

Review: Richard Dawkins, *Climbing Mount Improbable*, Penguin Books, London, UK, 1996 (2006 edn.)

Pages: 308

A Mountain of Magic

Dawkins' analogy is one grand story of how he thinks the two forces of 'natural selection' and 'random mutation' can create all of life slowly and gradually. The fact he admits many mutations are often *not* random, but concentrated around particular genes, and that (blind) natural selection has a ratchet-like effect in that it can't travel down peaks it has already climbed (and will continue to climb up to perfection for some reason) shows up the arbitrariness of his religious beliefs.

Scattered throughout are descriptions of coded information of the DNA, design, and sophisticated engineering. However, Dawkins incredibly wants to believe this is all *at base* sourced in random mutation, and is merely, "unconsciously crafted machinery".

He seems to think writing computer simulation programs (in which he has coded for directional changes) is somehow scientific evidence for Evolutionism, rather than an anachronistic exercise in wish-fulfilment.

Such abject stupidity is matched by his equally ludicrous faith in abiogenesis, that a chemical accident in a broth of organic chemicals somehow gave rise to a primeval replicator.

A book only the gullible could swallow.

I) Facing Mount Rushmore (pp. 1-31)

"Designoid objects *look* designed".

Australian compass termite mounds align N-S.

“DNA is digitally coded information just like numbers in a computer.”

II) Silken Fetters (pp. 32-63)

III) Message From the Mountain (pp. 64-96)

Some mutations are non-random in various senses, more likely to occur in certain genes than others. The great majority are bad. [p71]

“Mutation may be random, but selection is not [p71] ... all improvement is therefore, in the first place, lucky [p76].”

“If you start with something pretty good and change it at random, the chances are that you’ll make it worse.” [p74]

“...that precious rarity, a mutation that is an improvement.”

“Mutations may be quite old by the time natural selection gets around to working on them.” [p77]

“DNA is ... wisdom ... chanced upon by lucky random mutations ... the luck has been accumulated over so many generations.” [p80-1]

IV) Getting Off the Ground (pp. 97-125)

“Mount Improbable has many peaks [p120] going down the slopes of Mount Improbable is not allowed by natural selection [p123].”

V) The Forty-Fold Path to Enlightenment (pp. 126-179)

“Nine distinct principles have been recognised among the forty to sixty independently evolved eyes.” [p127]

Nilsson and Pelger ‘evolved’ a good fish eye with lens in 364,000 generations of simulations.

“The pupil of a human eye is a pretty sophisticated piece of automation technology, something that a Japanese micro-engineer could be proud of.” [p155]

“The only sense ... photoreceptors point backwards is that the ‘wires’ ... connecting them to the brain depart in the wrong direction towards the light rather than towards the brain.” [p159]

The human retina has 166M photoreceptors.

“The trilobite eye was already advanced 400mya [!].”

UV light helps guide insects to flower centres.

Camera eye images are inverted, meaning a second mirror is required to reinvert it.

VI) The Museum of All Shells (pp. 180-)

Large portions of the hypothetical Museum of All Possible Animals are forever barred from natural selection.

“I insist ... wherever in nature there is sufficiently powerful illusion [sic] of good design for some purpose, natural selection is the only known mechanism that can account for it ...

if an engineer ... sees that it is well designed ... I will stand up and assert that natural selection is responsible.” [p202-3]

VII) Kaleidoscopic Embryos (pp. 204-235)

Symmetry is not an obvious quality every creature must have.

VIII) Pollen Grains and Magic Bullets (pp. 236-253)

“The correct way to think of what is going on in in terms of unconsciously crafted machinery.” [p242]

IX) The Robot Repeater (pp. 254-271)

“The primeval soup; a weak broth of simple organic chemicals in the sea ... somehow ... a molecule arose that just happened to have the property of self-copying – a replicator [p259] ... An origin of life ...consists of the

chance arising of a self-replicating entity [p261] ... the original self-duplicating entities must have been simple enough to survive by the spontaneous accidents of chemistry. [p262]”

X) ‘A Garden Enclosed’ (pp. 272-294)