

Father Richard John Neuhaus defends Mike Behe against Richard Dawkins and the NYT

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You usually know that somebody is losing the argument when he loses his cool and resorts to bluster, abuse, caricature, and the invocation of authorities who agree with him. The New York Times Book Review, for reasons that surpass charitable explanation, gave Michael Behe's most recent book, *The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism*, to Richard Dawkins for review.

Behe is a biochemist, author of *Darwin's Black Box*, and a proponent of Intelligent Design. Dawkins is an atheist polemicist against religion, holds the ill-named Chair for the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford, and is author of *The God Delusion*.

Dawkins begins by saying he feels "sorry" for Behe, whom he describes as the "poster boy of creationists everywhere." Never mind that Behe is not a "creationist." No less than three times in the review, Dawkins alludes to the fact that Behe's colleagues in his university's biology department have publicly distanced themselves from his position. The other biologists at Lehigh University disagree with Behe. It follows that he must be a nut. Further, "Behe is taking on Ronald Fisher, Sewall Wright, J.B.S. Haldane, Theodosius Dobzhansky, Richard Lewontin, John Maynard Smith, and hundreds of their talented coworkers and intellectual descendents." This is what is known as argument from authority. Just who does this Behe guy, "the disowned biochemist of Lehigh University," think he is to disagree with the scientific establishment? Doesn't he know that science progresses by conformity to conventional opinion, as Nicolaus Copernicus, Isaac Newton, and Charles Darwin (!) have taught us.

Dawkins' clinching argument against Behe's claims about the limits of natural mutation is that different kinds of dogs have descended from the wolf. Dawkins writes, "As I incredulously close this book, I seem to hear mocking barks and deep baying howls of derision from 500 breeds of dogs." What the reader hears is the mocking barks and baying howls of Richard Dawkins. He says that Behe thinks that God is somehow involved in the evolutionary process, and the author of *The God Delusion* knows that that is madness.

All this raises interesting questions about the Book Review, which publicly claims to take care that a reviewer has no conflict of interest that would get in the way of a fair treatment of a book. For instance, is the author your brother-in-law? Apparently it doesn't matter if a prospective reviewer has publicly and repeatedly heaped contempt on an author and his arguments. This magazine has a different review policy. We will on occasion choose a reviewer who is known to disagree, and disagree strongly, with

an author. The purpose is to engage the argument and explain why it is wrong, with the author having a chance to respond. As the editors of the Book Review must know, Dawkins cannot engage Behe's argument. It is not simply that he is not a biochemist. He is in principle disqualified because he is a militant atheist committed to a position of scientific materialism in which any reference to transcendent purpose or design is deemed to be delusional, meaning it is the product of a mental disorder.

It is hard to know what purpose is served by the Book Review in having Dawkins review Behe, except, possibly, to ostracize anyone who presumes to raise questions about prevailing Darwinist orthodoxies and, perhaps, to pander to the smug prejudices of the presumed readership of the Times. That does not instill confidence in the Darwinist materialism that they are so desperately defending