

Nathaniel Comfort slams Richard Dawkins' 'Brief Candle in the Dark' as outdated science

**The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.**

In *Brief Candle in the Dark*, Richard Dawkins revisits his career since *The Selfish Gene*. Its predecessor, *An Appetite for Wonder*, was a memoir of a young upper-class Englishman becoming a scientist, replete with African adventures, British public schools and Oxonian traditions. Some reviewers wondered whether the sequel would have more heft and focus, reflection and introspection. At 450 pages, it is certainly heftier.

Today's genome is much more than a script: it is a dynamic, three-dimensional structure, highly responsive to its environment and almost fractally modular. Genes may be fragmentary, with far-flung chunks of DNA sequence mixed and matched in bewildering combinatorial arrays. A universe of regulatory and modulatory elements hides in the erstwhile junk. Genes cooperate, evolving together as units to produce traits. Many researchers continue to find selfish DNA a productive idea, but taking the longer view, the selfish gene per se is looking increasingly like a twentieth-century construct.

Dawkins's synopsis shows that he has not adapted to this view. He nods at cooperation among genes, but assimilates it as a kind of selfishness. The microbiome and the 3D genome go unnoticed. Epigenetics is an "interesting, if rather rare, phenomenon" enjoying its "fifteen minutes of pop science voguery", which it has been doing since at least 2009, when Dawkins made the same claim in *The Greatest Show on Earth*. Dawkins adheres to a deterministic language of "genes for" traits. As I and other historians have shown, such hereditarianism plays into the hands of the self-styled race realists.

**Read full, original post:** [Genetics: Dawkins, redux](#)