



Published on NCSE (<https://ncse.com>)

[Home](#) > Hacking reviews creationism/evolution books in The Nation

---

SHARE TWEET EMAIL [PRINT](#) [1]

[NCSE Staff](#) [2]

09.20.2007

## [Hacking reviews creationism/evolution books in The Nation](#) [3]

Writing in the October 8, 2007, issue of *The Nation*, the philosopher Ian Hacking [reviews](#) [4] five books relevant to the creationism/evolution controversy: Philip Kitcher's *Living with Darwin: Evolution, Design, and the Future of Faith*, Michael Lienesch's *In the Beginning: Fundamentalism, the Scopes Trial, and the Making of the Antievolution Movement*, Michael Behe's *The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism*, Ronald L. Numbers's *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design*, and *A Religious Orgy in Tennessee: A Reporter's Account of the Scopes Monkey Trial*, a collection of H. L. Mencken's contemporary reportage.

Hacking begins by looking on the bright side -- "The anti-Darwin movement has racked up one astounding achievement. It has made a significant proportion of American parents care about what their children are taught in school." -- although he subsequently observes, "The debate about who decides what gets taught is fascinating, albeit excruciating for those who have to defend the schools against bunkum." With Kitcher, he prefers to classify creationist bunkum not as bad science or pseudoscience, but as dead science -- or, borrowing a term from the philosopher of science Imre Lakatos, "degenerate" science.

"Degenerate programs paint themselves into smaller and smaller corners, skirting problems they'd prefer not to face," Hacking explains. "They seldom or never have a new, positive explanation of anything. In short, they teach us nothing." In contrast, "evolutionary theory is a living, growing, vital organism ... a blooming, buzzing, confusing delight, finding out more about the world every day." He cites debates over the phylogeny of the primates and the extant of horizontal genetic transfer as cases of genuine scientific controversies within evolutionary biology.

"Contrast that with pseudo-controversy," Hacking continues, "and take, for example, Michael Behe, a

professor at Lehigh University who must be the most ingenious and prolific anti-Darwinian biologist at work today." Referring to Behe's first book, he says, "There is no give and take of explanation and counterexample, no new methodology, no new anything -- just the same old question dressed up in slightly new clothes." With respect to Behe's latest book (which has already taken a pounding in [review](#) [5] after [review](#) [6] after [review](#) [7]), he concludes, "Once again, we get a recycled objection in slightly new packaging, and no new ideas. ... Can't they do better than that? Apparently not."

Hacking ends his review on a theological note. "Intelligent design is silly," he remarks, despite its predecessors in the history of philosophy, and its central weakness is that "[i]t says nothing about the designer." Its silence about the nature of the designer, he argues, allows a number of variations on "the trite ad hominem observation" that the design in nature is imperfect: that the designer is evil, that the designer is insane ("obsessed with intricate details so long as they do not get too much in the way of other devices he concocts"), and -- in what he describes as a "more attractive thought" -- that the designer chose to operate through chance and selection.

[Anti-Evolution](#) [8]

[2007](#) [9]

[National](#) [10]

[+ read](#) [3]

---

**Source URL:** <https://ncse.com/news/2007/09/hacking-reviews-creationismevolution-books-nation-001312#comment-0>

#### Links

[1] <https://ncse.com/printpdf/13187>

[2] <https://ncse.com/users/ncse-staff>

[3] <https://ncse.com/news/2007/09/hacking-reviews-creationismevolution-books-nation-001312>

[4] <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20071008/hacking>

[5] [http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/news/2007/US/687\\_dawkins\\_reviews\\_behe\\_in\\_emth\\_7\\_2\\_2007.asp](http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/news/2007/US/687_dawkins_reviews_behe_in_emth_7_2_2007.asp)

[6] [http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/news/2007/US/686\\_miller\\_drubs\\_behe\\_in\\_emnatur\\_6\\_27\\_2007.asp](http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/news/2007/US/686_miller_drubs_behe_in_emnatur_6_27_2007.asp)

[7] [http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/news/2007/US/291\\_behe39s\\_latest\\_scrutinized\\_6\\_12\\_2007.asp](http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/news/2007/US/291_behe39s_latest_scrutinized_6_12_2007.asp)

[8] <https://ncse.com/news/anti-evolution>

[9] <https://ncse.com/news/2007>

[10] <https://ncse.com/news/national>