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BOOK REVIEW

Brief Candle in the Dark: My Life in Science

Richard Dawkins (2015), Bantam Press (Transworld Publishers) ISBN 9780593072561
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Richard Dawkins continues his two-part autobiography with *Brief Candle in the Dark*, subtitled as *My Life in Science*. In the first part of his memoirs, *An Appetite for Wonder*, Dawkins chronicled the first 35 years of his life from his childhood in Africa up till the publication of *The Selfish Gene*, the first of the 12 books that he has published so far. In this second installment of his memoirs there is much to enjoy, from reminiscences about the art of teaching, tutoring students (under the Oxford system), to how to best grade papers and interview Oxford applicants, and going to conferences. There is an entire chapter on attending conferences, entitled 'The Delegate's Tale,' which begins with a quote from David Lodge's novel *Small World*: 'The modern conference resembles the pilgrimage of medieval Christendom in that it allows the participants to indulge themselves in all the pleasures and diversions of travel while appearing to be austerely bent on self-improvement'. One of the many joys of Dawkins' book is to come across so many references to authors of fiction (Kingsolver, Sagan) in addition to the scholarly discussions of books by eminent philosophers and biologist colleagues.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the publication of *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford University Press) in 1976 and one of the highlights of this autobiography is the lengthy (~120 pages) discussion of this and Dawkins' other books. After *The Selfish Gene* Dawkins wrote *The Extended Phenotype* as a sequel aimed at professional biologists. Here, he more extensively introduced the meme as another kind of replicator, tied to cultural rather than genetic transmission. Just as groups of genes may be selected for mutual compatibility, clusters of memes may be naturally selected and complexes of genes and memes might be favored together (page 406). *The Extended Phenotype* also explored the idea that the phenotype does not stop 'at the body wall', an idea now taking root in behavior genetics where studies more and more focus on the heritability and the influence of the genome on phenotypes that were traditionally labeled as environment, including print exposure, social environment, and the amount of time people spend on exercise or playing the violin.

Whereas the first volume of Dawkins's autobiography focused in a more traditional way on his ancestors, family history, childhood, and school days in Africa and England, with only the latter chapters discussing his scientific work in mathematical modeling of evolution, this second volume is more targeted at science and his life in science. Of course, a book about a current life in science can hardly omit finances and fundraising. Dawkins describes how he organized the Charles Simonyi (a software pioneer and early investor in Microsoft) Professorship of Public Understanding of Science in Oxford, when he noticed in his early fifties that he was starting to feel a little jaded with tutoring. Because Oxford has strong rules against buying promotion for named individuals, the appointment initially was as a reader (with a slight cut in salary) with promotion to full professor after a year. The professorship was granted in perpetuity (Professor Marcus du Sautoy OBE is the second holder of the chair) and the book gives the full text of the benefaction, which is an absolute delight to read, free of any legal jargon, but rather a philosophical reflection with a clear distinction between popularizers of science and scientists who popularize. Obviously, a better scientist than Richard Dawkins will be hard to find in the last category.