

## Chapter 2 – The God Hypothesis

In this chapter, Dawkins is seeking to make the idea that there is a God seem highly improbable, so that his reader already thinks God is highly unlikely to exist before he gets on to chapter 3 (dealing with the arguments for God's existence). He also begins the chapter by stating his alternative hypothesis:

*Any creative intelligence of sufficient complexity to design anything comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution.<sup>1</sup>*

Dawkins' approach to making "The God Hypothesis" seem unreasonable is as follows:

1. To make God sound terribly unattractive:

*'The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all of fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving, control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic-cleanser; a misogynist, homophobic, racist; infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully...<sup>2</sup>*

2. To ridicule the idea of the Trinity so it seems unreasonable:

He quotes some Catholic definitions of the Trinity (which, of course are totally orthodox and are exactly what we would say.) He then ridicules them as being non-sense, quoting Thomas Jefferson, "Ridicule is the only weapon that can be used against unintelligible ideas."<sup>3</sup>

Of course, the idea of the Trinity is only unintelligible if you assume:

- (a) we live in a purely material universe;
- (b) there are only 3 or 4 dimensions, therefore everything can be described in simple 3 or 4 dimensional models;
- (c) there is no evidence for it, which Dawkins clearly thinks.

However, the church fathers formulated the doctrine of the Trinity in inspired Scripture, and under the work of the Holy Spirit precisely because it was the only way to synthesise the data of the bible that clearly show God is one and yet is three persons, Father, Son and Spirit.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Delusion*, p.31

<sup>2</sup> *Delusion*, p.31

<sup>3</sup> *Delusion*, p.34

Also, it should be noted that frequently in science the language or models that we use are actually virtually impossible to formulate into coherent words. For example, we describe light as both a wave and a particle, despite the fact that it is impossible for us to visualise this. Or, I remember when I was doing research for my Masters (in Nuclear Magnetic Resonance) my supervisor commented that the solution to one problem a colleague was solving was “a four dimensional vector in spin-space”. This remains unintelligible to me to this day, however that doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist!

### 3. To give misinformation

He claims “Christianity was founded by Paul of Tarsus...”,<sup>4</sup> which is an outdated, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Liberal idea. He goes on to say that it “... spread by the sword... after the emperor Constantine elevated it from an eccentric cult to official religion....”<sup>5</sup>

Whilst there is a grain of truth in this, he fails to account for the first 3 centuries of Christian growth in the face of persecution! (And note the insinuation “eccentric cult”.)

### 4. To demonstrate that the USA was founded on secular principles but now has become polluted by religion to the extent that atheists are discriminated against in America.

This is of course of no relevance to whether God exists or not. It is just a piece of polemic against the “Christian” right in the US designed to win friends among his American readership particularly.

Having done that, he then sets out to show that while we cannot know for certain that there is a God or that there is not a God, we do need to make a decision based on the evidence in front of us. Agnosticism is not an option for him. And to be fair, I would agree with this point!

However, as Dawkins discusses this, his underlying and totally unproven assumption becomes clear: ***Dawkins has faith in the omniscience of Science.***

He basically argues that science can explain everything, although there is no evidence for this. It is just an assumption. One could argue that this is believing something “in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence.”

In the past some people have argued that science and religion both cover different realms -for example, Stephen Jay Gould’s concept of science and religion as “Non Overlapping Magisteria. Such people argue that science and religion are both valid but answer different questions. Science answers “How”

---

<sup>4</sup> *Delusion*, p.37

<sup>5</sup> *Delusion*, p.37

questions: e.g. how do animals breath? How come diamond is such a hard substance and graphite is so soft? Religion answers why questions: “Why are we here?”

Dawkins claims that this is a “tedious cliché (and unlike many clichés, it isn’t even true)... What on Earth is a *why?* question?”<sup>6</sup> In saying this he is effectively ruling out asking any questions which science cannot answer. Once again, his presupposition is driving his conclusion. And he produces no evidence.

In contrast many scientists would agree that there are limits to what science can tell us. For example, Sir Peter Medawar, an Oxford immunologist, who won a Nobel Prize for medicine. He once wrote:

There is indeed a limit upon science made likely by the existence of questions science cannot answer, and that no conceivable advance of science could empower us to answer.... I have in mind such questions as:

How did everything begin?  
What are we here for?  
What is the point of living?

Doctrinaire positivism – now something of a period piece – dismissed all such questions as non-questions or pseudoquestions such as only simpletons ask and charlatans are prepared to answer.”<sup>7</sup>

By doing this he is doing something that most boys have probably done at some stage in their childhood. I remember when playing football using jumpers as goal posts, it was always tempting to just remove the jumpers of the goal we were defending rendering it impossible for the other team to score a goal as the goal had been removed! This is exactly what Dawkins is doing here. He isn’t just moving the goal posts, he is *removing* the goal posts!

---

<sup>6</sup> *Delusion*, p.56

<sup>7</sup> cited in McGrath, *Dawkins Delusion*, p18

