The Claim. Many animals have non-functioning organs (or structures) that are vestiges (traces) of functional organs from their evolutionary ancestors.

The Evidence Presented. Supposed evidence for this claim includes certain unused organs or features in humans, including the tailbone and appendix, and evidence of legs in *Basilosaurus*, a claimed evolutionary ancestor of the whale.

The Full Story. Like most evolutionary proofs, the claim that vestigial organs are evidence for evolution dates to Darwin. In *The Origin of Species*, he wrote: “Organs or parts in this strange condition, bearing the plain stamp of inutility [uselessness], are extremely common throughout nature.” Elsewhere, he asserted:

> In order to understand the existence of rudimentary organs, we have only to suppose that a former progenitor possessed the parts in question in a perfect state, and that under changed habits of life they became greatly reduced, either from simple disuse, or through…natural selection…”

Riding this wave of Darwinian thought, German anatomist R. Wiedersheim wrote in 1895 that humans have eighty-six vestigial organs. As with Haeckel’s recapitulation theory, however, the vestigial organ argument is a carryover based on ignorance of function, not sound science. It stubbornly survives in textbooks because the evolutionist’s arsenal can claim few better proofs.

Many statements about vestigial structures are simply not true. Recall that *Basilosaurus*, a supposed evolutionary ancestor to the whale, is forced into the whale evolutionary sequence primarily because its hind limbs are asserted to have been “too small…to have assisted in swimming, and they could not possibly have supported the body on land.” Evolutionists reason that as the land-to-water transition occurred, hind limbs eventually disappeared or were reduced to small, non-functional bones; thus, they became vestigial organs. The National Academy of Sciences’ *Teaching About Evolution* even claims that they were “thought to have been nonfunctional”; this is then said to be evidence that they are an evolutionary carryover. The claim is intentionally misleading, however, and misrepresents the conclusions of the scientists who discovered and described *Basilosaurus*. Paleontologist Philip Gingerich, who announced *Basilosaurus* in *Science*, concluded that “maintenance of some function is likely for several reasons…” Most notably, “hind limbs of *Basilosaurus* are most plausibly interpreted as accessories facilitating reproduction…used as guides during copulation, which may otherwise have been difficult in a serpentine aquatic mammal.”

Another evolutionary claim is that whales possess a vestigial pelvis, the remnant of legs from evolutionary ancestors such as *Basilosaurus*. Again, however, this claim stems from ignorance, rather than evidence of a real vestigial structure. In truth, the bones are different in males and females, and they appear to help strengthen the reproductive organs.

Related to the human body, as medical knowledge has increased, the number of vestigial organs has been steadily reduced, and even evolutionists admit the number may be zero. Thus, it has become increasingly obvious that the vestigial argument is baseless, a false argument founded on ignorance of how the body functioned. Following a detailed study of Wiedersheim’s vestigial organ claims, evolutionist S.R. Scadding concluded:

As our knowledge has increased the list of vestigial structures has decreased. Wiedersheim could list about one hundred in humans; recent authors usually list four or five. Even the current short list of vestigial structures in humans is questionable.
Anatomically, the appendix shows evidence of a lymphoid function...The coccyx serves as a point of insertion for several muscles and ligaments...The semilunar fold of the eye...aids in the cleansing and lubrication of the eye ball.

Since it is not possible to unambiguously identify useless structures, and since the structure of the argument used is not scientifically valid, I conclude that “vestigial organs” provide no special evidence for the theory of evolution.¹⁰

To repeat, even organs that are frequently removed from humans likely have a purpose. In its November 2001 issue, for example, Scientific American addressed the function of the human appendix, noting that it:

...contains a significant amount of lymphoid tissue...these tissues are involved in the body’s ability to recognize foreign antigens (molecules to which the immune system can respond) in ingested material...a growing quantity of evidence indicates that the appendix does in fact have a significant function as a part of the body’s immune system. The appendix may be particularly important early in life because it achieves its highest state of development shortly after birth.⁵

Further problems exist. Given that over the course of a century, the number of vestigial human organs has fallen from one hundred to perhaps zero, an unbiased observer would likely reason that so-called useless organs and structures in animals may, in fact, serve a purpose, even if that purpose is not now recognized or understood. The opposite conclusion—that such organs and structures are remnants from evolutionary ancestors—would be logical only if direct evidence were found which demonstrated that an undisputed evolutionary ancestor possessed such an organ or structure, and that it served a useful function. For humans, however, as with all other species, such evidence cannot be established, for there exists no convincing evidence of common descent.

One reason textbooks still include treatments of vestigial organs is because evolutionists believe vestigial organs provide an argument against the alternatives to naturalistic evolution, intelligent design and creationism. This tactic originated in Darwin’s era, at a time during which many scientists professing belief in creation and directed purpose in nature thought that all animals were created in a perfectly functional state. Evolutionists reasoned that if useless organs were found, such would constitute evidence for naturalism, and against design. Indeed, as Scadding rightly observes, “The vestigial organ argument is essentially a theological rather than a scientific argument, since it is based on the supposed nature of the Creator.”¹¹ However, the assumptions of perfection (as well as the related concepts of the Scala Natura and the Great Chain of Being) are not, in fact, based on the teachings of Scripture, though many naturalists in Darwin’s day held to such assumptions. Still, evolutionists continue to equate such concepts with the claims of Scripture, as it is much easier to argue against outdated concepts than to honestly debate scientific evidence. While this strategy has deluded many into believing that the evidence best supports naturalism, it is disingenuous.

For Discussion:

1. In what way do claims of vestigial structures reflect a rush to judgment by evolutionists anxious to disprove alternatives to Darwinism? Why do such tactics persist?

Note: the discussion above is copyrighted material by Restoring Truth Ministries, LLC, and is a condensed version of the material in Repairing the Breach: Explaining the Systematic Deception Behind the War of Worldviews and How Christendom Can Turn the Tide by John M. Wynne and Stephen A. Wynne. The book can be ordered from www.restoringtruthministries.org. This Tear Sheet and additional
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Students and teachers are encouraged to make this material part of the discussion of Darwinian science. Where schools are not willing to allow criticisms of Darwinism, it is all the more important for the Tear Sheets to be distributed outside of class and for students to ask questions about the deceptive Darwinian claims presented in textbooks.

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1 Driving, The Origin of Species (Bantam version), p. 368.
5 Teaching About Evolution and the Nature of Science, p. 18.
7 Ibid.
9 Scadding, pp. 175-176.
x Julie Pomerantz, writing in answer to the question “Does the appendix serve a purpose in any animal?” Scientific American, November 2001, p. 96.
11 Scadding, p. 174.