

# The Only Game in Town? Richard Dawkins and the Limits of Reason

*Dawkins really believes (or at least really claims) that those who disagree with him are insane, deluded, intellectually perverse, and unintelligent.*

Wednesday, April 6, 2011

Evolution by natural selection is “the only game in town, the greatest show on Earth,” asserts Richard Dawkins. We have come to expect claims like this from Richard Dawkins, perhaps the most famous defender of Darwinian evolution alive today. Unlike many intellectuals, Dawkins manages to stay singularly focused and on message. He is the planet’s foremost evangelist for evolution, and he is absolutely certain that the evolutionary worldview is indeed “the only game in town.” He is clearly frustrated that so many dwellers of the Earth refuse to accept his message.

In *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution*, Dawkins sets out to present his most compelling case for evolution. He is — make no mistake — an ardent enthusiast for his argument. Seldom do we read a book written with such fervor and certitude, with an amazing amount of condescension and anger added to the mix, as well.

“Evolution is a fact,” he asserts. “Beyond reasonable doubt, beyond serious doubt, beyond sane, informed, intelligent doubt, beyond doubt evolution is a fact. The evidence for evolution is at least as strong as the evidence for the Holocaust, even allowing for eye witnesses to the Holocaust.”

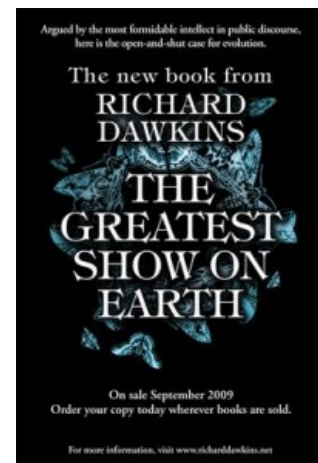
Note that this means, by obvious implication, that all objections to evolution are insane, unintelligent, and uninformed. Read his words carefully. Richard Dawkins is so bold as to assert that anyone who disagrees with him on such a controversial issue is insane, unintelligent, and uninformed, because any sane, intelligent, and informed person would have to agree with him.

He minces no words. “It is a plain truth that we are cousins of chimpanzees, somewhat more distant cousins of monkeys, more distant cousins still of aardvarks and manatees, yet more distant cousins of bananas and turnips ... continue the list as long as desired.”

Bananas and turnips? Welcome to his honest presentation of evolution and its implications as a theory. What makes Richard Dawkins so fascinating is his delight in detailing these implications. This Oxford University professor is an unabashed celebrant of the evolutionary worldview, and he shrinks back from none of its dimensions.

Pain and suffering have long presented excruciatingly difficult questions for serious minds. Not for Dawkins, whose most famous book on evolution is entitled *The Selfish Gene* because “evil and suffering don’t count for anything, one way or the other, in the calculus of gene survival.”

Dawkins sees grandeur in evolution and even in the suffering that accompanies the struggle for the replication of



genes. “Yes,” he writes, “there is a grandeur in this view of life, and even a kind of grandeur in nature’s serene indifference to the suffering that inexorably follows in the wake of its guiding principle, survival of the fittest.”

Furthermore, “If animals aren’t suffering, somebody isn’t working hard enough in the business of gene survival.” Note that human beings are animals in this evolutionary sense, as well, along with our “cousins” the chimpanzees, monkeys, aardvarks, and manatees. Suffering, we are told, simply doesn’t matter in the grand scheme of things. This is a macabre “grandeur” to be sure.

What frustrates Dawkins to no end is the fact that so many modern people reject evolution as a fact and as a worldview. “The evidence for evolution grows by the day, and has never been stronger,” he argues. “At the same time, paradoxically, ill-informed opposition is also stronger than I can remember.”

He cites the fact that no less than 40 percent of Americans deny that human beings evolved from lower animals and instead believe in the creation of the cosmos in general and of human beings in particular by God. The percentage of people who believe in the kind of naturalistic evolution Dawkins represents is truly small among the general public, and this is driving Dawkins to distraction.

This is where his argument becomes really interesting and quite extreme. Remember that Dawkins had claimed that the evidence for evolution is “at least as strong as the evidence for the Holocaust, even allowing for eye witnesses to the Holocaust.” That absolutely remarkable statement — claiming that all the inferential reasoning behind the theory of evolution exceeds even the eyewitness confirmation of the Holocaust — is truly shocking. This is hardly the kind of statement we would expect from someone who stands in such a privileged place within the academic community. But Richard Dawkins is not really writing in his capacity as a scientist. He is writing as an evangelist for evolution.

But there is another angle to this, as well. The public relations strategy Dawkins employs here is a rhetorical slander. He means to isolate those who deny evolution as morally and intellectually equivalent to Holocaust deniers — a very loaded and incendiary argument. “I shall be using the term ‘history-deniers’ for those people who deny evolution,” he announces.

Years ago, Richard Dawkins explained that evolution allowed him to become an intellectually fulfilled atheist. He later became one of the world’s most famous and influential atheists. In this book, we can easily see why these two arguments are melded into one in his mind and thought.

*The Greatest Show on Earth* has just been released in a German edition, in which it is retitled *The Creation Lie: Why Darwin is Right*. Dawkins told *Der Spiegel*. Dawkins has complained of the fact that the German title is negative, but he acknowledges the “negative side” of his argument: “But there is the negative side, as well. It is an attempt to disabuse people, especially in America, but also in other parts of the world, who have become influenced by fundamentalist religion into thinking that life can be and should be explained as all designed. I regard that as a lazy and unhelpful explanation as well as an untrue one.”

His interviewer asked: “Aren’t you afraid that some of these people might be alienated by the sometimes strong language in the book? . . . You call your opponents ‘Holocaust-deniers,’ ‘ignorant,’ ‘ridiculous’ and ‘deluded to the point of perversity.’”

Dawkins answered: “My suspicion is that more people will find it amusing. If I read an author who is ridiculing some idiot, I myself am rather amused. There may be some who will be turned off and I will have lost them in those passages. But I suspect they’ll be outnumbered by those who are amused.”

This is the only part of Dawkins’ argument that rings false. No one reading *The Greatest Show on Earth* will come away thinking that Dawkins meant to be amusing in any conceivable manner. He is deadly serious, and he never backs off from his argument in any sense. He really believes (or at least really claims) that those who disagree with him are



insane, deluded, intellectually perverse, and unintelligent.

Dawkins claims to be driven only by reason and “reality” in his worldview, but the actual arguments he makes show only the limits of autonomous reason when it comes to understanding ultimate reality.

Let his stridency sink in, along with the sterile and empty “grandeur” Dawkins sees in evolution. Then, take full account of the fact that, if atheism is true, Dawkins’ evolutionary worldview really is “the only game in town.”

---

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at [mail@albertmohler.com](mailto:mail@albertmohler.com). Follow regular updates on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler](http://www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler).

“Religion? Reality Has a Grander Magic of Its Own: An Interview with Scientist Richard Dawkins,” *Der Spiegel*, Wednesday, March 2, 2011.

Richard Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution* (The Free Press, 2009).

---

Content Copyright © 2002-2011, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.