



into the Melting Pot

the question is more important than the answer

Sunday 13 December

I Agree With Dawkins

The continuing irrelevant Science and Religion debate!

Rationalism against Superstition

- A Church weekend, the route to faith: Scripture → Tradition → Experience → Reason
My alternative: Reason → Experience → Scripture → Tradition
- God of the Gaps - religion teaches us that it is a virtue to be satisfied with not understanding; just because you don't understand the magic trick . . .

Professor Richard Dawkins (Science, Oxford, retired)

He has done much work on evolutionary biology, and more recently regarding atheism. 'The God Delusion' was published in 2006, ISBN 978-1-931498-23-4.

- Religious ideas, like scientific ideas, should be challengeable – there should be no privilege of religious or 'holy' belief under the guise of 'religious freedom'.
- Faith is a belief in something without evidence.
- Religion is a belief in the supernatural. The God Hypothesis: *there exists a superhuman, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it, including us.*
- Dawkins alternative: *any creative intelligence of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution.*

Darwinism

Evolution is change in the heritable traits of biological populations over successive generations. Evolutionary processes give rise to diversity at every level of biological organisation, including the levels of species, individual organisms, and molecules. Repeated formation of new species (speciation), change within species (anagenesis), and loss of species (extinction) throughout the evolutionary history of life on Earth are demonstrated by shared sets of morphological and biochemical traits, including shared DNA sequences.

*Charles Darwin formulated the scientific theory of **evolution by natural selection**, published in his book *On the Origin of Species* (1859), a process demonstrated by the observation that more offspring are produced than can possibly survive, along with three facts about populations: 1) traits vary among individuals with respect to morphology, physiology, and behaviour (phenotypic variation), 2) different traits confer different rates of survival and reproduction (differential fitness), and 3) traits can be passed from generation to generation (heritability of fitness). Thus, in successive generations members of a population are replaced by progeny of parents better adapted to survive and reproduce in the biophysical environment in which natural selection takes place.*

In the early 20th century the modern evolutionary synthesis integrated classical genetics with Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection through the discipline of population genetics. The importance of natural selection as a cause of evolution was accepted into other branches of biology. Edited from Wikipedia.

Random Change or Development

The traits that Nature deems most suitable for survival may be gradually progressive or the result of random aberrations in genetic code causing step changes in evolution. Are you comfortable knowing you are the result of millions of years of random events? Would you prefer to know that there is a designed purpose?

Spectrum of Belief

Strong Theist – I do not believe, I know

Theist – I cannot know for certain, but I strongly believe in God and live my life on the assumption he is there

Technical Agnostic – I am uncertain but inclined to belief

Impartial Agnostic (50:50)

Technical Atheist → Atheist → Strong Atheist

Bertrand Russells' Celestial Teapot (Is There A God? 1952)

Many orthodox people speak as though it were the business of sceptics to disprove received dogmas rather than of dogmatists to prove them. This is, of course, a mistake. If I were to suggest that between the Earth and Mars there is a china teapot revolving about the sun in an elliptical orbit, nobody would be able to disprove my assertion provided I were careful to add that the teapot is too small to be revealed even by our most powerful telescopes. But if I were to go on to say that, since my assertion cannot be disproved, it is intolerable presumption on the part of human reason to doubt it, I should rightly be thought to be talking nonsense. If, however, the existence of such a teapot were affirmed in ancient books, taught as the sacred truth every Sunday, and instilled into the minds of children at school, hesitation to believe in its existence would become a mark of eccentricity and entitle the doubter to the attentions of the psychiatrist in an enlightened age or of the Inquisitor in an earlier time.

'Proofs' for the existence of God

- Regression – the first mover, the first cause, creation
- (Intelligent) Design – nothing we know looks designed unless it is designed, hence a designer (God)
- Ontological argument (Anselm Canterbury 1078) – it is possible to conceive of a being than which nothing greater can be conceived; if it does not exist, then is less than perfect, so it must.
- Beauty
- Personal Experience / Vision (the story of the camper)
- Scripture

Pascal's Wager – the asymmetry in the penalty for being wrong.

All humans bet with their lives either that (Christian) God exists or that he does not. Based on the assumption that the stakes are infinite if God exists and that there is at least a small probability that God in fact exists, then a rational person should live as though God exists and seek to believe in God. If God does not actually exist, such a person will have only a finite loss (some pleasures, luxury, etc.), whereas they stand to receive infinite gains (as represented by eternity in Heaven) and avoid infinite losses (eternity in Hell). Edited from Wikipedia - Blaise Pascal (1623–62).

Other Topics

- The Prayer experiment
- How did Religion evolve?
- Is God limited by the Laws of Nature?
- Morality – has religion a right to impose a code of ethics?

What about a 'God' who is not supernatural?