



The Dawkins Letters - 6. Why there almost certainly is a God

David Robertson

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Dear Dr Dawkins,

Finally we arrive at the centre of your book and its main argument. The title of this fourth chapter is a bold claim. (You will notice that I have retitled it because I actually think the chapter does the very opposite of what you set out to do). In it you propose to prove, insofar as it is possible, that there is no God. I truly found this chapter astonishing. Allow me to explain why. I had expected that your case against God was to be a cumulative one – a bit like your view of evolution. Faced with the mountain of Divinity and the universal belief of humankind in a God or gods, I expected you to climb Mount Improbable gradually, building a case slowly and leading us by a cumulative process to the view that there is no God. However you go for the big leap. You think you have the killer argument and you can go straight to the Holy Grail of atheism, and then have a gentle slide downhill afterwards, picking off the remaining theistic arguments because you have already proved there is no God.

What is this killer argument? The one that even Nietzsche could not find? Your argument goes like this. Evolution is true. Evolution explains the illusion of design. The design argument is the

main argument for God. Therefore there is no God. And the reason that the design argument does not work? The point that you think almost 'certainly' proves there is no God is an astounding one. It is the core and heart of your intellectual justification for your emotional atheism. I almost feel at this point that there should be a drum roll.... The argument is "Who designed the Designer?"

In your own words:

Once again, this is because the designer himself (herself / itself) immediately raises the problem of his own origin.

Indeed design is not a real alternative at all because it raises an even bigger problem than it solves: who designed the designer?

But whatever else we may say, design certainly does not work as an explanation for life, because design is ultimately not cumulative.

As ever the theist's answer is deeply unsatisfying because it leaves the existence of God unexplained.

To suggest that the original prime mover was complicated enough to indulge in intelligent design, to say nothing of mind reading millions of humans simultaneously, is tantamount to dealing yourself a perfect hand at bridge.

It is clear that this point is very important to you and the foundation of the rest of your arguments. When I read it I was genuinely shocked. Not because of its originality, killer force or overwhelming logic, but rather because of its banality. 'Who made God?' is a question I would expect from a six year old. Likewise 'Who made God then?' is the accusation I would expect from a sixteen year old. I am genuinely surprised to find the world's most famous atheist (now that Anthony Flew has defected) and an Oxford Professor to boot, using it as THE intellectual foundation for his atheism. This is the argument that is going to change the world? This is the key?! Forgive my incredulity and perhaps even the slight mocking tone but you are very quick to mock some of the stupider theistic arguments. Using the 'Who made God?' argument is the atheist equivalent of the argument from degree.

The answer to the question who made God is simply 'nobody'. God is not made. God is the Creator, not the creation. God is outside of time and space. (This is not to say that he is not also in time and space and that there is not plenty of evidence for him there). God creates *ex nihilo*. That's what makes him God. He does not craft from what is already there. He creates time, space and matter from nothing. I realise for you that is a nonsense because the core of your creed is that evolution means that everything starts from the simple and becomes more complex, therefore because that is the case (and any designer would have to be incredibly complex) God cannot exist. But even if we grant that this is true for biology, biology is not everything. To argue as you do is to take an incredible leap of faith and to beg the question. Who says that everything, including God himself, has to come from something? Christians and other theists do not argue that God was created. That is precisely the point. He did not come from anywhere. He has always been. He did not evolve, nor was he made. If there is a personal Creator of the Universe then it makes perfect sense to regard him as complex, beyond our understanding and eternal. When you state that you can disprove God because there can *de facto* never be anything that was uncreated you are engaging in a circular argument. We do not believe in a created God. We believe in an uncreated supernatural power. I'm afraid you disprove nothing when you argue against the existence of a created God.

Let us assume for the moment that evolution is true, why would that disprove God? Let us assume that the Intelligent Design movement (and to be fair it should be pointed out that this is a particular political / philosophical / scientific movement primarily in the US) is wrong – why would that disprove God? It would disprove one argument that some theists use but there are many other arguments and there are many Christians who do not accept the ID science and who continue to be believers in the God of the Bible. You mention with particular praise Kenneth Miller, of Brown University and author of *Finding Darwin's God*. He strongly disagrees with Behe and with the whole ID movement. By your logic he should then be an atheist. But he is not. He is a Theist. I am sure you would not call him stupid but you do accuse other theists who are also 'good' scientists of 'compartmentalising'. To my mind this

is patronising and the equivalent of accusing them of a fundamental dishonesty. To you they have the evidence to prove there is no God (who designed the designer?) but they do not have the moral courage or the mental capacity to embrace the logical conclusions. Except of course these conclusions are not logical. As McGrath puts it:

There is a substantial logical gap between Darwinism and atheism, which Dawkins seems to prefer to bridge by rhetoric rather than evidence. (Dawkins' God – p87).

In order for there to be natural selection there has to be something to select. Where did that come from? This is where the Unmoved Mover, the Uncaused Cause and the Cosmological arguments come into their own. In terms of the origin of matter there are only three alternatives:

1. Something came from nothing. At one point there was no universe, there was no material, there was no matter, no time, no space. And out of that big nothing there came the Big Bang and our vast universe, tiny planet, evolution and the human species. I think you will agree that such a notion is beyond the realms of reason and is a total nonsensical fantasy.
2. Something was eternal. In other words matter has always existed. There is a lump of rock, or a mass of gas or some kind of matter which had no beginning and will probably have no end. And at some point that matter exploded and we ended up with the finely tuned and wonderful universe we now inhabit.
3. Something was created – *ex nihilo* – out of nothing. And that Creator has to be incredibly powerful, intelligent and awesome beyond our imagination.

I cannot see any other logical alternatives and I don't think you can either. I found it fascinating that when you were challenged about this you argued that we don't know where matter came from but one day scientists will find out. Apart from this rather touching faith in the potential omniscience of scientists, I'm afraid that will not do. The existence of God is not dependent on the argument from design as regards evolution, it is dependent on the fact that there is any matter at all, and that we live in a universe which is so finely tuned that life is possible at all. Why is there something rather than nothing? And why does

that something manage to produce you and I? That is not a question which you can just brush aside or express no interest in.

Let's move on to this second stage. It is not only the fact that matter exists at all, but that it is so ordered that life can exist. When I was a child I was brought up in an area which had very little light pollution and so during the winter nights I often walked under the stars, risking injury by continually gazing upwards. Even today when I can I visit the local observatory in Dundee where I am greeted by an inscription above the door "this observatory is given that you may observe the wonders of the Creator in the heavens". To stare at the stars is for me one of the major if not the major reason for believing in God. I found it difficult to believe that this vast universe existed by itself, or as the result of an accident. As I have grown older and in knowledge it has been a real delight to discover that my natural instincts in observation are in accord with what science has also discovered. Whereas I struggle with most books on evolution because of a lack of knowledge (your books have actually been the most accessible and interesting), I really enjoy cosmology. Recently I have been reading Owen Gingerich's *God's Universe* and Francis Collins' *The Language of God* which beautifully explain why the Universe is the best evidence for the existence of God. After going into detail about the wonders of the Big Bang Collins cites with approval the astrophysicist Robert Jastrow from *God and the Astronomers*:

For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountain of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.

I thought you would like that! Jastrow also writes:

Now we see how the astronomical evidence leads to a biblical view of the origin of the world. The details differ, but the essential elements and the astronomical and biblical accounts of Genesis are the same; the chain of events leading to man commenced suddenly and sharply at a definite moment in time' in a flash of light and energy.

Stephen Hawking points out that if the rate of expansion one second after the Big Bang had been smaller by even one part in ten thousand million million, the universe would have recollapsed before it ever reached its present state. If it had been greater by one part in a million then the stars and planets would not have been able to form. Is that not spine chillingly incredible? Constants like the speed of light, the force of gravity and electromagnetism all need to work precisely together for there to be life. Apparently there are fifteen such constants. Wonderful and incredible.

If you hold to position two – which you must as a rational atheist – then you are left with this vast improbability of the fine tuning of the Universe. And it is an improbability that cannot be explained by evolution because there is nothing to evolve. The question is how did we get the conditions for evolution? I guess you could argue that we were very very very lucky – to the point of one in ten thousand million million. That takes an enormous amount of faith. Like the example you cite from the philosopher John Leslie we talks about a man sentenced to death standing in front of a firing squad of ten expert marksmen. All of them miss. There could be some way of explaining it, but it is such an improbable event. Multiply that a million times and you have the improbability of the universe as we have it. So in order to avoid that what can you do? Well you can invent the multiverse. The view that there are billions of universes co-existing like bubbles of foam and the chances are that at least one will end up with some form of life. You even cite Lee Smolin's view that daughter universes are born from parent universes and that they in effect evolve thus eventually getting to a stage where life is possible. This is really special pleading and indicates desperation to try and explain the universe we have without God. You keep telling us that science is about what we can observe, that it is about fact and empirical evidence. The multiverse notion is a sci-fi nonsense for which there is no evidence whatsoever. One almost gets the impression that you would accept any theory as long as it did not involve the possibility of there being a God! This becomes especially evident when we move on to the last chapter – there you take this speculation even further citing David Deutsch's *Fabric of Reality*. Deutsch speculates that there are a vast and rapidly growing number

of universes, existing in parallel and mutually undetectable – except through the porthole of quantum mechanical experiments. You write: “In some of these universe I am already dead. In a small minority of them, you have a green moustache”. And you have the nerve to mock those of us who believe that the Creator of the Universe could raise the dead! Are you really so desperate to escape God that you have to have faith in a universe where there are green moustaches? Why stop there? Why not suggest that the Matrix is correct? The world we live in is not really real – we only think it is because we are wired up to a giant computer which feeds our minds with the illusion of reality.

You like to suggest that your position is a logical one caused by the fact that Darwin has raised your own consciousness and you seem to think that those who do not agree with you are not so highly evolved (at least in consciousness). Your position is the scientific one and you set up the debate so that it is always the forces of reason and science against the blind irrationality of faith. I’m afraid that that just does not square with the facts. In fact although you state that science is the reason you do not believe in God, you offer no substantive scientific reasons as to why we should not believe in God. Your arguments for atheism as a belief system are primarily arguments which are non-scientific. And you need to stop misrepresenting those of us who believe in God as doing so because we are looking for a God of the gaps – someone who will fill in until ‘science’ gives us the real answer. The reason that we believe in God is because of the evidence, because of science (knowledge), because of what we see in the universe. As Collins declares, “There are good reasons to believe in God, including the existence of mathematical principles and order in creation. They are positive reasons, based on knowledge, rather than default assumptions based on a temporary lack of knowledge” (The Language of God – p93). I’d take the awe of understanding over the awe of ignorance any day.

Let me leave you with a couple of other quotes:

The best data we have are exactly what I would have predicted, had I nothing to go on but the five books of Moses, the Psalms, the Bible as a whole. (Arno Penzias, the Nobel prize winning scientist who discovered background radiation

that proved the Big Bang).

It would be very difficult to explain why the universe should have begun in just this way, except as the act of a God who intended to create beings like us. (Stephen Hawking A Brief History of Time).

I am personally persuaded that a super intelligent Creator exists beyond and within the cosmos, and that the rich context of congeniality shown by our universe, permitting and encouraging the existence of self-conscious life, is part of the Creator’s design and purpose. (Owen Gingerich, God’s Universe).

... the extreme difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of conceiving this immense and wonderful universe, including man with his capacity for looking far backwards and far into futurity, as the result of blind chance or necessity. When thus reflecting I feel compelled to look to a First Cause having an intelligent mind in some degree analogous to that of man; and I deserve to be called a Theist. Charles Darwin (cited in the book you mention – Miller’s Finding Darwin’s God).

In bringing up the argument of the origin of matter and of the universe you have in fact scored an enormous own goal. Instead of proving that there almost certainly is no God you have demonstrated that there almost certainly is. It might be a good idea to find out who he is, stop burying your head in the sand and stop shaking your fist at a God you say cannot exist because in order to exist he would have to be more complex than you. He is.

Yours etc

David

PS – There is much in this chapter that I have not interacted with including another attack on the Templeton Foundation and further criticism of another backsliding compromising scientist – Freeman Dyson. But there are a couple of quotes that I cannot resist. Firstly you point out that “It is utterly illogical to demand complete documentation of every step of every narrative, whether in evolution or any other science”. I agree. Can I suggest that you also apply that to theology and the Bible?

Secondly you declare “When pressed, many educated Christians today are too loyal to deny the virgin birth and the resurrection. But it embarrasses them because their rational minds know it is absurd, so they would much rather not be asked”.

Wrong. An educated Christian believes in the God of the Bible who created this whole amazing universe. To raise the dead or create a virgin birth seems to me to be, if not quite chickenfeed in comparison, at least very probable and doable and certainly not illogical. Besides which I would regard it as a whole lot more logical to believe that an eternal omnipotent God could raise the dead, than to believe that the explanation for our universe involves there being multi-universes in which I exist – with or without my green moustache!

Read Part 7.

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