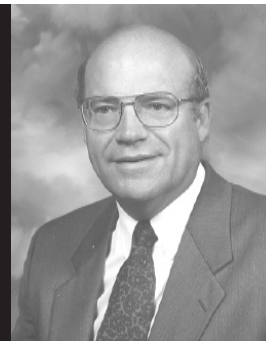




Dr. Fred Schwarz

The Schwarz Report



Dr. David Noebel

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A Review of Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*

by Glenn R. Kreider

From the first page of the Preface, Dawkins's agenda is clear. His thesis, which he states repeatedly and in various forms, is that religions are dangerous, not only because none of them is true, but also because they all inevitably lead to great evil. So he writes to encourage the adoption of atheism or at least an agnosticism toward religion. This book, he writes, "is intended to raise consciousness...to the fact that to be an atheist is a realistic aspiration, and a brave and splendid one. You can be an atheist who is happy, balanced, moral, and intellectually fulfilled" (p. 1). One of his goals is to mobilize the vast number of atheists in the world to "come out" and thus make it easier for others to follow, to create a "critical mass for the initiation of a chain reaction" (p. 4). Dawkins believes that "atheists and agnostics far outnumber religious Jews, and even outnumber most other particular religious groups" but that atheists and agnostics are "not organized and therefore exert almost zero influence" (p. 4).

The title of the book expresses Dawkins's view of God and those who believe in Him. He defines delusion as "a persistent false belief held in the face of strong contradictory evidence, especially as a symptom of psychiatric disorder" (p. 5). His goal is simply and clearly stated: "If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down" (ibid.). This is not merely an attempt to mobilize atheists; it is an apologetic for atheism, an attempted rebuttal of religious views in whatever form.

The "God" whom Dawkins considers a delusion is "a supernatural creator that is 'appropriate for us to worship'" (p. 13). To believe in God without evidence and in the face of strong contradictory evidence would meet the definition of a delusion. Instead of belief in God, Dawkins defends atheistic naturalism, the belief that "there is nothing beyond the natural, physical world, no *supernatural* creative intelligence lurking beyond the observable universe, no soul that outlasts the body and no miracles—except in the sense of natural phenomena that we don't yet understand" (p. 14; here and throughout the review, italics are in the original). Those who believe that strong evidence supports belief in God have grounds to dispute Dawkins's diagnosis of their faith as a psychological disorder.

Dawkins's first chapter ends with this disclaimer: "I shall not go out of my way to offend, but nor shall I don kid gloves to handle religion any more gently than I would handle anything else" (p. 27). It is hard for readers to miss the irony that greets them in the opening sentence of the second chapter, "The God Hypothesis."

And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead expose them. Ephesians 5:11

"Dwell on the past and you'll lose an eye; forget the past and you'll lose both eyes." Old Russian Proverb

Here is Dawkins's description of Yahweh: "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully" (p. 31). Of course Dawkins knows that such language is offensive to worshippers of Yahweh and apparently he intends his language to be provocative. This book is full of such offensive rhetoric; that is Dawkins's style. He therefore appears a bit disingenuous when he claims, "I am not attacking the particular qualities of Yahweh, or Jesus, or Allah, or any other specific god" (p. 31). But that is exactly what he does throughout the book. His strong language is not limited to beliefs of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Every religion receives his scorn.

In "Arguments for God's Existence" Dawkins dismisses a variety of apologetic arguments for God's existence. His rejection of theistic proofs is expected; after all, he denies that any supernatural creator exists. He correctly notes that testimonies of conversion experiences cannot be the sole evidence for a position since they are personal and individual, they are found in all religions and the testimonies are sometimes contradictory. He rejects the scriptural evidence for God based on a list of "problem passages" in the New Testament. He is heavily dependent on the arguments of Bart Ehrman. (For helpful evaluations of some of these issues see D. Jeffrey Bingham, "Development and Diversity in Early Christianity," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 [2006]: 45-46; and Daniel B. Wallace, "The Gospel according to Bart," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 [2006]: 327-49.)

Dawkins criticizes the use of Pascal's wager as an apologetic for belief in God. Dawkins summarizes Pascal's wager as follows. "However long the odds against God's existence might be, there is an even larger asymmetry in the penalty for guessing wrong. You'd better believe in God, because if you are right you stand to gain eternal bliss and if you are wrong it won't make any difference anyway. On the other hand, if you don't believe in God and you turn out to be wrong you get eternal damnation, whereas if you are right it makes no difference. On the face of it the decision is a no-brainer. Believe in God" (p. 103). Dawkins is correct that Pascal's wager is often used this way, to encourage people to make a wise decision, to choose belief in God because the risk is greater to deny Him than to believe in Him. Stated this way conversion is seen as a matter of personal choice, assuming that people

have the ability to believe and that when presented with an offer framed in such a way, the choice should be obvious. Dawkins's response is profoundly significant. "There is something distinctly odd about the argument, however. Believing is not something you can decide to do as a matter of policy. At least, it is not something I can decide to do as an act of will. I can decide to go to church and I can decide to recite the Nicene Creed, and I can decide to swear on a stack of bibles that I believe every word inside of them. But none of that can make me actually believe it if I don't. Pascal's wager could only ever be an argument for *feigning* belief in God. And the God that you claim to believe in had better not be of the omniscient kind or he'd see through the deception" (p. 104). Dawkins seems to understand faith quite well and his implicit critique of apologetic and evangelistic approaches that treat faith as a willful decision needs to be heard.

In "Why There Almost Certainly Is No God," Dawkins criticizes several arguments that theists believe provide support for the existence of a Creator. He dismisses the "intelligent design" argument as "creationism in a cheap tuxedo" (p. 113) and theistic evolutionism as believing in a "lazy God [who] is even lazier than the deist God of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment" (p. 118). He argues that an example of genuine irreducible complexity (the view that "a functioning unit is said to be irreducibly complex if the removal of one of its parts causes the whole to cease functionality" [p. 123]) "would wreck Darwin's theory if it were ever found...but it already *has* wrecked the intelligent design theory, for, as I keep saying and will say again, however little we know about God the one thing we can be sure of is that he would have to be very, very complex and presumably irreducibly so!" (p. 124).

Throughout this chapter, the reader is reminded that one's starting point provides a perspective that heavily influences the conclusions. For those who by faith are confident that God exists, the evidence in creation points to Him. For those who without faith are highly skeptical that there is a God, the evidence in creation does not compel them to faith. Although "the heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1), it takes the eyes of faith to be able to see and hear it. Although God has made "His eternal power and divine nature" clear and plain in creation (Rom. 1:18-20), the universal response of humanity, apart from faith, has been rejection and rebellion against God (Rom. 1:21-2:1). Reading Dawkins's rejection of God is annoying, frustrating, aggravating, and even wearisome. He goes to great lengths to be offensive, provocative, and dismissive. But on reflection, the more appropriate Christian reaction should be sadness. Dawkins is a bril-

liant man, created in the image of God, who is in rebellion against his Creator. Were God to grant him the faith to believe in Him, Dawkins's outlook would be different. Would it not be appropriate to pray for his salvation, to beseech God to bring him to repentance, to ask God to open his eyes to see the marvelous God who is revealed in creation, and to petition God to grant him eternal life through faith in the risen Lord?

In "The Roots of Religion" Dawkins gives his take on the universality of religions. He argues that the fact that every culture in the world has religious beliefs is not evidence of the truth of any religion. Rather, the diversity of religious beliefs and the changes that develop over time, he says, argue against there being one true belief system. Religions are the result of natural selection; they "evolve with sufficient randomness, from beginnings that are sufficiently arbitrary, to generate the bewildering—and sometimes dangerous—richness of diversity that we observe. At the same time, it is possible that a form of natural selection, coupled with the fundamental uniformity of human psychology, sees to it that the diverse religions share significant features in common" (pp. 189-190).

Religious apologists commonly defend their religion on moral grounds. Apart from God, the argument goes, there would be no standard of good and evil and thus no motivation to be moral. Dawkins agrees that this might be the case were original sin true. He rejects "the central doctrine of Christianity: that of 'atonement' for 'original sin'" as "morally obnoxious" (p. 251). Although he holds to a view he admits might be a bit naïve, namely, that humans are essentially good and would choose to do good even without the threat of punishment for doing evil, Dawkins, unwittingly perhaps, gives evidence of the evil of the human heart. Dawkins knows enough of the Bible to know that Christians believe that God is love, that Jesus forgives sins and calls His followers to love others. It is not difficult to imagine how difficult it is for Dawkins to reconcile this with the content of Christian responses to his views. He notes that he receives a large number of letters, "and the nastiest of all, I am sorry to report, are almost invariably motivated by religion" (p. 211). Certainly it is wrong for Christians to think it appropriate to write hate letters to him. There is never an excuse for failing to speak the truth in love. Name-calling, hate speech, death threats, and gleeful requests that Dawkins suffer unspeakable suffering should never come from the mouths or keyboards of Christians. His offensive rhetoric does not justify a response in kind.

Perhaps the most provocative chapter in this book is

"The 'Good' Book and the Changing Moral *Zeitgeist*." Although a bit simplistic, Dawkins's understanding of how the Bible functions for establishing morality is basically correct. "There are two ways in which scripture might be a source of morals or rules for living. One is by direct instruction, for example through the Ten Commandments...the other is by example: God, or some other biblical character, might serve as—to use the contemporary jargon—a role model" (p. 237). Beginning with God's decreed destruction of all creatures, except the inhabitants of the ark, in Noah's day (Gen. 6-9), Lot's willingness to sacrifice his daughters to the Sodomites (Gen. 19), the horrifying abuse of the Levite's concubine (Judg. 19), Abraham's repeated mistreatment of his wife (Gen. 12, 20), and God's demand that Abraham sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22), Dawkins correctly observes the harshness of the God revealed here and the difficulty with developing morality from these stories.

Of course, trained biblical scholars and theologians have provided answers to his questions, but none of these can mitigate the horror of the events in those stories. But the cruelty of God and His people is not the ultimate point Dawkins is making. He actually is calling attention to an inconsistency in Christian hermeneutics. He hears Christians claim that they follow the example of God as revealed in the Bible. Thankfully, he says, they do not really do that. On the other hand he refers to the religious extremism of Muslim suicide bombers and concludes, "*these people actually believe what they say they believe*" (pp. 305-6). This leads him to his repeated claim that religion itself is the problem: "The take-home message is that we should blame religion itself, not religious *extremism*—as though that were some kind of terrible perversion of real, decent religion" (p. 306). Dawkins's thesis is again clearly stated. "As long as we accept the principle that religious faith must be respected simply because it is religious faith, it is hard to withhold respect from the faith of Osama bin Laden and the suicide bombers. The alternative, so transparent that it should need no urging, is to abandon the principle of automatic respect for religious faith. This is one reason why I do everything in my power to warn people about faith itself, not just against so-called 'extremist' faith. The teachings of 'moderate religion, though not extremist in themselves, are an open invitation to extremism" (p. 306).

Although he admits that most Christians pick and choose which parts of Scripture to take literally and which to "write off as symbols or allegories" (p. 238), and thus are not as dangerous as Islamic extremists, he does warn against the tendency of some Christian leaders to claim

publicly that natural and other disasters have been the work of God. Whether it was the events in America in September 2001, the Asian tsunami in 2004, hurricane Katrina in 2005, or other events since then, like the collapse of the I-35 bridge in Minneapolis in 2007, some Christian leaders have thought it appropriate to speak for God, to claim to know that God not only caused those events but was sending a message in doing so. These leaders claim to know not only what God has done but why. John Calvin warned against presuming to know what God is doing in the midst of suffering. He affirmed that such events occur as part of the plan of God. What cannot be known, however, is why God does what he does. "We must lay our hand upon our mouth; that is to say, we must not be so bold as to prattle about them. . . . If God hides the reason for his works from us, and it is too high for us to reach, let us shut our mouths; that is to say, let us not be talkative, babbling after our own imagination, but let us glorify God and not be ashamed to be ignorant. The true wisdom of the faithful is to know no more than it has pleased God to show them. Therefore, let us keep silent before God regarding whatever he does, till the last day comes, when he reveals himself and when we see him face to face in his glory and majesty" (Joseph A. Hill, ed., *Suffering—Understanding the Love of God: Selections from the Writings of John Calvin*, Living Classics for Today [Webster: NY: Evangelical, 2005], 326-27).

It is a bit surprising to read Dawkins's clear presentation of the gospel. Dawkins writes: "God incarnated himself as a man, Jesus, in order that he should be tortured and executed in *atonement* for the hereditary sin of Adam. Ever since Paul expounded this repellent doctrine, Jesus has been worshipped as the *redeemer* of our sins. Not just the past sin of Adam: *future* sins as well" (p. 252). Of course Dawkins finds this gospel deeply offensive, since it requires belief in a God who demands human sacrifice to appease His wrath. Dawkins illustrates Paul's assertion: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (I Cor. 1:18, NIV).

Dawkins's strongest language against religion is found in "Childhood, Abuse and Religion." Here he gives his readers child-rearing advice and sharply criticizes those who "label children as possessors of beliefs that they are too young to have thought about" (p. 315). Labeling children according to a religious position is, he says, a form of child abuse. He argues that there are no Christian (or Muslim, or Hindu, or atheist, etc.) children. Those qualifiers apply only to those who are able to choose them for themselves. To this point he is right. It does

seem confusing to apply the label "Christian" to persons and things which are not regenerated by the Spirit of God. It is also confusing to use "Christian" as a qualifier for objects, ideas, movements, cultures, nations, and so forth. But Dawkins then urges parents to take "the view that children should be taught not so much *what* to think as *how* to think. If, having been fairly and properly exposed to all the scientific evidence, they grow up and decide that the Bible is literally true or that the movements of the planets rule their lives, that is their privilege. The important point is that it is their privilege to decide what they shall think, and not their parents' privilege to impose it by *force majeure*" (p. 327). Such a view is impossible; one cannot be taught how to think without some context of things to think about and that means decisions must be made about what one thinks. Meanwhile, how one thinks is inevitably influenced by what one thinks. Believing in God cannot but impact the way one thinks about God and His world.

This book contains much that is offensive to religious people, perhaps especially Christians (and Muslims). Dawkins's portrayals of religions are sometimes caricatures and straw men. He is an intelligent and gifted man. He writes in an engaging and entertaining style. But he does not believe in God, he has no intention of changing his mind, and he has no hesitation about saying that repeatedly. Believers should hope and pray that he will encounter the living God, perhaps through kind and loving Christians, and undergo a transformation.

Who should read this book? Those who are offended or easily angered at harsh language and pejorative treatments of the faith should stay away from books like this. But those who want to understand how Christianity is perceived by an intelligent scientist who is an atheist will find the book challenging. This book should reaffirm the need for Christians to be consistent in what they believe and practice. Dawkins reignited a desire in this reviewer to pursue God who is beyond anyone's ability to understand completely. He is the Creator of heaven and earth, the providential Sustainer of everything that is, and He is the proclaimer of the hope that one day all things will be made right. Christians will also agree with Dawkins at times. At one pivotal point in the book, he writes, "I must admit that even I am a little taken aback at the biblical ignorance commonly displayed by people educated in more recent decades than I was" (pp. 340-41). Although he does not believe in God, Dawkins does not believe that atheism "provides a justification for cutting the Bible, and other sacred books, out of our education" (p. 344). Ironically, it would seem that some of the "danger"

of books like *The God Delusion* for Christians is because even they are biblically and theologically illiterate.

It is difficult for most Christians to be able to engage people like Dawkins in his area of expertise, science. But Christians ought to heed his call for followers of Jesus to become more knowledgeable about the Bible. People need to become biblically and theologically literate. The

Holy Spirit who inspired the Word of God continues to speak through it and even saves some “through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5-6).

—*Bibliotheca Sacra*, Jan-March 2008, 91f.

Editor’s Note:

With the avalanche of books promoting atheism and the humanistic worldview, Christians need to be aware of the powerful and timely materials available to answer Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, Michael Shermer, Michel Onfray, and Sam Harris (to name some of the more famous atheists).

We are living in days not unlike the pre-French and Bolshevik revolutions, and every Christian needs to be on guard as never before. In fact, with atheism attacking from the left and Islam attacking from the right, there is even more urgency that we do our homework. Listed here are resources answering the so-called New Atheism:

John C. Lennox, *God’s Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?*

Armand M. Nicholi, Jr., *The Question of God: C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life*

Alister and Joanna McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion: Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine*

Douglas Wilson, *Letter from a Christian Citizen*

Joel McDurmon, *The Return of the Village Atheist*

Antony Flew, *There Is A God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*

Ann Coulter, *Godless: The Church of Liberalism*

Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*

Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*

Rodney Stark, *For The Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery*

Michael J. Behe, *The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism*

John C. Sanford, *Genetic Entropy and the Mystery of the Genome*

Alvin Plantinga, “The Dawkins Confusion: Naturalism ‘ad absurdum’” (March 1, 2007 article in *Books & Culture*)

Dinesh D’Souza, *What’s So Great About Christianity*

These works more than speak to the theistic issues raised by the New Atheistic apologists. The issue these atheists haven’t been honest about is the link between their brand of atheism and the totalitarian systems of the 20th century that resulted in the death of literally millions of human beings. Both Communism and Nazism are founded on exactly the same brand of atheism that the New Atheists are propounding, and their atheistic arguments are exactly the same as those of their predecessors.

But, of course, some might argue that the New Atheists are much more tolerant and indeed more respectful of their opponents than were their predecessors (deSade, Marx, Lenin, Mao, Pol Pot, Russell, Negrì, the Bolsheviks, the French Encyclopaedists, etc.). However, one needs merely to read the New Atheists to realize they would have little hesitation eradicating their opposition—especially Christians. A fellow atheist said of Sam Harris’ work *The End of Faith* that “it is not easy to do justice to the book’s nastiness; it makes Dawkins’s claim that religious education constitutes child abuse look sane and moderate.” Harris also remarked, “The link between belief and behavior raises the stakes considerably. Some propositions are so dangerous that it may be ethical to kill people for believing them.” Christians beware!

It was this same atheist who said of Harris’ comment that such a statement was “quite possibly the most disgraceful that I have read in a book by a man posing as a rationalist.” So much for a more tolerant generation of atheists! It may not be a guillotine, but it will be something just as deadly!

The Dawkins Confusion

Part I

by Alvin Plantinga

Richard Dawkins is not pleased with God:

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 misogynistic homophobic racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal....

Well, no need to finish the quotation; you get the idea. Dawkins seems to have chosen God as his sworn enemy. (Let's hope for Dawkins' sake God doesn't return the compliment.)

The God Delusion is an extended diatribe against religion in general and belief in God in particular; Dawkins and Daniel Dennett (whose recent *Breaking the Spell* is his contribution to this genre) are the touchdown twins of current academic atheism. Dawkins has written his book, he says, partly to encourage timorous atheists to come out of the closet. He and Dennett both appear to think it requires considerable courage to attack religion these days; says Dennett, "I risk a fist to the face or worse. Yet I persist." Apparently atheism has its own heroes of the faith—at any rate its own self-styled heroes. Here it's not easy to take them seriously; religion-bashing in the current Western academy is about as dangerous as endorsing the party's candidate at a Republican rally.

Dawkins is perhaps the world's most popular science writer; he is also an extremely *gifted* science writer. (For example, his account of bats and their ways in his earlier book *The Blind Watchmaker* is a brilliant and fascinating *tour de force*.) *The God Delusion*, however, contains little science; it is mainly philosophy and theology (perhaps "atheology" would be a better term) and evolutionary psychology, along with a substantial dash of social commentary decrying religion and its allegedly baneful effects. As the above quotation suggests, one shouldn't look to this book for evenhanded and thoughtful commentary. In fact the proportion of insult, ridicule,

mockery, spleen, and vitriol is astounding. (Could it be that his mother, while carrying him, was frightened by an Anglican clergyman on the rampage?) If Dawkins ever gets tired of his day job, a promising future awaits him as a writer of political attack ads.

Now despite the fact that this book is mainly philosophy, Dawkins is not a philosopher (he's a biologist). Even taking this into account, however, much of the philosophy he purveys is at best jejune. You might say that some of his forays into philosophy are at best sophomoric, but that would be unfair to sophomores; the fact is (grade inflation aside), many of his arguments would receive a failing grade in a sophomore philosophy class. This, combined with the arrogant, smarter-than-thou tone of the book, can be annoying. I shall put irritation aside, however and do my best to take Dawkins' main argument seriously.

Chapter 3, "Why There Almost Certainly is No God," is the heart of the book. Well, why does Dawkins think there almost certainly isn't any such person as God? It's because, he says, the existence of God is monumentally improbable. How improbable? The astronomer Fred Hoyle famously claimed that the probability of life arising on earth (by purely natural means, without special divine aid) is less than the probability that a flight-worthy Boeing 747 should be assembled by a hurricane roaring through a junkyard. Dawkins appears to think the probability of the existence of God is in that same neighborhood—so small as to be negligible for all practical (and most impractical) purposes. Why does he think so?

Here Dawkins doesn't appeal to the usual anti-theistic arguments—the argument from evil, for example, or the claim that it's impossible that there be a being with the attributes believers ascribe to God. So why does he think theism is enormously improbable? The answer: if there were such a person as God, he would have to be enormously complex, and the more complex something is, the less probable it is: "However statistically improbable the entity you seek to explain by invoking a designer, the designer himself has got to be at least as improbable. God is the Ultimate Boeing 747." The basic idea is that anything that knows and can do what God knows and can do would have to be incredibly complex. In particular, anything that can create or design something must be

The Schwarz Report Bookshelf

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at least as complex as the thing it can design or create. Putting it another way, Dawkins says a designer must contain at least as much information as what it creates or designs, and information is inversely related to probability. Therefore, he thinks, God would have to be monumentally complex, hence astronomically improbable; thus it is almost certain that God does not exist.

But why does Dawkins think God is complex? And why does he think that the more complex something is, the less probable it is? Before looking more closely into his reasoning, I'd like to digress for a moment; this claim of improbability can help us understand something otherwise very perplexing about Dawkins' argument in his earlier and influential book, *The Blind Watchmaker*. There he argues that the scientific theory of evolution shows that our world has not been designed—by God or anyone else. This thought is trumpeted by the subtitle of the book: *Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design*.

How so? Suppose the evidence of evolution suggests that all living creatures have evolved from some elementary form of life: how does that show that the universe is without design? Well, if the universe has *not* been designed, then the process of evolution is unguided, unorchestrated, by any intelligent being; it is, as Dawkins suggests, *blind*. So his claim is that the evidence of evolution reveals that evolution is unplanned, unguided, unorchestrated by any intelligent being.

But how could the evidence of evolution reveal a thing like that? After all, couldn't it be that God has directed and overseen the process of evolution? What makes Dawkins think evolution is unguided? What he does in *The Blind Watchmaker*, fundamentally, is three things. First, he recounts in vivid and arresting detail some of the fascinating anatomical details of certain living creatures and their incredibly complex and ingenious ways of making a living; this is the sort of thing Dawkins does best. Second, he tries to refute arguments for the conclusion that blind, unguided evolution could not have produced certain of these wonders of the living world—the mammalian eye, for example, or the wing. Third, he makes suggestions as to how these and other organic systems could have developed by unguided evolution.

Suppose he's successful with these three things: how would that show that the universe is without design? How does the main argument go from there? His detailed arguments are all for the conclusion that it is biologically possible that these various organs and systems should have come to be by unguided Darwinian mechanisms (and some of what he says here is of considerable interest). What is truly remarkable, however, is the form of what seems to be the main argument. The premise he argues for is something like this:

1. *We know of no irrefutable objections to its being biologically possible that all of life has come to be by way of unguided Darwinian processes; and Dawkins supports that premise by trying to refute objections to its being biologically possible that life has come to be that way. His conclusion, however, is*
2. *All of life has come to be by way of unguided Darwinian processes.*

It's worth meditating, if only for a moment, on the striking distance, here, between premise and conclusion. The premise tells us, substantially, that there are no irrefutable objections to its being possible that unguided evolution has produced all of the wonders of the living world; the conclusion is that it is true that unguided evolution has indeed produced all of those wonders. The argument form seems to be something like

We know of no irrefutable objections to its being possible that p ; Therefore p is true.

Philosophers sometimes propound invalid arguments (I've propounded a few myself); few of those arguments display the truly colossal distance between premise and conclusion sported by this one. I come into the departmental office and announce to the chairman that the dean has just authorized a \$50,000 raise for me; naturally he wants to know why I think so. I tell him that we know of no irrefutable objections to its being possible that the dean has done that. My guess is he'd gently suggest that it is high time for me to retire.

Here is where that alleged massive improbability of theism is relevant. If theism is false, then (apart from certain weird suggestions we can safely ignore) evolution is unguided. But it is extremely likely, Dawkins thinks, that theism is false. Hence it is extremely likely

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that evolution is unguided—in which case to establish it as true, he seems to think, all that is needed is to refute those claims that it is impossible. So perhaps we can think about his Blind Watchmaker argument as follows: he is really employing as an additional if unexpressed premise his idea that the existence of God is enormously unlikely. If so, then the argument doesn't seem quite so magnificently invalid. (It is still invalid, however, even if not quite so magnificently—you can't establish something as a fact by showing that objections to its possibility fail, and adding that it is very probable.)

Now suppose we return to Dawkins' argument for the claim that theism is monumentally improbable. As you recall, the reason Dawkins gives is that God would have to be enormously complex, and hence enormously improbable ("God, or any intelligent, decision-making calculating agent, is complex, which is another way of saying improbable"). What can be said for this argument?

Not much. First, is God complex? According to much classical theology (Thomas Aquinas, for example) God is simple, and simple in a very strong sense, so that in him there is no distinction of thing and property, actuality and potentiality, essence and existence, and the like. Some of the discussions of divine simplicity get pretty complicated, not to say arcane. (It isn't only Catholic theology that declares God simple; according to the Belgic Confession, a splendid expression of Reformed Christianity, God is "a single and simple spiritual being.") So first, according to classical theology, God is simple, not complex. More remarkable, perhaps, is that according to Dawkins' own definition of complexity, God is not complex. According to his definition (set out in *The Blind Watchmaker*), something is complex if it has parts that are "arranged in a way that is unlikely to have arisen by chance alone." But of course God is a spirit, not a material object at all, and hence has no parts. A fortiori (as philosophers like to say) God doesn't have parts arranged in ways unlikely to have arisen by chance. Therefore, given the definition of complexity Dawkins himself proposes, God is not complex.

So first, it is far from obvious that God is complex. But second, suppose we concede, at least for purposes of argument, that God *is* complex. Perhaps we think the more a being knows, the more complex it is; God, being omniscient, would then be highly complex. Perhaps so;

still, why does Dawkins think it follows that God would be improbable? Given *materialism* and the idea that the ultimate objects in our universe are the elementary particles of physics, perhaps a being that knew a great deal would be improbable—how could those particles get arranged in such a way as to constitute a being with all that knowledge? Of course we aren't *given* materialism. Dawkins is arguing that theism is improbable; it would be dialectically deficient *in excelsis* to argue this by appealing to materialism as a premise. *Of course* it is unlikely that there is such a person as God if materialism is true; in fact materialism logically entails that there is no such person as God; but it would be obviously question-begging to argue that theism is improbable because materialism is true.

So why think God must be improbable? According to classical theism, God is a necessary being; it is not so much as possible that there should be no such person as God; he exists in all possible worlds. But if God is a necessary being, if he exists in all possible worlds, then the probability that he exists, of course, is 1, and the probability that he does not exist is 0. Far from its being improbable that he exists, his existence is maximally probable. So if Dawkins proposes that God's existence is improbable, he owes us an argument for the conclusion that there is no necessary being with the attributes of God—an argument that doesn't just start from the premise that materialism is true. Neither he nor anyone else has provided even a decent argument along these lines; Dawkins doesn't even seem to be aware that he *needs* an argument of that sort.

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Watch for the second part of this article in the April issue of *The Schwarz Report*.