



The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism

By Michael J. Behe

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When Michael J. Behe's first book, *Darwin's Black Box*, was published in 1996, it launched the intelligent design movement. Critics howled, yet hundreds of thousands of readers -- and a growing number of scientists -- were intrigued by Behe's claim that Darwinism could not explain the complex machinery of the cell.

Now, in his long-awaited follow-up, Behe presents far more than a challenge to Darwinism: He presents the evidence of the genetics revolution -- the first direct evidence of nature's mutational pathways -- to radically redefine the debate about Darwinism.

How much of life does Darwin's theory explain? Most scientists believe it accounts for everything from the machinery of the cell to the history of life on earth. Darwin's ideas have been applied to law, culture, and politics.

But Darwin's theory has been proven only in one sense: There is little question that all species on earth descended from a common ancestor. Overwhelming anatomical, genetic, and fossil evidence exists for that claim. But the crucial question remains: *How* did it happen? Darwin's proposed mechanism -- random mutation and natural selection -- has been accepted largely as a matter of faith and deduction or, at best, circumstantial evidence. Only now, thanks to genetics, does science allow us to seek direct evidence. The genomes of many organisms have been sequenced, and the machinery of the cell has been analyzed in great detail. The evolutionary responses of microorganisms to antibiotics and humans to parasitic infections have been traced over tens of thousands of generations.

As a result, for the first time in history Darwin's theory can be rigorously evaluated. The results are shocking. Although it can explain marginal changes in evolutionary history, random mutation and natural selection explain very little of the basic machinery of life. The "edge" of evolution, a line that defines the border between random and nonrandom mutation, lies very far from where Darwin pointed. Behe argues convincingly that most of the mutations that have defined the history of life on earth have been nonrandom.

Although it will be controversial and stunning, this finding actually fits a general pattern discovered by other branches of science in recent decades: The universe as a whole was fine-tuned for life. From physics to cosmology to chemistry to biology, life on earth stands revealed as depending upon an endless series of unlikely events. The clear conclusion: The universe was designed for life.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

With his first book, *Darwin's Black Box*, Behe, a professor of biology at Lehigh University, helped define the controversial intelligent design movement with his concept of "irreducible complexity." Now he attempts to extend his analysis and define what evolution is capable of doing and what is beyond its scope. Behe strongly asserts, to the likely chagrin of young earth creationists, that the earth is billions of years old and that the concept of common descent is correct. But beginning with a look at malaria and the sickle cell response in humans, Behe argues that genetic mutation results in only clumsy solutions to selective pressures. He goes on to conclude that the statistical possibility of certain evolutionary changes taking place is virtually nil. Although Behe writes with passion and clarity, his calculations of probability ignore biologists' rejection of the premise that evolution has been working toward producing any particular end product. Furthermore, he repeatedly refers to the shortcomings of "Darwin's theory—the power of natural selection coupled to random mutation," but current biological theory encompasses far more than this simplistic view. Most important, Behe reaches the controversial conclusion that the workings of an intelligent designer is the only reasonable alternative to evolution, even without affirmative evidence in its favor.

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Review

"With this book, Michael Behe shows that he is truly an independent thinker of the first order. He carefully examines the data of evolution, along the way making an argument for universal common descent that will make him no friends among young-earth creationists, and draws in new facts, especially the data on malaria, that have not been part of the public debate at all up to now. This book will take the intelligent design debate into new territory and represents a unique contribution to the longstanding question of philosophy: Can observation of the physical world guide our thinking about religious questions?"

-- Professor David Snoke, Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Pittsburgh

"In *The Edge of Evolution* Michael Behe carefully assesses the evidence of what Darwin's mechanism of random mutation and selection can achieve in well documented cases, and shows that even in those cases that maximize its power as a creative force it has only been able to generate very trivial examples of evolutionary change. Could such an apparently impotent and mindless force really have built the sophisticated molecular devices found throughout nature? The answer, he insists, is no. The only common-sense explanation is intelligent design."

-- Michael Denton, M.D., Ph.D., author of *Nature's Destiny*

"In crystal-clear prose Behe systematically shreds the central dogma of atheistic science, the doctrine of the random universe. This book, like the natural phenomena it so elegantly describes, shows the unmistakable signs of a very deep intelligence at work."

-- Jeffrey M. Schwartz, M.D., Research Psychiatrist, UCLA, and author of *The Mind & The Brain*

"Until the past decade and the genomics revolution, Darwin's theory rested on indirect evidence and reasonable speculation. Now, however, we have begun to scratch the surface of direct evidence, of which this book offers the best possible treatment. Though many critics won't want to admit it, *The Edge of Evolution* is very balanced, careful, —and devastating. A tremendously important book."

-- Dr. Philip Skell, Evan Pugh Professor of Chemistry, Emeritus, at Pennsylvania State University, and

member of the National Academy of Sciences

"With this book, Michael Behe shows that he is truly an independent thinker of the first order. In a day when the media present all issues in the football metaphor as two teams fighting, the intelligent design debate is presented simplistically as authors who are lapdogs for young-earth creationists versus evolutionists who are lapdogs for atheists. Michael Behe is no lapdog. He carefully examines the data of evolution, along the way making an argument for universal common descent that will make him no friends among young-earth creationists, and draws in new facts, especially the data on malaria, that have not been part of the public debate at all up to now. This book will take the intelligent design debate into new territory and represents a unique contribution on the longstanding question of philosophy: can observation of the physical world guide our thinking about religious questions?"

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-- Dr. Philip Skell, Evan Pugh Professor of Chemistry, Emeritus, at Pennsylvania State University, and member of the National Academy of Sciences

About the Author

Michael J. Behe is a Professor of Biological Science at Lehigh University, where he has worked since 1985. From 1978 to 1982 he did postdoctoral work on DNA structure at the National Institutes of Health. From 1982 to 1985 he was Assistant Professor of Chemistry at Queens College in New York City. He has authored more than forty technical papers, but he is best known as the author of *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*. He lives near Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, with his wife and nine children.

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