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The new book from "intelligent design" proponent Michael Behe, *The Edge of Evolution* (Free Press, 2007), is supposed to present "astounding new findings from the genetics revolution to show that Darwinism cannot account for the sheer complexity and near-miraculous design of life as we know it," according to a press release from the publisher. There were similarly grandiose claims in Behe's previous book, *Darwin's Black Box* (Free Press, 1996), in which Behe contended that "intelligent design" "must be ranked as one of the greatest achievements in the history of science. The discovery rivals those of Newton and Einstein, Lavoisier and Schroedinger, Pasteur, and Darwin. The observation of the intelligent design of life is as momentous as the observation that the earth goes around the sun or that disease is caused by bacteria or that radiation is emitted in quanta." Such claims notwithstanding, knowledgeable reviewers were anything but impressed. In his review of *Darwin's Black Box* for the September-October 1997 issue of *American Scientist*, for example, Robert Dorit [wrote](#) [4], "as a practicing biologist, and a card-carrying molecular evolutionist, I cannot but find the premise of this book -- that molecular discoveries have plunged a wooden stake through the heart of Darwinian logic -- ludicrous." *The Edge of Evolution* is faring no better, as three recent reviews demonstrate.

First, writing in the *Globe and Mail* (June 2, 2007), Michael Ruse [offers](#) [5] his assessment with his customary affability, describing Behe as "warm and friendly" and saying that *Darwin's Black Box* "makes the case for ["intelligent design"] in the most user-friendly manner possible." But he was disappointed by *The Edge of Evolution*, which in comparison to *Darwin's Black Box* seemed "a bit of a sad sack. Nothing very much new, old arguments repeated, opposition ignored or dismissed without argument." What seems to interest Ruse the most about *The Edge of Evolution* is the degree to which it embraces claims that are anathema to young-earth creationists: "What does surprise me is how emphatic Behe now is in putting a distance between himself and the older Creationists. For a start, he stresses his commitment to evolution. He thinks the world of life is as old as is claimed by any more conventional biologist. He also

wants to give natural processes of change a role in life's history." But in the end, he finds it saddening: "with so many important issues waiting for attention in our society, I am just a bit depressed that anyone would think that something like ["intelligent design"] is worth pushing or that it gains so much attention others have to spend time refuting it." Ruse is a professor of philosophy at Florida State University and a Supporter of NCSE.

Second, writing in *Science* (June 8, 2007), Sean Carroll takes a harder line, [contending](#) [6] that in *The Edge of Evolution* "Behe makes a new set of explicit claims about the limits of Darwinian evolution, claims that are so poorly conceived and readily dispatched that he has unwittingly done his critics a great favor in stating them." "Behe's chief error," he says, "is minimizing the power of natural selection to act cumulatively as traits or molecules evolve stepwise from one state to another via intermediates." The error is manifest both in Behe's reasoning -- Carroll cites a number of problems, particularly a lack of quantitative thinking -- and in his neglect of relevant scientific facts, causing Carroll to wonder, "Is it possible that Behe does not know this body of data? Or does he just choose to ignore it?" He concludes: "The continuing futile attacks by evolution's opponents reminds me of another legendary confrontation, that between Arthur and the Black Knight in the movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. The Black Knight, like evolution's challengers, continues to fight even as each of his limbs is hacked off, one by one. ... The knights of ID may profess these blows are 'but a scratch' or 'just a flesh wound,' but the argument for design has no scientific leg to stand on." Carroll is a professor of biology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and a Supporter of NCSE.

Third, and most thoroughly, Jerry Coyne devotes 7500 words to reviewing *The Edge of Evolution* in the June 18, 2007, issue of *The New Republic*, [providing](#) [7] a great deal of useful background information in the process. Coyne, like Carroll, worries about the propaganda value of the book, writing, "The general reader, at whom *The Edge of Evolution* is aimed, is unlikely to find the scientific holes in its arguments. Behe writes clearly and engagingly, and someone lacking formal training in biochemistry and evolutionary biology may be easily snowed by his rhetoric." In fact, however, Behe's arguments betray "a profound, almost willful ignorance of the evolutionary process," and his offered alternative of "intelligent design" is "infinitely malleable in the face of counterevidence, cannot be refuted, and is therefore not science." Coyne summarizes: "Behe's new theory remains the same old mixture of dead science and thinly disguised theology. There is no evidence for his main claim of non-random mutation, and scientists have plenty of evidence against it. His arguments against the Darwinian evolution of complex organisms are flawed and misleading. And there is not a shred of evidence supporting his claim that the goal of evolution is intelligent life." Coyne is a professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolution at the University of Chicago.

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<http://www.americanscientist.org/issues/feature/a-review-of-darwins-black-box-the-biochemical-challenge-to-evolution-by->

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