**RICHARD DAWKINS AND THE GOD DELUISON**

**1) The God Hypothesis**

When Dawkins speaks of religion he is expressly thinking of those who believe in a God who intervenes in human history. In other words, those who believe that:

“There exists a superhuman, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it, including us.”

**A theist** believes in such a God who is intimately involved in human affairs: answering prayers, forgiving or punishing sins, intervening in the world by performing miracles. This God is a pernicious delusion.

T**he existence of God, says Dawkins, is therefore a scientific hypothesis:** The religious claim of an interventionist God who answers prayers leads to a very different world from one without such a God.

If God communicated with humans, that fact would be scientifically verifiable. He goes to say that even those religious people who believe in a non-interventionist God, nevertheless claim an ultimate design of the universe – i.e. designed by God.

**2) No Design – No God**

Evidence for design: The natural world looks as though it is designed. However, evolution through natural selection (Darwinism) gives us evidence to reject creation by design as well as creation by chance.

Religious people have argued that the natural world is so complex, it could not have evolved (for example, the human eye). But natural selection is a cumulative process so that what seems highly improbable can be broken up into steps which are not prohibitively improbable.

Evolution is the only process, as far as we know, capable of generating complexity from simplicity. We cannot be satisfied to say that this is a mystery as it would mark an end to scientific investigation; ignorance drives scientists on.

We live on a planet that is friendly to our kind of life. There are two reasons for this:

1. Life has evolved to flourish in the conditions provided by the planet;
2. There are billions of planets in the universe and our planet is one of the few which is evolutionary-friendly.

**We live in a friendly universe.** The laws and constants of physics are friendly enough to allow life to arise; a very small difference would make life impossible.

* A theist says that God tuned the constants such that the production of life was possible – but this leaves the existence of God unexplained. A God capable of calculating the values of the constants is very improbable.
* Some physicists think that the constants have to be the particular values they are for any universe.
* Other physicists suggest that there are many co-existing universes, each one with a different set of constants and laws; we are in one of the universes which happened to be beneficial to our eventual evolution.

A God capable of designing a universe (and who is claimed to be able to send and receive intelligible signals to millions of people simultaneously) would have to be complex and would be statistically improbable.

To suggest that a great unknown is responsible for the universe existing rather than not is a total abdication of the responsibility to find an explanation. The God Hypothesis is untenable. God almost certainly does not exist.

**3) So why are there religions?**

As religious rituals have a cost in both time and resources, an evolutionist has to ask the question, What is the benefit? For evolutionists, ‘benefit’ normally means, What is the enhancement to the survival of the individual’s genes?

There is little evidence that religious belief protects people from stress-related diseases. It may be a placebo that prolongs life by reducing stress but this does not explain the extent of the phenomenon.

Neuroscientists suggest there is a ‘god centre’ in the brain, but Darwinians then want to know what natural selection favoured this.

I suggest that religion is a by-product of the way we bring up our children. There is a selective advantage for children to believe without question what grown-ups tell them in order for them to avoid what is dangerous. This, though, makes them vulnerable to misinformation (mind viruses) such as religion.

How did religion start? One psychologist suggests that children have a natural tendency to:

* make a fundamental distinction between mind and matter. This compares with the view of most scientists who regard mind as a manifestation of matter.
* assign a purpose to everything (for example, clouds are ‘for raining’).

Both tendencies predispose us to religion. Genes are the physical entities which are responsible for biological reproduction. In a similar way, memes may be responsible for transmitting culture in human society. Just as there are copying errors (mutations) in genes, religion may be seen as a mutation of these memes. Once religion has a hold, its attribute of being against reason helps its own survival.

**4) Do we need religion in order to be good?**

Genes are ‘selfish’ in the sense that, through the filter of natural selection, those that survive do so at the expense of rivals. But this does not necessarily make the organism (humans) selfish.

There are four good Darwinian reasons for individuals to be altruistic:

* Genetic kinship: care for those who share similar genetic make-up.
* Reciprocation: giving of favours in anticipation of a payback.
* Acquiring a good reputation for generosity and kindness.
* Conspicuous generosity demonstrates superiority.

These ‘rules’ of altruism may be carried out even when there is no genetic advantage (example of a reed warbler feeding a young cuckoo).

We don’t need God or religion to have good morals. One study shows that there is no statistical difference between atheists and religious believers in making moral judgements. Moral principles based only upon religion may be called absolutist but, for example, “Is it always wrong to kill an embryo?”

Religious people don’t derive their morals from scripture, or if they do, they choose the nice bits and reject the nasty. There are many Old Testament passages which we would now describe as immoral. In the New Testament we read that Jesus didn’t derive his ethics from the scriptures of his day.

The central doctrine of Christianity is that Jesus was tortured and executed in payment for the hereditary sin of Adam, including possible future sins. This is vicious, sado-masochistic and repellent. If God wanted to forgive our sins, why not just forgive them?

Religion makes the world’s troubles worse, even when they can be described as political. Religion exacerbates the world’s problems through:

* + Labelling of children in terms of their religion before they know what they believe.
  + Segregated schools.
  + Taboos against marrying outside the religious culture.

We have all changed our attitude to what is right and wrong over time, whether or not we are religious. These changes have not come from religion. Individual atheists may do evil things but they don’t do evil things in the name of religion.

**5) What is wrong with religion?**

As a scientist, I am hostile to fundamentalist religion because it actively perverts the scientific enterprise as it teaches us not to change our mind. Religious people who are not fundamentalists make the world safe for fundamentalists by teaching children that an unquestioning faith is a virtue.

Only religious faith is a strong enough force to motivate utter madness of the terrorist acts we have seen over the last few years. Our current war against terrorism is a war against religious idealists who have an unquestioning faith.

The treasured heritage of our sacred religious books can be retained even when we give up our belief in God. Any gap that religion leaves in the areas of explanation, exhortation, consolation and inspiration can be filled in other ways. Explanation and inspiration can come from science.

**6. Darwinism: Human survival without Religion or Purpose?**

Richard Dawkins wrote: “Humans have always wondered about the meaning of life...life has no higher purpose than to perpetuate the survival of DNA...life has no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference”. --Richard Dawkins

**Evolution and Purpose**

Evolution teaches that we are the product of CHANCE, we differ from one another, but those differences arise at random, without a plan or purpose   Pulitzer Prize author Edward Humes writes of this: “Darwin's brilliance was in seeing beyond the appearance of design, and understanding the purposeless, merciless process of natural selection, of life and death in the wild, and how it culled all but the most successful organisms from the tree of life, thereby creating the illusion that a master intellect had designed the world. But close inspection of the watchlike "perfection" of honeybees' combs or ant trails…reveals that they are a product of random, repetitive, unconscious behaviours, not conscious design”. Humes, Edward. 2007. Monkey Girl: Evolution, Education, Religion, and the Battle for America's Soul. New York: Ecco, 119

Dawkin’s evolutionary approach to life is nihilistic and atheistic; evolution works without either plan or purpose…. Evolution is random and undirected and is based on a philosophical materialism, the conviction that matter is the stuff of all existence and that all mental and spiritual phenomena are its byproducts. Nature ruthlessly eliminates the unfit. Suddenly, humanity is reduced to just one more species in a world that cares nothing for us. The great human mind was no more than a mass of evolving neurons, there is no divine plan to guide us.10

**The Implications**

The real difficulty in accepting Darwin's theory has always been that it seems to diminish our significance…. |Evolution| asked us to accept the proposition that, like all other organisms, we too are the products of a random process that, as far as science can show, we are not created for any special purpose or as part of any universal design.

“In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.” (River out of Eden)

Many scientists would agree with him. One study of 149 leading biologists found that 89.9 percent believed that evolution has no ultimate purpose or goal except survival, and we are just a cosmic accident existing at the whim of time and chance. A mere six percent believed that evolution has a purpose.23

How come the Universe looks as if it is designed for a purpose?

**Purpose of Life for Dawkins**

“We are going to die, and that makes us the lucky ones. Most people are never going to die because they are never going to be born. The potential people who could have been here in my place but who will in fact never see the light of day outnumber the sand grains of Arabia. Certainly those unborn ghosts include greater poets than Keats, scientists greater than Newton. We know this because the set of possible people allowed by our DNA so massively exceeds the set of actual people. In the teeth of these stupefying odds it is you and I, in our ordinariness, that are here. We privileged few, who won the lottery of birth against all odds, how dare we whine at our inevitable return to that prior state from which the vast majority have never stirred?” [Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder](http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/3323916)