

Review – “Throughout ‘Darwin’s Black Box’ ...”

Summary

(Paragraph 1) Behe’s argument against Darwinism is flawed. Irreducible complexity is a weak argument against which there is evidence. (Paragraph 2) Behe states that some things in nature (e.g. a mousetrap) cannot function properly if one were to remove one part. (Paragraph 3) The mousetrap is a weak metaphor because it can in some ways function without certain parts, and it is not a living organism and thus could not have evolved anyway. (Paragraph 4) Irreducible complexity is a weak argument because it uses one’s personal ignorance as evidence. (Paragraph 5) The computer program Avida was used to show how complex functions can originate from simple functions. (Paragraph 6) The computer program is similar enough to living organisms to give the study validity. (Paragraph 7) Behe’s response to Lenski’s work was insubstantial. (Paragraph 8) Behe’s skewed account of antibodies is evidence to his lack of credibility. (Paragraph 9) Behe’s argument for intelligent design is weak.

Paragraph 1

- Unclear thesis
 - o The introduction of Professor Lenski’s study brings unnecessary emphasis to this one argument. You should give equal emphasis or more broadly address this source.
- Awkward word choice
 - o “to call it quits” is very colloquial.
 - o “when his mousetrap breaks” references the concept of the mousetrap specifically, but you introduce the concept of the mousetrap in a later paragraph. Your view of the reader’s prior knowledge is inconsistent.

Paragraph 2

- Ambiguous claim
 - o The introduction stated that Behe argued against Darwinian evolution with irreducible complexity, but here it is stated that his argument begins with irreducible complexity.
 - If he begins this way, then how does he end? Or continue?
- Spelling error
 - o “therefor” → “therefore”

Paragraph 3

- Unnecessary format
 - o “However, is any of this really true?” does not serve to further the paper
 - o The use of “let’s” introduces a second person format which may be replaced with a more professional tone.
- Unsupported claim
 - o “Besides the holes...” assumes that there are holes in the argument; however this is the thesis of the entire paper.
 - o “it’s extremely likely that the system could be worked in some way...” requires evidence. To say that the system *may* be worked out in some way to be reducible would be more accurate given the author’s position.
- Unnecessary word choice
 - o “not nearly as efficient” unnecessarily introduces the adverb “nearly”, which is an unsubstantiated claim.

Paragraph 4

- Awkward transition
 - o The transition is too direct/obvious.
- Awkward phrase
 - o “Not only that, but he also proceeds to design...” uses the present tense which implies that the experiment was not carried out to fruition.
- Unnecessary information
 - o The author recognizes how McDonald acknowledges the metaphor’s difference, but this argument was already pointed out by the author in the last paragraph, and thus only serves to characterize McDonald; which is unnecessary to the paper.
- Unnecessary format
 - o “if you start...” unnecessarily introduces the second person which could be replaced with a more professional format.

- o “because it is still possible to modify...” introduces the ambiguous pronoun “it”. The paper would flow better if this was not used.
- Grammatical error
 - o “McDonald also shows how...” is a run-on sentence.
- Ambiguous phrase
 - o A comma is after the “but” in “but as the structure evolves...” would make the sentence more easily understandable.

Paragraph 5

- Awkward phrase
 - o “Further studies” implies that there were other studies by Professor Lenski. The author has not mentioned any specific studies by Professor Lenski save from the introduction paragraph (refer to comments on Paragraph 1).
 - o The author stated that Avida conducted knockout experiments, but Lenski, the experimenter, should be the one credited.
- Unclear argument
 - o The author states that “Lenski used this system...” but does not inform the reader of how Lenski used the system. Rather, the statement should be that in Lenski’s program, complex functions arise out of random mutations and natural selection.
 - o The author states that Lenski conducted knockout experiments, but fails to give the results of said experiments.
- Unnecessary format
 - o The author introduces the pronoun “you”, which could be replaced for a more professional tone.
- Awkward phrase
 - o “pokes quite a large hole” is colloquial, and should be made more professional.
- Biased statement
 - o “pokes quite a large hole” is biased, as “quite large” is a subjective description.

Paragraph 6

- Unnecessary sentences
 - o “The information provided...” summarizes the author’s paragraph, and introduces the idea of lost descendants, which does not contribute to the argument, since the author did not elucidate whether Behe referenced lost descendants.
 - o “This data supports...” summarizes the author’s paragraph
 - o “So much of Behe’s theory...” does not contribute to the argument
- Biased statements
 - o “shows clearly” unnecessarily introduces bias, as “clearly” is subjective
 - o “So much” is subjective
 - o “how can it be true...” implies that the author has already proven Behe wrong, which is even beyond the scope of the author’s thesis.

Paragraph 7

- Awkward transition
 - o “On the subject of Lenski’s work” is an obvious and blatant transition. If the paper was already on the subject of Lenski’s work, then the author did not need to elucidate this.
- Unsupported claim
 - o The author claims that Behe ignores or manipulates the study. This requires a source or evidence to the fact.
- Unnecessary claim
 - o The author compares Behe’s perspective to that of Creationists, but this is an entirely different subject, and thus does not contribute to the thesis.

Paragraph 8

- Unsupported claims
 - o The author claims that Behe has a questionable reputation, but the paragraph only points to one example (antibodies). The statement should be adjusted to more accurately reflect the scope of the author’s argument. As is, the sentence is almost another thesis unto itself.

- The author's information about how antibodies work should be supported by some evidence, since Behe himself is already a reasonable source for the opposing view.
- Unnecessary phrase
 - "This is entirely untrue" is the obvious stance of the author. The paper would benefit more if that idea or even that sentence was integrated into the argument more naturally.
- Biased statements
 - "This is entirely untrue"; "entirely" is an unnecessary adjective for the statement.
 - "didn't even bother" holds a lot of invective.
 - "thorough analysis" seems sarcastic in the face of the author's argument.

Paragraph 9

- Biased statements
 - "countless assertions" is an exaggeration.
 - "hard evidence" is subjective in this case.
 - "easy to see" is subjective.
 - "gaping holes" introduces an unnecessary adjective
- Unnecessary claims
 - "they fail to prove any point at all" is too wide of a conclusion to make. The author can attempt to state that the arguments by Behe do not prove his intended point.
 - To say that Behe failed to acknowledge all articles written by scientists is too large of a conclusion. There is evidence to suggest this (the one article), but that is all that the author should say.
- Awkward phrase
 - "Not only that" and "In addition to this" make the disjoint between the observations of the author very obvious. A more natural progression of ideas would obviate this need.

- Awkward wording
 - o “fails to account for these many inconsistencies” implies that within Behe’s own reasoning there are inconsistencies, but the author’s paper discusses why Behe’s reasoning is flawed. Inconsistencies should be changed to a more relevant word.

General comments (things that need improvement)

The author should attempt to elucidate the thesis more clearly, especially in the opening paragraph. The scope of the paper is relatively clear given the author’s arguments, but not based on the author’s claims. On that note, there are many claims made by the author that weaken the professionalism of the paper. The author usually presents evidence towards these conclusions, but the scope of the evidence is exaggerated. Tightening up the thesis would help to point the arguments.

The bias in the paper is quite clear. There are multiple instances where the author introduces colloquialisms and in each of these there is the connotation of invective towards Behe and his theory. The paper should avoid writing from a personal perspective as this will discredit the author.

If many of these statements are removed, the paper becomes too short. The author should attempt to dig deeper into his sources for more incompatibilities or else find another source. There are multiple aspects to Behe’s argument for intelligent design, and finding more instances where there are flaws can only help the main argument of the paper.

General comments (things to preserve)

The material the author presented the paper was very coherent and directed. This sort of evidence lends itself to a very pointed and accurate thesis.

The position on the paper, to take two different perspectives and contrast them (as opposed to proposing an observation), was well observed by the author.

There are very few grammatical or stylistic errors in the essay. Active voice is very consistent throughout. Most statements are very clear in intention.