

## **Postscript – The Commuter’s Question**

In the course of writing the material for this project, Stuart was on a train from the City District back to Richmond in the South West of London. As part of his preparation for the first session, he had his copy of *The God Delusion* sitting out in front of him, making notes and thinking things through. At one point, one of the other commuters leaned over and said,

*‘Is that book any good? I’ve been thinking of reading it. What do you think of it?’*

Stuart gave a short reply (which was no doubt superlatively better than mine would have been!), but came away unsatisfied, feeling that he should have been able to sum up the book and its deficiencies in a short, pithy response. After all, we are meant to always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks for the reason for the hope to which we profess. What better way to challenge the latent canker of atheism in our society than by answering a question like that? So Stuart suggested that he and I ought to come up with short responses to that question, summing up our key thoughts and concerns about the book. We were to try to come up with ‘One-Stop answers’ (that is, an answer that could be given between the doors closing at one tube station and opening at the next – the average gap between London Tube stations is around two and a half minutes).

Both of us had a stab at this independently, and interestingly came up with fairly similar responses. Each attempted to mention some of the crucial strands of Dawkins’ arguments, outlining what we thought the main content of the book was. However, we also mentioned some of the weaknesses and deficiencies, as well as some of the evidences for God that Dawkins omitted or skated over. Furthermore, we both picked up on some key doctrines, and brought the answer to conclusion by resting on the gospel itself – the idea with both answers was to give enough information that the person could go away knowing some of the problems with the major tenets of the book if the conversation came to a rapid conclusion (as they will on a London commute!), but to provoke further questions if at all possible. Ultimately, however, we wanted to leave the person with the gospel – so that we had given the truth as well as highlighting falsehood.

So here are our attempts at answering the question – they are by no means conclusive, prescriptive, or to be memorised. They are, if you like, sample answers – the fact that we’ve both worded them slightly differently indicates we need to convey ‘truth through personality’<sup>1</sup>. They are merely examples, so that you can think about how you would answer the question yourself!

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Brooks’ phrase describing biblical preaching.

## Stuart's Attempt

It's very readable and often funny, but it's heavy on anecdotes and light on evidence. He tries to show there "almost certainly is no God" but his argument is really just "who made God"? His presuppositions drive his science, rather than his science driving him to his conclusion.

He rightly condemns some terrible things done in the name of religion, but the problem isn't really religion. The problem is humans! And most surprisingly, he doesn't really engage with the best evidence for God there is: the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

## Steve's Attempt

The book has two main lines of attack and both of them sound impressive, but are fundamentally flawed. Firstly, he attacks the notion of God outright. His attempts to undermine evidence of God are unsatisfactory for many reasons – often purely logical. He uses areas of science that are far from being widely accepted in order to support his case<sup>2</sup>; he uses concepts from one branch of science and misapplies them elsewhere<sup>3</sup>, and he fundamentally fails to understand the difference between a washing machine and its engineer, or between a book and its reader... he even completely ignores the most compelling evidence for God – the resurrection of Jesus Christ – and doesn't deal with it at all.

Secondly, he approaches from a side channel, attacking religion as an evil thing. He actually often actually argues from a truly biblical viewpoint – that we are hardwired for wonder<sup>4</sup>, that we by nature recognise that there is more than the material universe<sup>5</sup>, that Christians still show their sinfulness in many ways too, and fall short of the glory of God. However, because of his presuppositions, he fails to see the incredible truth of God's sovereign grace and that people are able to do good things only so long as God allows them to. We're only able to have absolute morality because we are made in God's image. His arguments are a photo-realistic illustration of the biblical concept that '*men ... suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.*'<sup>6</sup> It's a fantastic book and yet also a tragic book in that he shows glimpses of the truth that can set us free, but chooses to suppress it.

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<sup>2</sup> Memetics

<sup>3</sup> Memetics, again, and also the idea of infinite regress – applying the same developmental process of an object to the one who made that object!

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 1

<sup>5</sup> Chapter 5

<sup>6</sup> Romans 1:18b, 19