

Sermon: The Atheist Summer Camp

I have just returned from a visit to the local atheist summer camp. Early one morning last week, I saw a strange creature arising from the primeval swamp. Gradually it became clear through the mist that this was none other than the evangelical atheist Richard Dawkins. Suddenly there was a rush of sound and a great crowd of atheistic boys and girls from Hampstead and Camden ran to greet him, singing:

Kumbaya, NO LORD, Kumbaya: Kumbaya, NO LORD Kumbaya

Millions of years of inherited characteristics caused Dawkins to smile broadly and he addressed his captivated young followers: "Let us commune with our genetic code." And he lifted up his voice in a hearty un-prayer

"All hail to chromosome and gene,
Our uncreated go-between
We are just our DNA
And there is nothing more to say"

A choir of small boys in monkey masks began to sing the first camp song:

All things bright and beautiful
Organisms great and small;
There is nothing wonderful
Just evolution, that's all

Each little flower that opens
Each little bird that sings
Their colours are all randomised
Their long-mutated wings

The purple-headed mountain
The river running by
Developed out of nothing
There is no reason why

Our eyes with which we see them
(Both left and right they match)
Appeared by fluky accident
From a primitive damp patch

After readings from *Janet and John Look at Frogs*, from Bertrand Russell's *Why I Am Not A Christian* and from Polly Toynbee's *I Was A Left-wing Fruit Fly*, the winner of the Unbeliever's Limerick Prize was announced. It was won by Nellie the genetically modified elephant for:

The history of all the world's life
Is raw competition and strife
So take a collection
For natural selection
And watch the mutations run rife

And who should have the honour of presenting the prize? The evangelical atheist Dawkins himself, and for the award ceremony he appeared on the makeshift wooden rostrum among the trees in his *Selfish Gene* costume – something a little like a giant slug and a lot like a pea-pod. I am afraid I have to relate that the party was spoilt rather by a sudden savage outburst from a small boy armed with a catapult and a copy of St John's Gospel. He mounted the rostrum and commanded the attention of all the little atheist girls and boys, and announced:

"It's all a sham, I tell you. There is no such person as Richard Dawkins. He's a delusion. That thing you see there before you is just a random collection of genes and chromosomes biologically programmed to say stupid things. Belief in the existence of Richard Dawkins is just a hangover from our primitive past. All reasonable people gave up believing in Richard Dawkins years ago. He's just an insult to our intelligence"

There was a stunned silence and then shockingly, almost disgustingly, the *Selfish Gene* costume began to dissolve until finally, with a terrific squidgy plop, it sank back into the primeval swamp. At once a magical, melodious sound – some said it was the birds themselves, while others thought they heard angels – came from the very middle of the wood. I could just make out the words of their song:

"Now thank we all our God..."