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Will the Real Fundamentalists Please Stand Up?

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Last week, Londoners were treated to a public celebration of the 30th anniversary of *The Selfish Gene* by Oxford scientist Richard Dawkins, a vociferous opponent of Christianity. The event, held at the London School of Economics, was a big event, and it drew many of the biggest names in modern science.

Among the participants was Daniel Dennett of Tufts University, another well-known opponent of Christianity. Here is the most interesting portion of Dennett's comments, drawn from a transcript of the event:

When I thought about which features of the book I would talk about tonight, knowing who the others were who were going to be speaking about it, I realized that I should perhaps stick to some of the grander, larger, more philosophical themes and leave some of the wonderful details to people who are more expert in those. And I also thought, on rereading the book, that the late Steve Gould was really right when he called Richard and me Darwinian fundamentalists.

And I want to say what a Darwinian fundamentalist is. A Darwinian fundamentalist is one who recognizes that either you shun Darwinian evolution altogether, or you turn the traditional universe upside down and you accept that mind, meaning, and purpose are not the cause but the fairly recent effects of the mechanistic mill of Darwinian algorithms. It is the unexceptioned view that mind, meaning, and purpose are not the original driving engines, but recent effects that marks, I think, the true Darwinian fundamentalist.

And Dawkins insists, and I agree wholeheartedly, that there aren't any good compromise positions. Many have tried to find a compromise position, which salvages something of the traditional right-side-up view, where meaning and purpose rain down from on high. It cannot be done. And the recognition that it cannot be done is I would say, the mark of sane Darwinian fundamentalism.

He called himself a Darwinian fundamentalist, and he is right. The same is true for Richard Dawkins. This kind of candor is rare. Savor it.

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