEAD THAT IT IS NEW INFORMATION? ACTUALLY, WE ALL KNOW WHY - UNTIL YOU CAN FREE YOURSELF FROM THE FEAR THAT THE THREATS IN THE BIBLE MAY BE TRUE, YOU WILL FOREVER BE A SLAVE TO INVISIBLE GHOSTS WHO WILL DO TERRIBLE THINGS TO YOU IF YOU DARE TO DOUBT OR QUESTION).

KAKAPO

DAWKINS DESCRIBES THIS BIRD AS FOLLOWS:

“ … KAKAPOS, NEW ZEALAND’S FLIGHTLESS PARROTS, WHOSE FLYING ANCESTORS APPARENTLY LIVED SO RECENTLY THAT KAKAPOS STILL TRY TO FLY ALTHOUGH THEY LACK THE EQUIPMENT TO SUCCEED.”

ONCE AGAIN, THIS IS HARDLY NEWS TO CREATIONISTS —A DETERIORATION DUE TO MUTATIONS, WHICH NATURAL SELECTION DID NOT “PUNISH” IN THE ABSENCE OF PREDATORS.

(NEO: YOU KEEP CALLING LOSS OF FLIGHT A "DETERIORATION." IF FLIGHT WAS ADVANTAGEOUS FOR THIS SPECIES, NATURAL SELECTION WOULD HAVE FAVORED THEM KEEPING THE ABILITY TO FLY. IN THEIR CASE, FLIGHT WAS NOT ADVANTAGEOUS AND WAS WEEDED OUT BY NATURAL SELECTION. LOSS OF FLIGHT IS NOT NECESSARILY A "DETERIORATION").

YET THIS IS A PROBLEM FOR LONG-AGE IDEAS: NEW ZEALAND WAS SUPPOSEDLY ISOLATED MANY MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO, AND ITS FAUNA ISOLATED FROM PREDATORS FOR THAT TIME, YET THIS FLIGHTLESSNESS IS CLEARLY RECENT.

(NEO: HOW IS THAT A PROBLEM FOR LONG AGE IDEAS? I THOUGHT YOU GUYS DIDN'T BELIEVE IN PUNCTUATED EQUILIBRIUM?).

PENGUINS

AS DAWKINS SAYS, “ … PENGUINS … USE THEIR WINGS TO ‘FLY UNDERWATER’ … ” THIS IS COMPATIBLE WITH A DESIGN EXPLANATION.

(NEO: IF THIS IS COMPATIABLE WITH A DESIGNER, WHY DIDN'T HE GIVE THEM THE ABILITY TO BREATH FIRE "UNDERWATER" LIKE HE GAVE TO THE LEVIATHAN IN THE BIBLE?

THAT WAS A PRETTY USEFUL DESIGN WASN'T IT?).

THE POINT IS THAT THE PRINCIPLES OF FLIGHT ARE THE SAME REGARDLESS OF THE FLUID USED—A FLUID IS A MATERIAL THAT FLOWS, I.E. A LIQUID OR A GAS. MERELY THE OPTIMAL DIMENSIONS MUST BE CHANGED. THIS IS WHY FLIGHT SIMULATIONS OFTEN USE A DIFFERENT FLUID AND DIMENSIONS AND ARE STILL ACCURATE.

(NEO: HOW EASILY YOU GET CONFUSED: DAWKINS USED "FLY UNDERWATER" ONLY AS AN EXPRESSION. "FLIGHT" ONLY APPLIES TO CREATURES THAT MOVE THROUGH THE AIR - NOT THE WATER).

HALTERES: LOST/EVOLVED WINGS ON INSECTS?

A CAST OF A FOSSIL SPECIMEN OF THE PTEROSAUR RHAMPHORHYNCHUS MUENSTERI

DAWKINS THEN DISCUSSES CERTAIN FEATURES OF FLIES OR DIPTERA, WITH ONLY TWO WINGS INSTEAD OF FOUR, LIKE MOST INSECTS. INSTEAD OF HINDWINGS, THEY HAVE LITTLE STALKS WITH KNOBS CALLED HALTERES. THEY HAVE LONG BEEN KNOWN TO ACT AS A GYROSCOPE, BECAUSE THEY BEAT IN ANTIPHASE TO THE WINGS, I.E. IN REVERSE DIRECTION. THE BASE OF THE HALTERE HAS MECHANICAL SENSORS CALLED CAMPANIFORM (BELL-SHAPED) SENSILLA THAT QUICKLY PASS ON FLIGHT INFORMATION TO THE WING-STEERING MUSCLES, SO THEY CAN RESPOND FAST ENOUGH TO STABILIZE THE FLY. THUS HALTERES ARE THE EQUIVALENT OF AN AIRCRAFT’S ATTITUDE INDICATOR.

STABILITY VS MANEUVERABILITY

DAWKINS EXPLAINS THIS AS PART OF THE TRADE-OFF BETWEEN STABILITY AND MANEUVERABILITY AS ALL FLYING MACHINES HAVE, AND PUTS THE FOLLOWING EVOLUTIONARY SLANT ON IT:

(NEO: NOW HE QUOTES DAWKINS):

“THE GREAT JOHN MAYNARD SMITH, WHO WORKED AS AN AIRCRAFT DESIGNER BEFORE RETURNING TO THE UNIVERSITY TO READ ZOOLOGY … POINTED OUT THAT FLYING ANIMALS CAN MOVE IN EVOLUTIONARY TIME, BACK AND FORTH ALONG THE SPECTRUM OF THIS TRADE-OFF, SOMETIMES LOSING INHERENT STABILITY IN THE INTERESTS OF INCREASED MANŒVRABILITY, BUT PAYING FOR IT IN THE FORM OF INCREASED INSTRUMENTATION AND COMPUTATION CAPABILITY—BRAIN POWER.” (P. 348)

(NEO: SARFATI CONTINUES):

THEN THERE IS A DIVERSION TO ILLUSTRATE HIS POINT WITH PTEROSAURS.

PTEROSAURS

DAWKINS ILLUSTRATES A SUPPOSEDLY EARLY PTEROSAUR, RHAMPHORHYNCHUS, WITH A LONG TAIL “WITH THE PING-PONG BAT AT THE END”, SO IT WAS VERY STABLE, SO “WOULD NOT HAVE NEEDED SOPHISTICATED GYROSCOPIC CONTROL”. BUT IT WAS NOT VERY MANEUVERABLE, HE SAYS. BUT ANHANGUERA, ALLEGEDLY 60 MILLION YEARS LATER, HAD ALMOST NO TAIL, SO “IT WOULD SURELY HAVE BEEN AN UNSTABLE AIRCRAFT, RELIANT ON INSTRUMENTATION AND COMPUTATION TO EXERCISE SUBTLE, MOMENT-TO-MOMENT CONTROL OVER ITS FLIGHT SURFACES.” (PP. 347–8).

DARWINOPTERUS … IS EVIDENCE AGAINST THE MAYNARD SMITH THEORY, SINCE IT HAD BOTH A LONG TAIL AND ‘ADVANCED’ FEATURES IN THE HEAD AND NECK. I.E. THE LATTER FEATURES AROSE WITHOUT BEING DRIVEN BY SELECTION FOR COMPENSATION FOR LOSS OF STABILITY.

IN THIS CASE, THE CONTROLS WERE MOST LIKELY PROVIDED BY ORIENTATIONAL INFORMATION FROM THE SEMICIRCULAR CANALS. INDEED, THEY WERE VERY LARGE. BUT DAWKINS GRUDGINGLY ADMITS, “ALTHOUGH, A TOUCH DISAPPOINTINGLY FOR THE MAYNARD SMITH HYPOTHESIS, THEY WERE LARGE IN RHAMPHORHYNCHUS AS WELL AS ANHANGUERA.” (P. 348).

A NEW PTEROSAUR FOSSIL, PUBLISHED AFTER I WROTE MOST OF THIS CHAPTER, PROVIDES AN EVEN BIGGER PROBLEM: DARWINOPTERUS MODULARIS.

FIRST OF ALL, IT WAS “DATED” AT 160 MILLION YEARS OLD, WHICH IS ON THE YOUNGER END OF THE EVOLUTIONARY AGE RANGE OF RHAMPHORHYNCHUS (165 TO 150 MILLION YEARS). BUT FAR MORE IMPORTANT, IT IS EVIDENCE AGAINST THE MAYNARD SMITH THEORY, SINCE IT HAD BOTH A LONG TAIL AND “ADVANCED” FEATURES IN THE HEAD AND NECK. I.E. THE LATTER FEATURES AROSE WITHOUT BEING DRIVEN BY SELECTION FOR COMPENSATION FOR LOSS OF STABILITY. THIS CAN BE SEEN FROM COMMENTS OF ONE OF THE DISCOVERS, DR DAVID UNWIN FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER, UK, WHO HAD EXPECTED AN INTERMEDIATE ALONG THE MAYNARD-SMITH LINES:

(NEO: UNWIN'S QUOTE):

“DARWINOPTERUS CAME AS QUITE A SHOCK TO US. WE HAD ALWAYS EXPECTED A GAP-FILLER WITH TYPICALLY INTERMEDIATE FEATURES SUCH AS A MODERATELY ELONGATE TAIL — NEITHER LONG NOR SHORT.

“BUT THE STRANGE THING ABOUT DARWINOPTERUS IS THAT IT HAS A HEAD AND NECK JUST LIKE THAT OF ADVANCED PTEROSAURS, WHILE THE REST OF THE SKELETON, INCLUDING A VERY LONG TAIL, IS IDENTICAL TO THAT OF PRIMITIVE FORMS.”

(NEO: SOUNDS LIKE ONE OF THOSE TRANSITIONAL SPECIES THAT YOU GUYS REFUSE TO ADMIT EXIST.

SARFATI CONTINUES):

INSTEAD, THE RESEARCHERS PROPOSE A NOVEL IDEA, WHICH GOES AGAINST DAWKINS’ DARWINIAN GRADUALISM: THAT NATURAL SELECTION SELECTED WHOLE “MODULES”; HENCE THE SPECIES NAME:

(NEO: HE QUOTES DAWKINS AGAIN):

“THIS PATTERN SUPPORTS THE IDEA THAT MODULES, TIGHTLY INTEGRATED COMPLEXES OF CHARACTERS WITH DISCRETE, SEMI-INDEPENDENT AND TEMPORALLY PERSISTENT HISTORIES, WERE THE PRINCIPAL FOCUS OF NATURAL SELECTION AND PLAYED A LEADING ROLE IN EVOLUTIONARY TRANSITIONS.”

(NEO: SARFATI CONTINUES):

BUT THIS EVIDENCE IS BETTER EXPLAINED BY THE BIOTIC MESSAGE THEORY, AS PROPOSED BY WALTER REMINE IN THE BIOTIC MESSAGE. THAT IS, THE EVIDENCE FROM NATURE POINTS TO A SINGLE DESIGNER, BUT WITH A PATTERN WHICH THWARTS EVOLUTIONARY EXPLANATIONS.

(NEO: IF THAT EXPLANATION WAS BETTER THAN DAWKINS, IT WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN REJECTED BY 99% OF ALL BIOLOGISTS - MANY OF WHOM ARE CHRISTIANS).

IN THIS CASE, THE COMMON MODULES POINT TO ONE COMMON DESIGNER—ONE WHO WORKED WITH DIFFERENT MODULES CREATING DIFFERENT CREATURES WITH DIFFERENT MODULES THAT FIT NO CONSISTENT EVOLUTIONARY PATTERN.

(NEO: OKAY, YOU WIN. BY THE WAY, NOW THAT YOU'VE PROVEN THE EXISTENCE OF A DESIGNER, I JUST HAVE ONE QUESTION - WHOSE GOD IS THE DESIGNER? YOU ALL MAKE THE SAME CLAIM, AND YOU ALL HAVE THE SAME AMOUNT OF EVIDENCE: ZERO).

ALSO, IN MOST CULTURES AROUND THE WORLD, SUCH A PATTERN OF COMMONALITY WOULD BRING HONOUR TO A DESIGNER, AND WOULD ALSO INDICATE THE DESIGNER’S AUTHORITY OVER AND MASTERY OF HIS DESIGNS.

(NEO: THEN I GUESS WE ALL OWE ALLAH A DEBT OF GRATITUDE, DON'T WE?).

MORE IS EXPLAINED IN THE CHAPTER ON HOMOLOGY, TITLED “COMMON ANCESTRY OR COMMON DESIGN?”

(NEO: QUESTION: SINCE THERE IS JUST AS MUCH EVIDENCE THAT YOUR "DESIGNER" IS ALLAH AS THERE IS THAT HE IS YOUR GOD, AND SINCE ALLAH HAS PROMISED TO BURN YOU IN HELL FOREVER FOR NOT BELIEVING IN HIM, WOULDN'T YOU GUYS BE BETTER OFF IF DARWIN WAS RIGHT?).

ORIGIN OF PTEROSAURS

A FAR BIGGER PROBLEM IS THAT THE FOSSIL RECORD SHEDS NO LIGHT ON THE ALLEGED EVOLUTION OF PTEROSAURS FROM NON-FLYING CREATURES, A FAR BIGGER JUMP THAN BETWEEN DIFFERENT TYPES OF PTEROSAUR, WHICH DOESN’T FIT DAWKINS’ FAVOURITE EVOLUTIONARY STORY ANYWAY, AS HE AND UNWIN ADMITTED. FOR EXAMPLE, RESEARCHERS INCLUDING DR UNWIN RECENTLY DISCOVERED THAT PTEROSAURS USED THEIR TINY PTEROID BONE AS A SUPPORT FOR A WING FLAP, WITHOUT WHICH THEY LIKELY COULD NOT HAVE RISEN OFF THE GROUND IN THE FIRST PLACE. WITH BATS, THE PROBLEM FOR EVOLUTION IS EVEN STRONGER—THE OLDEST KNOWN (BY EVOLUTIONARY ‘DATING’ METHODS) FOSSIL BATS ARE PRACTICALLY INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM MODERN ONES. EVOLUTIONIST PAUL SERENO ADMITTED:

(NEO: NOW HE QUOTES SERENO):

“FOR USE IN UNDERSTANDING THE EVOLUTION OF VERTEBRATE FLIGHT, THE EARLY RECORD OF PTEROSAURS AND BATS IS DISAPPOINTING: THEIR MOST PRIMITIVE REPRESENTATIVES ARE FULLY TRANSFORMED AS CAPABLE FLIERS.”

(NEO: YOU GUYS NEVER LEARN. EVERYTIME YOU COMPLAIN ABOUT A GAP, SCIENTISTS SLAM DUNK YOUR CLAIM AND FORCE YOU TO RETREAT BACK TO THE NEXT GAP. THE EVOLUTIONARY TREE IS NOW REMARKABLY FULL AS GAPS ARE CONSTANTLY BEING FILLED. SINCE THERE WILL ALWAYS BE GAPS, THIS CLAIM WILL NEVER DIE - IT WILL JUST MAKE YOU LOOK MORE RIDICULOUS EVERY TIME YOU USE IT).

IN LIKE MANNER, EVOLUTIONARY PALEONTOLOGIST ROBERT CARROLL SAID:

(NEO: NOW HE QUOTES CARROLL):

“THE FOSSIL RECORD DOES NOT PROVIDE EVIDENCE FOR THE TRANSITION TOWARDS EITHER PTEROSAURS OR BATS: THE EARLIEST KNOWN MEMBERS OF THESE [BAT] GROUPS HAD ALREADY EVOLVED AN ADVANCED FLIGHT APPARATUS.”

(NEO: AND ?)

MORE PROBLEMS FOR EVOLUTION ARE DISCUSSED IN THE CHAPTER “THE LINKS ARE STILL MISSING”.

(NEO: THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS "LINKS." ALL FOSSILS ARE LINKS TO ALL OTHER FOSSILS, HENCE, THE TERM "LINK" HAS NO MEANING).

PRINGLE ON HALTERES

RETURNING TO HALTERES, DAWKINS CITES THE WORK OF J.W.S. PRINGLE (1912–1982), ONE OF HIS OWN OXFORD PROFESSORS FROM HIS STUDENT DAYS, ONE OF THE FIRST TO WORK OUT THE GYROSCOPIC FUNCTION OF THE HALTERES. BUT AFTER THIS GOOD SCIENCE, PRINGLE SPECULATED ON THEIR ORIGIN, AS DAWKINS RELATES:

(NEO: NOW HE QUOTES DAWKINS):

“PRINGLE SUGGESTED THAT THE FOUR-WINGED ANCESTORS OF FLIES PROBABLY HAD LONG ABDOMENS, WHICH WOULD HAVE MADE THEM STABLE. ALL FOUR WINGS WOULD HAVE ACTED AS RUDIMENTARY GYROSCOPES. THEN, HE SUGGESTS, THE ANCESTORS OF FLIES STARTED TO MOVE ALONG THE STABILITY CONTINUUM, BECOMING MORE MANŒVRABLE AND LESS STABLE AS THE ABDOMENS GOT SHORTER. THE HIND WINGS STARTED TO SHIFT MORE TOWARDS THE GYROSCOPIC FUNCTION (WHICH THEY HAD ALWAYS PERFORMED [DUE TO TINY SENSE ORGANS IN THE BASE, P. 347] BECOMING SMALLER, AND HEAVIER FOR THEIR SIZE, WHILE THE FOREWINGS ENLARGED TO TAKE OVER MORE OF THE FLYING. THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN A GRADUAL CONTINUUM OF CHANGE, AS THE FOREWINGS ASSUMED EVER MORE OF THE BURDEN OF AVIATION, WHILE THE HIND WINGS SHRANK TO TAKE OVER THE AVIONICS.” (PP. 348–9).

DRAGONFLIES IN THE OINTMENT

ONE PROBLEM WITH THE PRINGLE STORY IS THAT THE ALLEGEDLY PRIMITIVE INSECTS IN THE ODONATA (DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES) HAVE BOTH LONG ABDOMENS AND SOPHISTICATED FLYING METHODS, SO EFFICIENT THAT ENGINEERS ARE TRYING TO COPY THEM.

THEY HAVE “UNUSUAL MUSCULATURE” THAT ALLOWS THEM TO MOVE EACH OF THEIR FOUR WINGS INDEPENDENTLY. ROBOTIC SIMULATIONS SHOWED THAT THEIR OUT-OF-PHASE FLAPPING ALLOWS THE HIND WINGS TO EXTRACT EXTRA ENERGY FROM THE WAKE OF THE FRONT WINGS, IMPROVING ENERGY EFFICIENCY BY 22%.

INDEED, THE RESEARCHERS REALISED THAT THIS WAS A PROBLEM FOR PRINGLE-TYPE SCENARIOS:

“CAUTION MUST BE APPLIED WHEN INTERPRETING THE BIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ABOVE OBSERVATIONS. SUGGESTING AN EVOLUTIONARY ADVANTAGE TO EITHER TWO-WINGED OR FOUR-WINGED FORMS IS UNWISE, CONSIDERING THE SUCCESS AND DIVERSITY OF THE TRUE FLIES (DIPTERA), AND YET THE MAINTENANCE OF THE FOUR-WINGED FORM BY DRAGONFLIES SINCE THE CARBONIFEROUS.”

A BETTER IDEA IS THAT THEY WERE DESIGNED BY AN INTELLIGENCE FAR GREATER THAN OUR OWN, SO IT’S NOT SURPRISING THAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THEM.

(NEO: HOW IS THAT A BETTER IDEA? I WOULD THINK THAT A "BETTER" IDEA WOULD BE ONE WITH EVIDENCE - NOT ONE BASED ON MAGIC).

CREATIONIST PROF. STUART BURGESS, LEADER OF THE DESIGN ENGINEERING RESEARCH GROUP AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL (UK), INFORMS US:

(NEO: NOW HE QUOTES BURGESS):

“FLYING INSECTS LIKE DRAGONFLIES ARE ANOTHER STRONG EVIDENCE FOR DESIGN BECAUSE THEIR FLIGHT MECHANISMS (AND NAVIGATION SYSTEMS) ARE INCREDIBLY SOPHISTICATED ALTHOUGH EVOLUTIONISTS REGARD DRAGONFLIES AS “PRIMITIVE” INSECTS THAT APPEARED MANY MILLIONS YEARS AGO.

(NEO: IF "EVOLUTIONISTS" REGARD THEM AS PRIMITIVE, WHY WOULD ANYONE ASSIGN MORE VALIDITY TO THE OPINION OF AN "ENGINEER?" IF THE QUESTION WAS ABOUT AIRCRAFT, I WOULD SEEK THE ANSWER FROM THE ENGINEER - NOT THE BIOLOGISTS. BUT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT BIOLOGY.

I THINK WE ALL KNOW WHY YOU ACCEPT THE OPINION OF THE ENGINEER (OUTSIDE HIS FIELD OF EXPERTISE) - IT IS BECAUSE IT AGREES WITH WHAT YOU DESPERATELY WANT TO BELIEVE.

BURGESS CONTINUES):

MY OWN RESEARCH GROUP AT BRISTOL UNIVERSITY IS DEVELOPING MICRO AIR VEHICLES BASED ON THE WINGS OF DRAGONFLIES. WE HAVE FILMED DRAGONFLIES WITH HIGH SPEED CAMERAS AND RECORDED THE EXACT FLAPPING AND TWISTING MOTION OF THEIR WINGS. WE HAVE THEN PRODUCED LINKAGE MECHANISMS THAT CAN COPY THAT MOTION IN MADE-MADE MICRO AIR VEHICLES.”

(NEO: SARFATI CONTINUES):

YET SOMEHOW, WHAT THE MOST INGENIOUS HUMAN DESIGNERS CAN’T ACHIEVE WITH BULKY SYSTEMS, WAS PROGRAMMED INTO THE TINY DRAGONFLY BRAIN WITHOUT ANY INTELLIGENCE INVOLVED AT ALL!

(NEO: SCIENTISTS UNDERSTAND HOW INFORMATION IS PROGRAMMED INTO THE GENES OF LIVING THINGS.

AND YOU FINALLY GOT ONE RIGHT AFTER ALL THIS TIME: "WITHOUT ANY INTELLIGENCE INVOLVED AT ALL!").

FURTHERMORE, NOT ONLY DO DRAGONFLIES HAVE SOPHISTICATED FLYING, THEY ALSO HAVE SOPHISTICATED INSTRUMENTATION. THEY CAN TRACK OTHER INSECTS WITH INCREDIBLY INTRICATE MANEUVERING THAT MAKES THE DRAGONFLY APPEAR STATIONARY TO ITS TARGET. INSECTS’ COMPOUND EYES ARE GOOD AT DETECTING THE SLIGHTEST MOTION BY OPTIC FLOW, SO THE FLIGHT PATTERNS MUST HAVE AMAZING CONTROL SYSTEMS. APPEARING STATIONARY WOULD BE VERY USEFUL FOR SNEAKING UP ON OTHER INSECTS OR FOR ELUDING A PREDATOR.

(NEO: SOUNDS LIKE EVOLUTION DID A PRETTY GOOD JOB. WHY DO YOU THINK A BEARDED, INVISIBLE MAN WAS RESPONSIBLE?).

A BRIEF REPORT IN NEW SCIENTIST SAID, “DRAGONFLIES OVERSHADOW THEIR ENEMIES IN COMPLEX MANOEUVRES THAT MILITARY FIGHTER PILOTS CAN ONLY DREAM OF. … IT DEMANDS EXQUISITE POSITION SENSING AND CONTROL.”

(NEO: OUR PILOTS ACHIEVE HEIGHTS AND SPEEDS THAT A DRAGONFLY ... CAN ONLY DREAM OF).

THE RESEARCHER, AKIKO MIZUTANI, OF THE CENTRE FOR VISUAL SCIENCE AT THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY IN CANBERRA, SAID, “THIS SORT OF PERFORMANCE IS EXTREMELY HARD TO ACHIEVE WITHOUT VERY EXPENSIVE AND BULKY MEASUREMENT SYSTEMS.”

YET SOMEHOW, WHAT THE MOST INGENIOUS HUMAN DESIGNERS CAN’T ACHIEVE WITH BULKY SYSTEMS, WAS PROGRAMMED INTO THE TINY DRAGONFLY BRAIN WITHOUT ANY INTELLIGENCE INVOLVED AT ALL!

(NEO: YOU ARE STARTING TO REPEAT YOURSELF. MAYBE IT'S TIME YOU STARTED WRAPPING THIS UP).

DRAGONFLY NAVIGATION ADDS TO THE RHAMPHORHYNCHUS SEMICIRCULAR CANALS, AND EVEN MORE DARWINOPTERUS, AS COUNTER-EXAMPLES TO THE MAYNARD SMITH HYPOTHESIS, UPON WHICH THE PRINGLE HYPOTHESIS FOR HALTERE ORIGIN DEPENDS.

(NEO: BUT NOT ONE OF YOUR ARGUMENTS DISPROVES EVOLUTION. NOT ONE OF YOUR ARGUMENTS SUPPORTS INTELLIGENT DESIGN. OTHER THAN SNIPING AT EVOLUTION LIKE AN ANNOYING GNAT, EXACTLY WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS HAS ACCOMPLISHED?).

STRAW MAN ARGUMENTS

DAWKINS’ BOOK IS FULL OF STRAW-MAN ARGUMENTS, WITH EXAMPLE AFTER EXAMPLE OF ADAPTATION BY MUTATIONS AND NATURAL SELECTION THAT SUPPOSEDLY “PROVE EVOLUTION” (PLUS LOTS OF “JUST-SO” STORY TELLING).

(NEO: THAT ACCUSATION PROVES THAT YOU HAVEN'T THE VAGUEST CLUE WHAT A "STRAW MAN" ARGUMENT IS.

A WORD OF ADVICE: A RELIGIOUS BELIEVER WITH NO CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS (THAT WOULD BE YOU), TRYING TO ATTACK A SCIENTIST (LIKE DAWKINS) WITH "LOGIC," HAS ABOUT AS MUCH CHANCE OF SUCCESS, AS ONE OF YOUR MAGNIFICENT DRAGONFLIES HAS, OF GOING UP AGAINST ONE OF OUR SLOW, CLUMSY JET FIGHTERS. ACTUALLY, THE DRAGONFLY MIGHT EVEN HAVE A BETTER CHANCE).

BUT CREATIONIST BIOLOGISTS HAVE LONG ACCEPTED THE REALITY OF MUTATIONS AND NATURAL SELECTION,

(NEO: NOT UNTIL THE EVIDENCE FORCED IT UPON YOU. YOU GUYS FOUGHT THAT AS LONG AND AS HARD AS YOU FOUGHT AGAINST THE SUN-CENTERED SOLAR SYSTEM, UNTIL PUBLIC HUMILIATION FINALLY FORCED YOU TO RETREAT).

BUT UNDERSTAND THAT THEY ARE INCAPABLE OF CREATING ANY OF THE VAST AMOUNTS OF NOVEL GENETIC INFORMATION REQUIRED FOR GOO-TO-YOU EVOLUTION TO BE BELIEVABLE. RICHARD DAWKINS’ “PROOF” OF EVOLUTION IN THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH IS NOTHING OF THE KIND.

(NEO: THE FEAR THAT KEEPS YOU FROM ENJOYING THE INCREDIBLE DISCOVERIES OF SCIENCE IS THE SAME FEAR THAT KEEPS YOU FROM ENJOYING LIFE, WHILE YOU ANXIOUSLY AWAIT DEATH TO TAKE YOU TO YOUR MASTER.

I MAY BE GOING TO HELL - BUT YOU ALREADY LIVE THERE).

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

'SPIDER PILL' OFFERS NEW WAY TO SCAN FOR DISEASES INCLUDING COLON CANCER

A NEW WAY TO SCAN FOR DISEASES, INCLUDING CANCER OF THE STOMACH OR COLON, USING A REMOTE CONTOL ‘SPIDER PILL’ CAMERA WITH MOVING LEGS, HAS BEEN HAILED BY SCIENTISTS IN ITALY.

EXPERTS BELIEVE THE DEVICE, WHICH IS SWALLOWED BY THE PATIENT AND CONTROLLED BY DOCTORS USING A WIRELESS CONNECTION, COULD TRANSFORM THE DIFFICULT AND INVASIVE PROCESS OF DIAGNOSING SERIOUS CONDITIONS.

THE PILL, WHICH CONTAINS A TINY CAMERA, IS ALSO FITTED WITH TINY LEGS THAT CAN BE ACTIVATED REMOTELY ONCE IT IS INSIDE THE COLON OR INTESTINE.

THE LEGS PROTRUDE OUTWARDS AND ARE MOVABLE IN ORDER TO MAKE DEVICE TO ‘CRAWL’ INSIDE THE PATIENT LIKE A SPIDER. IT CAN BE MOVED BACK AND FORTH, GIVING DOCTORS MORE FLEXIBILITY DURING THE EXAMINATION.

DR ENRICO GRASSO, A CANCER SPECIALIST AT THE UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL TOR VERGATA IN ROME.IN ITALY, TOLD THE BBC THE INVENTION COULD REDUCE THE USE OF ENDOSCOPES THAT MANY PATIENTS FIND SO UNCOMFORTABLE THAT THEY REFUSE TREATMENT.

“IT COULD IMPROVE ADHERENCE TO THE PROGRAM,” HE SAID.

PILLS CONTAINING CAMERAS ALREADY EXIST, BUT THIS IS BELIEVED TO BE THE FIRST THAT CAN BE CONTROLLED AFTER IT HAS BEEN SWALLOWED.

ONCE THE EXAMINATION HAS FINISHED, THE SPIDER PILL EXITS THE BODY NATURALLY.

IT HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY TESTED ON PIGS BUT FURTHER TRIALS WILL BE NEEDED BEFORE IT CAN BE CLEARED FOR USE BY DOCTORS.

ELISA BUSELLI, ONE OF THE SCIENTISTS WORKING ON THE PROJECT THAT CREATED THE SPIDER PILL, SAID: “THIS SHOULD IMPROVE THE SITUATION NOT JUST FOR THE PATIENT BUT ALSO THE DOCTOR.”

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ABROAD

JAPAN - HARSH WORDS FOR CHRISTIANITY

THIS COULD BE INTERESTING. BARACK OBAMA, WHO HAS SAID HIS CHRISTIAN FAITH IS INTEGRAL TO HIS PRIVATE LIFE AND PUBLIC PERSONA, ARRIVES FRIDAY IN JAPAN ON THE INITIAL LEG OF HIS FIRST TRIP TO ASIA AS PRESIDENT -- JUST AS A TOP POLITICIAN THERE HAS CALLED CHRISTIANITY "EXCLUSIVE AND SELF-RIGHTEOUS."

(NEO: WHAT COULD HAVE POSSIBLY LED THAT POLITICIAN TO COME TO THAT CONCLUSION?).

"ISLAM IS BETTER, BUT IT IS ALSO EXCLUSIVE," ICHIRO OZAWA, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE RULING DEMOCRATIC PARTY, TOLD JAPANESE MEDIA AFTER MEETING THE HEAD OF THE JAPAN BUDDHIST FEDERATION ON TUESDAY.

(NEO: ISLAM IS BETTER? HOW? BETTER BECAUSE THEY KILL MORE INNOCENT PEOPLE? BETTER BECAUSE, INSTEAD OF ELECTRICUTING, OR PUTTING THEM TO SLEEP, THEY STONE THEM TO DEATH? BETTER BECAUSE OF THE EXALTED POSITION THAT WOMEN HAVE WITHIN THEIR SOCIETY?

IN WHAT WAY IS ISLAM BETTER?).

CHRISTIANITY "IS AN EXCLUSIVE AND SELF-RIGHTEOUS RELIGION. AND SOCIETY IN THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE, WHICH ARE BASED ON CHRISTIANITY, ARE AT A DEAD END," THE NIKKEI NEWSPAPER QUOTED OZAWA AS TELLING REPORTERS, ACCORDING TO A REUTERS REPORT.

(NEO: OKAY, WE AGREE ON THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS AND EXCLUSIVE PART - BUT HOW DO YOU FIGURE THEY ARE AT A DEAD END? AS I RECALL, THEY KICKED YOUR ASSES PRETTY BAD IN THE LAST WORLD WAR. IS THAT WHAT HAS YOU SO PISSED OFF - YOU'RE MAD BECAUSE WE MADE YOUR EMPEROR SIGN A PAPER ADMITTING THAT HE WASN'T GOD?).

OZAWA NOT SURPRISINGLY HAD KIND WORDS FOR BUDDHISM, WHICH HE SAID "TEACHES US FROM THE STARTING POINT OF HOW HUMAN BEINGS SHOULD BE, THEIR STATE OF MIND AND WAY OF LIFE."

(NEO: OKAY, I'LL ADMIT IT'S A HELL OF A LOT BETTER THAN THE BLOODY DESERT DOGMAS).

PERHAPS OZAWA, WHO IS SOMETHING OF THE KARL ROVE OF HIS PARTY, MIGHT WANT TO TAKE A REFRESHER COURSE ON THOSE LESSONS. IT'S NOT LIKELY OBAMA WILL EXPRESS ANY PERSONAL DISPLEASURE, HOWEVER. CHRISTIANS ARE A TINY MINORITY IN JAPAN, WHERE THEY WERE RUTHLESSLY PERSECUTED IN PAST CENTURIES, AND MUSLIMS ARE EVEN FEWER.

(NEO: WELL, AMERICAN CHRISTIANS PERSECUTE NONBELIEVERS, CALLING THEM HORRIBLE NAMES AND THREATENING THEM WITH ETERNAL TORTURE, SO I GUESS IT JUST GOES TO SHOW THAT WHEREVER YOU GO IN THE WORLD, THE MAJORITY WILL ALWAYS PERSECUTE THOSE WHO DON'T AGREE WITH THEM.

WHOEVER CALLED THE 21ST CENTURY "CIVILIZED" SHOULD HAVE THEIR HEAD EXAMINED).

WHILE MOST OF JAPAN IS CONSIDERED FAIRLY SECULAR, BUDDHISM, ALONG WITH THE INDIGENOUS SHINTO RELIGION, IS CLOSELY BOUND UP WITH THE NATION'S HISTORY AND PRIDE. THERE ARE SOME CONCERNS ABOUT A RESURGENCE OF RELIGIOUS-NATIONALISTIC FERVOR.

(NEO: WE HAVE THE SAME PROBLEM HERE IN THE STATES).

IN 2000, THEN-PRIME MINISTER YOSHIRO MORI REFERRED TO JAPAN AS A "DIVINE NATION WITH THE EMPEROR AT ITS CENTER," WHICH EVOKED MEMORIES OF THE RELIGIOUS UNDERPINNINGS OF JAPAN'S WARTIME AGGRESSION.

(NEO: NEARLY ALL AGGRESSION HAS RELIGIOUS UNDERPINNINGS. THAT IS THE MOST PROVEN WAY TO GET MEN TO GO OUT AND SLAUGHTER EACH OTHER).

MORI LATER APOLOGIZED. OZAWA SEEMS UNFAZED, AT LAST REPORT.

(NEO: RELIGIOUS NUT JOBS ARE NEVER FAZED BY ANYTHING - ESPECIALLY REALITY).

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FAMOUS QUOTES

MAX PLANCK (1858 –1947) 89 YEARS.

HE WAS A GERMAN PHYSICIST. HE IS CONSIDERED TO BE THE FOUNDER OF THE QUANTUM THEORY, AND THUS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PHYSICISTS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. PLANCK WAS AWARDED THE NOBEL PRIZE IN PHYSICS IN 1918.

“AN EXPERIMENT IS A QUESTION WHICH SCIENCE POSES TO NATURE,

AND A MEASUREMENT IS THE RECORDING OF NATURE'S ANSWER.”