

FRAUDS IN SCIENCE

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With a cult-like aura surrounding them, these men and women are seen as the paragons of virtue in the intellectual community. They are a priesthood, arrayed in white apparel, tinkering with test tubes and peering through microscopes in a sophisticated “holy of holies.” I am speaking, of course, of the twentieth-century scientist. He is not to be questioned as he pontificates upon matters that have baffled the intellects of the ages. His dogmatic theories are sacrosanct, and never are his motives suspect. Although this is quite a common notion in today’s society, it is woefully inaccurate. While it is true that there are many honest people working in the various fields of science, it also is only fair to point out that there have been, and likely will continue to be, some real charlatans in the scientific community. Consider, for example the following.

Exalted views of the objectivity of science and scientists were shattered recently when the *New Scientist* reported in its November, 1976 issue on the results of a survey it conducted on the subject of “Cheating in Science.” Out of 204 scientists replying to the journal’s questionnaire, 197 reported they were aware of cheating by their colleagues. They judged that 58% of the cheating was intentional, and they reported that only 10% of these intentional cheaters were dismissed; most of them, in fact, were promoted (Koshy, 1977, p. 86).

Two of the more notorious instances of scientific fraud provide an interesting and valuable case study in this regard.

THE EMBRYONIC RECAPITULATION HOAX

Ernst Heinrich Haeckel (1834-1919) was a German biologist and philosopher who asserted that the entire Universe (including the human mind) was the result of solely material processes—a mere machine in motion. He was a devoted follower of Charles Darwin—so much so, in fact, that he was dubbed “the apostle of Darwinism in Germany.”

Haeckel received most of his fame as a consequence of his popularization of the so-called “theory of embryonic recapitulation.” This is the now-defunct notion that successive stages of individual embryonic development repeat the evolutionary stages of one’s animal ancestry. The argument is entirely specious, as even evolutionists have admitted. Famed Harvard evolutionist George Gaylord Simpson wrote, for example: “It is now firmly established that ontogeny [development of the individual—WJ] does not repeat phylogeny [development of the race—WJ]” (1957, p. 352).

In any case, Haeckel had a passion for promoting the recapitulation theory, which he termed “the fundamental biogenetic law.” And, as one writer noted:

To support his theory, however, Haeckel, whose knowledge of embryology was self-taught, faked some of his evidence. He not only altered his illustrations of embryos but also printed the same plate of an embryo three times, and labeled one a human, the second a dog and the third a rabbit “to show their similarity” (Bowden, 1977, p. 128).

Haeckel was exposed by professor L. Rutimeyer of Basle University. He was charged with fraud by five professors, and ultimately convicted in a university court. During the trial, Haeckel admitted that he had altered his drawings, but sought to defend himself by saying:

I should feel utterly condemned and annihilated by the admission, were it not that hundreds of the best observers and biologists lie under the same charge. The great majority of all morphological, anatomical, histological, and embryological diagrams are not true to nature, but are more or less doctored, schematized and reconstructed (as quoted in Bowden, 1977, p. 128).

Not only did Haeckel misrepresent evidence in his own drawings, but even “went so far as to alter pictures of embryos drawn by others. Professor Arnold Bass charged that Haeckel had made changes in pictures of embryos that he (Bass) had drawn. Haeckel’s reply to these charges was that if he is to be accused of falsifying drawings, many other prominent scientists should be accused of the same thing...” (Davidheiser, 1969, p. 76).

Evolutionist H.H. Newman of the University of Chicago said that Haeckel’s works “did more harm than good to Darwinism” (1932, p. 30). Yet in spite of the fact that Haeckel’s drawings proved to be an embarrassment to the evolutionary establishment, they still are employed in some modern writings as a “proof” of the accuracy of the theory of evolution (e.g., see Asimov, 1981, 89[9]:83).

THE PILTDOWN HOAX

In December 1912, Charles Dawson, an amateur archaeologist, and Sir Arthur Smith Woodward of the British Museum of Natural History, announced that they had discovered a man-like skull in a pit near Piltdown, England. Along with the skull was a jawbone that appeared to be very ape-like, except for the teeth—which were more flattened, as would be expected in humans. Working with Dawson and Woodward was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest in his late twenties who labored incessantly to harmonize evolution and the biblical record of creation.

Although a few scientists questioned the association of the skull with the jaw, most evolutionists were convinced that *Eanthropus dawsoni* (or, as he was more commonly known, “Piltdown Man”) was an authentic link in human evolution. It has been estimated that some 500 publications appeared on this subject. It is a curious thing, however, that the bones were kept under tight security—even from evolutionists. Sir Arthur Keith, an eminent British authority in this field, was allowed to view the fossils for only twenty minutes, and was forced henceforth to work with plaster casts of the originals (see Weiner, 1955, p. 121). The famous anthropologist L.S.B. Leakey likewise complained that he was denied access to the fossils (Leakey, 1960, p. vi.).

By 1950, a dating method [employing fluorine] had become available for assigning a relative age to fossil bones. In 1953, after a series of tests, it was determined that the Piltdown skull and jaw were of completely different ages. The skull was a few thousand years old (not one million as formerly alleged), and the jaw bone was that of a modern ape! As a consequence of this startling revelation, a careful study of the bones was begun. Eventually, it was discovered that the teeth had been filed to appear human—and that the perpetrator had done a sloppy job at that. Abrasion marks were still evident, the surfaces were flattened at different angles, etc. Moreover, as a result of chemical tests, it was determined that the jaw bone had been stained chemically with potassium bichromate and iron salts for the purpose of making it appear ancient. Actually the “fossil” turned out to be nothing more than a human skull with an ape’s jaw attached. Someone had really been “monkeying” with the evidence.

But who was the instigator of this elaborate fraud? S.J. Weiner of Oxford University, who was instrumental in the exposure of the hoax, suggested (without making any formal accusation) that the weight of the evidence pointed in the direction of Dawson—although he did allow that perhaps Dawson himself was a victim of this devious scheme. The renowned United Nations scientist, A.E. Wilder-Smith, though again making no formal charge, commented:

It does strike one as remarkable that Professor Smith-Woodward allowed very few other scientists to study the original skull or even to handle it. Plaster casts were always made and the studies carried out with their aid. Plaster casts, however, do not give the very fine details needed for study, nor can one determine with their help whether a find is a fossil or not. Even more important, no one can analyze a skull chemically with only a plaster cast to work with! (1968, p. 133).

More recently, in a scholarly investigation of the available data, Malcolm Bowden concluded that Teilhard de Chardin was likely the culprit (1977). Teilhard certainly had the motive because, as far as he was concerned, all views should bow to evolution, which he viewed as “the light illuminating all facts” (1963, p. 44). Moreover, he had the opportunity, since several of the fake finds were “discovered” by him. Also, he had the technical expertise to pull off such an elaborate ruse, having taught chemistry (a knowledge of which would be essential in staining the fossils) at Cairo University.

Perhaps as embarrassing as the fraudulent nature of the Piltdown affair, however, was the fact that a number of the world’s leading evolutionary experts were fooled by the hoax for over 40 years. Dogmatic, sweeping statements that had been made with an air of absolute confidence ultimately required public retraction. Such was the concern in England that a motion was made (and eventually tabled) in the House of Commons “that the House has no confidence in the Trustees of the British Museum...because of the tardiness of their discovery that the skull of the Piltdown man is a partial fake” (see Bowden, 1977, p. 8). Duane Gish no doubt expressed the sentiments of many when he wrote: “The success of this monumental hoax served to demonstrate that scientists, just like everyone else, are very prone to find what they are looking for whether it is there or not” (1973, p. 92).

There is an important lesson that many Christians need to learn from situations such as these. There is no need to be intimidated by the so-called “discoveries” of an unbelieving society. Not all these discoveries are fraudulent, of course, but they nevertheless are subject to the interpretation placed on them by the discoverer. This, at the very least, should suggest caution in accepting the claims that evolutionists make from time to time.

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Originally Published In
Reason and Revelation
February 1981, 1[2]:6-7

ARTICLE REPRINT

Distributed by
Apologetics Press, Inc.
230 Landmark Drive
Montgomery, AL 36117-2752
(334) 272-8558