

Creationists Believe in Shorter Time Scales

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Editor:

Michael Schillaci recently expressed curiosity about an alternative to the standard evolutionary story about human origins, namely, the *Australopithecus*, *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus* sequence that purports to link *Homo sapiens* with an apelike ancestor. I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide one. The most crucial issues, however, do not directly involve physical anthropology which I will address later, but rather have to do with the setting in which the fossil data are interpreted, specifically with the physical history of the earth itself.

As I mentioned briefly in previous letters, there is an astounding difference in the style, character, and extent between sedimentary formations of Paleozoic and Mesozoic age and those of younger age. This profound difference is apparent in simple field observation but is perhaps most evident in the data of crustal seismology that is currently pouring in from all over the world.

Paleozoic and Mesozoic formations commonly extend for thousands of miles and frequently bear internal evidence of high energy transport. Put simply, there is strong observational support for global tectonic catastrophe associated with the Paleozoic and Mesozoic record. A vital aspect of the problem involves the mechanism responsible for the obvious vertical motions of the continent surfaces as these thick deposits were formed. These motions strongly suggest a mechanism involving the earth's silicate mantle below the crust.

Creationists like myself are persuaded a tectonic catastrophe did indeed occur in the earth's past, similar in many ways to the one the data from the Magellan spacecraft indicate occurred at about the same time on the planet Venus. In both cases the catastrophe was almost certainly driven by gravitational potential energy, involved processes internal to the planet, and resulted in large scale planet resurfacing.

For the pieces of the puzzle to fit together for the earth, the radiometric time scale must be abandoned. As I have mentioned briefly on previous occasions, there is a wide assortment of non-radiometric processes that give orders of magnitude different estimates for geologic age relative to radiometric methods. I have mentioned the preservation of protein in dinosaur bone buried in strongly leaching conditions in porous rock, the high retention fraction of radiogenic helium in zircons in granite of Precambrian age, and the small amount of highly soluble minerals in ocean water. I will add another--the capture of entire magnetic reversal events in single volcanic lava flows.

To be brief, creationists are persuaded there was a single tectonic catastrophe that completely replaced the world's ocean floor and generated most of the Phanerozoic sedimentary record, with all its fossils, in a relatively brief period of time. One effect was a large increase in the global ocean temperature (late Cretaceous high-latitude bottom water had a temperature of about 30 degrees C), which led to an ice age within a few centuries according to calculations using standard 3-D atmospheric general circulation models. The post-catastrophe environment was one of continuing local catastrophism involving high seismicity and volcanism coupled with climatic instability. It is in such a setting that the so-called hominid fossils are to be interpreted.

In this framework creationists interpret these fossils in terms of two distinct contemporaneous species, *Australopithecus* and *Homo sapiens*. Although there are many diverse and strongly held opinions among evolutionary anthropologists, there is a large and growing number who also merge the taxon *Homo erectus* into *Homo sapiens*. Donald Johanson, the discover of Lucy, states, for example, "It would be interesting to know if a modern man and a million-year-old *Homo erectus* woman could together produce a fertile child. The strong hunch is that they could."

Regarding the *Homo habilis* taxon, the extreme variation in the fossil material has led many evolutionary specialists to conclude the material involves mixture from at least two separate taxa. Creationists similarly conclude *Homo habilis* material represents a mixture of australopithecine and human material. In other words, the bones classified *Homo habilis* do not represent a legitimate single species. A key find in this regard was Olduvai Hominid 62 discovered in 1986 by Timothy White working with Donald Johanson. This was the first find in which post-cranial material was found in unquestioned association with a skull of *Homo habilis* affinity. This adult skeleton was three to four feet tall, australopithecine in character, and markedly different from other post-cranial bones previously taken to belong to the *Homo habilis* taxon.

The overriding factor in the creationist framework, however, is a dramatically shortened time scale associated with the hominid fossils--a time scale of at most a few thousand years situated in the aftermath of the tectonic catastrophe. Both Australopithecus and Homo sapiens were survivors of the catastrophe. There was obviously insufficient time for any significant evolution to occur, even supposing a mechanism for macroevolution existed.

In conclusion, I invite evolutionists to realize the issues are not as simple, nor as cut and dried, as they were taught in school. Most need to recognize that geological considerations are paramount to the whole controversy. With the fossil record the product of a single global tectonic catastrophe, the time scale dramatically reduced, the origin of the first genome inexplicable in terms of natural law, the mechanism for macroevolution unknown, and the expected abundance of fossil intermediates missing, just where is a rational basis for believing the materialist fairy tale of evolution?

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