

Richard Dawkins: How a Scientist Changed the Way We Think  
Alan Grafen, Mark Ridley

I had not realized how important Dawkins was

until reading assessments of his contribution to modern thought by the writers I most esteem: Stephen Pinker, Daniel Dennett and Matt Ridley.

Dawkins' ability to express himself clearly leads to the deceptive conclusion that he is a popularizer rather than an innovator in science. Wrong. While he draws from the great streams of scientific thought, he has woven ideas together into several constellations that are his alone.

I had thought, reading Dennett's rather dense but delightful "Darwin's Dangerous Idea" that Dawkins was his disciple. Wrong again - other way around.

Each of these 24 authors refer to their subject as "Richard," somewhat familiarly but also with some reverence, as if "Richard" were a prefix for something such as "The Sixth" or "of Cambridge"

Most interesting and awkward of the articles was one by the Bishop of Oxford attempting to grapple with Dawkins' oft-expressed atheism and his belief that religion is a virus of the mind. Quite in contrast with Dawkins' work, I could not make heads or tails of this attempted reconciliation, which seemed to say no more than that he is a decent fellow despite his disbelief.