

Book Review

Review of Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*

TITLE: *The God Delusion*

AUTHOR: Richard Dawkins

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In *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins (2006) presents an apologia for atheism akin to Bertrand Russell's, yet takes a more contemporary approach. The book revolves around the questions "Does God exist, and if He does, what is his nature?" These questions have shaped the discourse in the philosophy of religion for centuries. Dawkins undertakes to debunk the notion of God's existence. The book is in the tradition of other atheistic writers such as Kai Nielsen, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean Paul Sartre, Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Karl Marx. As one reads the book, one is reminded of Russell's *Why I am not a Christian* (1957). As an apologia for atheism, the book lays a foundation for "the other view" in cases where arguments for God's existence are taken as a foregone conclusion. In fact, the book seeks to "emancipate" the human mind from the chains of religion- which is depicted as a manifestation of delusion or insanity.

In seeking to debunk religion, Dawkins presents four foundational propositions. *First*, atheists can be happy, balanced, moral, and intellectually fulfilled. *Second*, Darwinian natural selection rationally explains the origin of life better than religious doctrine. *Third*, no one is born Christian, Muslim or Jewish, and nobody should be labelled as such. *Fourth*, Atheist pride should assert itself. These propositions run coordinated threads in the entire book. The text is punctuated by jokes and abuses, and laced with a tone of personal vendetta against religion. This is illustrated in some atheistic remarks such as the assertion that the Old Testament God is 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). It is with the same vigor that Dawkins launches an onslaught against arguments for the existence of God. Specifically, Dawkins refutes Aquinas' five proofs of God's existence, Pascal's Wager, and Stephen Unwin's probability-of-God argument - all of which he dismisses as academic jokes (2006, 77-108).

Dawkins vilifies the claim by Christian apologists that some early scientists were Christians. He writes that the much acclaimed "scientists who believe" notion is, in fact, wrongly ascribed since the scientists only mention the supernatural in their attempt to show how incorrigible the notion of God is. These views are founded on Russell's statement that the "immense majority of intellectually eminent men disbelieve in Christianity religion, but they

conceal the fact in public, because they are afraid of losing their incomes" (cited in Dawkins 2006, 97).

Dawkins also rejects the widely held view that American "founding fathers" were believers. He cites the remarks of some of the said "fathers" to illustrate their disapproval of the Christians' thought. Thomas Jefferson claimed that "Christianity is the most perverted system that ever shone on man"; Benjamin Franklin remarked that "Lighthouses are more useful than churches", while John Adams is quoted as having argued that "This would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it As I understand the Christian religion, it was, and is, a revelation. But how has it happened that millions of fables, tales, legends, have been blended with Jewish and Christian revelation that have made them the most bloody religion that ever existed?" (cited in Dawkins, 2006, 111).

Having sought to show that the Christian is in error, Dawkins advances the view that the probability that God exists is equal to the probability that God does not exist is mistaken given the overwhelming evidence that God does not exist. Dawkins offers to guide the agnostic from such deviation - guidance that is not manifest in the later pages of the book.

Dawkins' book is a challenge to Christian intellectuals to take the lead in issues that in their view the scientists have not adequately considered instead of falling into the fallacy of *argumentum ad ignorantium* (appeal to ignorance). For instance, instead of Christians giving credible postulations in the developments in science, they escape reality by explaining every academic lacuna in terms of God's existence. It is in this context that the book presents arguments for evolutionism as a more formidable explanation of origins than the account of the existence of God in any religious book. It is within this paradigm that Fred Hoyle's adage (cited in Dawkins 2006, 113) that "the probability that life originated on Earth is no greater than the chance that a hurricane, sweeping through a scrap yard, would have the luck to assemble a Boeing 747" should not be regarded as a credible intellectual postulation.

This book is a wake-up call to students of Philosophy, religion and apologetics. If their aim is to seek knowledge, then the book offers resourceful information; if they seek exploratory knowledge in religion, then it offers sufficient information on arguments for the existence of God and how they can be challenged by contemporary thought. For the apologist, this is appropriate material to debate about and develop counter positions. Although some of the

arguments presented in the text are weak, a critic of this text will nonetheless find it a Herculean task to formulate non-emotive responses to them. A critic will need to punctuate his/her defense with resourceful interactive material that catalyzes contemplation. This book will definitely help the reader develop skills in sound argumentation through the examination of the arguments presented in it. In this manner, the reader will actualize the Antony Flew's view that to make sense of an academic position one has to do it in the strongest form possible. It would be interesting for the reader of this book to ascertain for himself/herself whether or not the evidence therein demands a verdict.