In fact, Berwick's opening is doubly wrong than just quoting out of context, since this is a misquotation—and of somebody other than Dawkins! In a popular passage in his book about the false profundity of the idea of a Bauplan—"there miles notes from the depths of the Rhine", as Sir Peter Medawar sarcastically put it—Dawkins goes on to say: "I prefer the Anglo-Saxon simplicity of my colleague Dr. Henry Bessell-Clark, with whom I have discussed these matters. All questions about life have the same answer through, it may not always be a helpful one: natural selection."

Berwick strain hard to create the misimpression of Dawkins as a "fundamentalist," an "alpinist" committed to simple hill-climbing, ignoring all the passages in which Dawkins elaborates, clarifies, acknowledges complexities. And as we have just seen, Berwick is not above simply deleting the crucial qualifications when they would need to expose his gameplan. Then he borrows a refinement from Stephen Jay Gould that I recently analyzed:

In the first stage, you create the strawperson, and "refute" it (everybody knows that trick). Second (this is the anvil of genius), you yourself draw attention to the evidence that you have taken the first step—the evidence that your opponents don't in fact hold the views you have attributed to them—but interpret these citations as the godgirding comparisons to your attack.1

In closing sections of his review, called "Yes, But ... Berwick acknowledges all the complications that Dawkins himself insists upon, but interprets Dawkins as thereby "backing off" his "original alpine arrogance." But Berwick never succeeded in pinning "fundamentalist alpinism" on Dawkins in the first place.

Berwick also repeats Gould's oft-heard but finally ambiguous claim that if we run the evolutionary tape again, "we aren't going to get the same 'perfection' we see now." Well, what about a merely similar "perfection"? It is trivial to claim that the replay wouldn't be exactly the same, and neither Gould nor Berwick has offered any reason to believe that there wouldn't be major similarities, again and again and again. This phenomenon is called convergent evolution, and in spite of what you may have heard from members of the Gould/Lewontin sect about the importance of "massive contingency," convergent evolution is an uncontroversial textbook fact of contemporary evolutionary theory, exemplified in hundreds or thousands of well-studied cases.

Berwick also relies heavily on an rhetorical trick of Lewontin, the scientific snowjob: he provides a generous helping of elementary instruction (on Mendel's pea, on DNA replication, on Kimura's neutral theory, etc.), presented as if it were an embarrassment to Dawkins' position. What we are to suppose—that Dawkins somehow forgets all this in his "barebonde" essays? As I asked some years ago, in exposing Lewontin's strategy:

Lewontin reminds us of general hitchhiking and random genetic drift ... To whom is Lewontin addressing these remarks? He may suppose that he wishes that a philosopher has never heard of genetic hitchhiking or random genetic drift, but surely the biologist he is supposedly criticizing are not in need of this textbook review. He says as much. So they must disagree about the implications of these recognized facts.2

Is there anything new in Berwick's piece? Yes, there is a novel argument which equates in desperation anything I have encountered in the creationist literature. Berwick quotes Darwin saying that variation "occurs simultaneously" (Berwick's emphasis) in all directed evolutionary theory, when Orr turns to Michael Behe's book and faces the task of responding to all of Berwick's challenges, he helps himself at every turn to hypotheses about natural selection. Why? Because although natural selection may not be the answer to all the questions of life, it is surely the answer to all Behe's unanswerable questions about the intricate economies and efficiencies of the cellular world. How did they arise? By natural selection, which is, as Orr shows, a much more potent collection of cranes and ratchets than anyone imagines.

Natural selection is a much more potent collection of cranes and ratchets than Behe imagines.

A Scientific Snow Job
Daniel Dennett

It seems that the Boston Review has decided to become an outter for position papers by members of the Gould/Lewontin sect of evolutionary thinkers. First there was H. Allen Orr's attack on my book, Darwin! Dangerous Idea, and now there is Robert Berwick's attack on Dawkins' book. All this is getting old, as one says. The ideas are all second hand, and even the tasks are borrowed.

Berwick's review is an extended exercise of two rhetorical tricks he has learned from his mentor—and one strange novelty. He leads with that old chestnut: creating a strawperson by quoting out of context:

But Dawkins believes, further, that "all questions about life have the same answer—natural selection."

true of Darwin, and in spite of what you may have heard from members of the Gould/Lewontin sect about the importance of "massive contingency," convergent evolution is an uncontroversial textbook fact of contemporary evolutionary theory, exemplified in hundreds or thousands of well-studied cases.

Another aspect of Lewontin's rhetorical snowjob is a much more


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