

# Book review of *climbing mount improbable*

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## Perspective

This book presents the theory of unintelligent design wherein everything similar is the same. That is, similarity is identity, if you are so inclined as many have been, since Darwin began this way of thinking. If I can sketch it on paper, that's the way it is. And if I can't design it, it does not exist, which takes care of all spirit. Dawkins designs away. From the book jacket:

Dawkins guides the reader through the spectacular mountain passes of the world. We are led through the silken world of spiders; we are shown how wings gradually sprouted on the bodies of flightless animals; we see how the fig is a garden for its own teeming population of insects; and we learn that the eye has evolved no less than forty times independently.

Even with that promo, no one ever heard of this book, because most people can see right through it with better eyes than Dawkins ever dreamed up. A better title would have been *Mounting the Press and Media* or, same thing, *Marketing Richard Dawkins* because that is the purpose of this book i.e., the selling of Richard Dawkins to the ILLS (Incorrigible Liberal Loons) of the press and media. But that was a success, because the ILLS never question or criticize him. Actually, this best forgotten book deserves no review--I only do so to show the nature of its author.

First, Dawkins praises Ernst Haeckel for his brilliant illustrations especially of single celled organisms. Okay, it's all right to give Haeckel that ... but Haeckel was also an outright liar whose proven fabricated drawings of embryological development still shamefully find their way into biology textbooks (See, I told you that Dawkins likes drawings). Birds of a feather, no doubt.

### Second and most damning is Dawkins on the eye:

But I was starting to tell the story of how lenses might have evolved in the first place, from a vitreous mass that filled the whole eye. The principle of how it might have happened, and the speed with which it might have been accomplished, has been beautifully demonstrated in a computer model by a pair of Swedish biologists called Dan Nilsson and Susanne Pelger. I shall lead up to explaining their elegant computer model in a slightly oblique way (pages 160-161).

Knowing of Dawkins untrustworthiness, I looked up the above referenced article (Proc. R. Soc. Lond. B (1994) 256, 53-58). It does little of what Dawkins claims. It presents "theoretical considerations" of schematic changes in a "model of arbitrary size" from a "light sensitive patch" to a "focus lens eye" by 8 stages of 1,829 steps (mutations always in the right direction and best sequence) of 1% change estimating small design improvements in optical geometry, thereby changing the model from a "flat patch" to a deepened "vitreous body filled cavity" (a "camera eye"). The vitreous body filling the cavity was chosen to be almost water with an assumed refractory index of "1.35, which is only slightly higher than that of water, and not enough to give the vitreous body any significant optical effect" (Where this pure almost water would come from was never stated). The mathematical calculations of the changes in this

cartoon estimated in the summary paragraph "only a few hundred thousand years" (actually "less than 340,000 years" in the text) for it to occur. Not addressed, because the eye was far from functional, are the missing positive feedback mechanisms necessary to reinforce the model's always improving developmental changes (1,829 of them in a row—Even the old Yankees or Notre Dame combined never had such an undefeated record!). The article states that the model does not introduce structures for a functional eye such as adjustable iris; structures for distance accommodation; a vascularized layer; the choroid; retinal cells for photoreception, polarization sensitivity and colour vision; a supporting capsule; the sclera; the blood supply; structural support; or external protective structures. Some eye. Basically, the model is a speculative series of sketches mathematically considered by an imposed assumed rate of change. There is no "elegant computer model" and the word "computer" was not even in the article.

Then, Dawkins, on page 163, vividly rambles and ruminates about these mutations which were contrived to improve optical performances and to bring about the appearance of a lens. One sentence from Dawkins' dreamwork is enough:

The lens has "condensed" out of the vitreous mass by gradual, point by point changes in the refractive index.

Contrary to Dawkins, here is what the article says: In a "model sequence" of changes in "model stages," a "graded-index lens" was "introduced gradually as a local increase of refractive index" after selection of an aperture of a chosen size. There was no condensing "out of the vitreous mass" and the word "condensed," quoted by Dawkins, is not in the article.

In psychiatric terms, these sort of descriptions by Dawkins are called confabulations, often seen in the brain damaged. For others, these descriptions are recognized as "smoking guns" (for a man who shot himself in his foot and also halfway thereto). Dawkins again: "The central message of this chapter is that eyes evolve easily and fast, at the drop of a hat" (Pg. 190) (And with that, he just shot himself in the head). The rest of the book is about the same.

**So here is Dawkins, family man:**

On a crisp, starry night in 1986, I awoke my 2 year old daughter Juliet and carried her, wrapped in blankets, out into the garden where I pointed her sleepy face toward the published location of Halley's Comet. She did not take in what I was saying, but I stubbornly whispered into her ear the story of the comet and the certainty that I could never see it again but that she might when she was seventyeight. I explained that I had woken her so that she'd be able to tell her grandchildren in 2062 that she had seen the comet before, and perhaps she'd remember her father for his quixotic whim in carrying her out into the night to show it to her. (I may even have whispered the words quixotic and whim because small children like the sound of words they do not know, carefully articulated) (Pg. 143).

Is that pretentious or what? (In the text, he is not certain that he even saw the Comet himself.) And where was Juliet's mother?

I was driving through the English countryside with my daughter Juliet, then age 6, and she pointed out some flowers by the wayside. I asked her what she thought wildflowers were for. She gave a rather thoughtful answer: "Two things," she said. "To make the world pretty and to help the bees make honey for us." I was touched by this and sorry I had to tell her that it was not true. (Pg. 256).

Several pages later, he tells the correct answer: "DNA." Well, will someone please call Juliet's mother, and keep this guy away from all children!

Richard Dawkins lives in his own world. He is not climbing any mountains—unless it is Mount Nitaka. He just digs holes, and makes me wax prayerfully poetical: "Junk food/ Junk wine/ Junk mail/ Junk science/ And thou,/ Darwin/ Dawkins/ DN/ A in/ Heaven/ Amen!" Where is the Fraudulent Science Committee of the National Academy of Sciences when it is really needed?

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**Conflicts of interest**

None.

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