

The God Delusion Debate (Transcript) - Richard Dawkins vs. John Lennox

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---Beginning of debate and transcript---

Larry Taunton

Good evening. I'm Larry Taunton, executive director of Fixed Point Foundation the sponsor of this event. We welcome you to the University of Alabama at Birmingham Allis Stevens Center and we also welcome those were listening around the world. Tonight's debate features two of the great minds currently writing and speaking on this issue: Professor Richard Dawkins and Dr John Lennox. I'll not waste time now giving you their biographies, as you'll find them in your program. But it has been my pleasure to get to the both of these men. We have brought you here this evening under rather false pretences. It's not actually a debate this evening. Richard Dawkins wanted to come to the Bible belt to announce his conversion (audience laughter) to the Christian faith. Perhaps I'm mistaken.

Incidentally Richard is representing the atheistic position in this debate if you didn't know that, and Dr John Lennox the Christian one. There's something that I would like to say about the debate itself. We have thought that much of the discussion on the issue hasn't been particularly helpful as it's frequently framed as "science vs. religion". What we are seeking to do this evening is to narrow the discussion just a bit and hence that the name of this debate the "God Delusion Debate". This debate will feature and will focus on the book *The God Delusion* and Richard's assertions therein over and against the Christian faith. A word about Fixed Point Foundation: we are a Christian organization, and unashamedly so, but we also seek thoughtful civil discussion on meaningful issues and questions regarding eternity we think are meaningful indeed.

We ask that you extend every courtesy to these men whether you agree with them or not, and undoubtedly there will be much said this evening that you will take issue with. Nonetheless, we hope that you will extend to them a Southern welcome. We are also pleased to have with us tonight serving as our moderator Judge Bill Pryor. Many of you will recall that he was the attorney for the state of Alabama and is now a Federal judge. Bill, thank you very much. We also ask that you turn off your cell phones and join me in greeting these men and turning it over to Bill Pryor.

Moderator

Thank you Larry. Good evening and welcome to the debate. You all know the theme as Larry has introduced it of "The God Delusion vs. Christianity". There will be a structure to our debate this evening. We will begin with biographical statements from each of our debaters beginning with Professor Richard Dawkins and then turning over to Dr John Lennox. I asked that each of them provide a statement that help tell us something about themselves, and something about the book *The God Delusion*. We will then turn to the six major theses of Professor Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion*.

Now obviously it's a long book and we can't cover everything in it, but we have selected what we think are the six major themes. To introduce each of those themes, I will read some excerpts from Professor Dawkins' book and then give him an opportunity to elaborate and Dr Lennox an opportunity to respond. Each of those exchanges should be about five minutes per side, and then what is not reflected in your program is that each of our debaters will finish the program with final statements, with concluding remarks. We will start that with Dr Lennox and then we will turn to Professor Dawkins. So Professor Dawkins, you will have both the first and the last word, I suppose in the interest of Christian charity. Professor Dawkins, could you begin our

discussion with an autobiographical statement, tell us something about yourself and about the book?

Introduction

Prof. Richard Dawkins

I was born in Africa. I'm a child of what was in those days the British Empire. Descended from a long line of khaki shorts wearing, hairy kneed, brown shoed Colonial officers. I had every opportunity to become a naturalist, because Africa as you know is a wonderful place to be a naturalist. Unfortunately that's not the way it was. I never was much of a naturalist much to my father's disappointment I suspect, he is a very good naturalist. I suppose that's a preamble to saying that my interest in the science and biology, which is what I specialise in, came more from an interest in fundamental questions than from the love of watching birds or insects or pressing flowers. I wanted to know why we're all here, what is the meaning of life, why does the universe exist, why does life exist. That's what drew me to science.

My parents left Africa when I was about eight and I came with them. I was sent to boarding school in England. I suppose part of the point of this autobiographical notice to give a kind of religious background since we are talking about religion tonight. I had a harmless Anglican upbringing. I could never claim that I had religion thrust down my throat in the way it might have been had I been brought up in a more militant faith. Anglicanism as you know is a very civilized version of Christianity. No bells and smells and no creationist lunacy. I was confirmed into the Church of England and at the time I sincerely believed it. I had a brief period of doubt at about the age of nine, or about three years before my confirmation. This doubt was caused by the realization that there are lots of different religions in the world, and I recognized that it was an accident of my birth that I happened to have been born to the Christian faith. I recognized instantly that say had I been born in Afghanistan or born in India I would have believed very different things.

That quite rightly shook my faith in the particular religion I had been brought up in. Weirdly, and I don't know why, I seem to have lost those doubts when I was about 13 and I was confirmed into the Church of England. I went to Oxford after having lost my faith for good of about the age of 15 or 16 and that was because I discovered Darwinism and recognized that there was no good reason to believe in any kind of supernatural creator. And my final vestige, last vestige of religious faith disappeared when I finally understood the Darwinian explanation for life. I went to Oxford, I got a doctorate at Oxford eventually, I went to the University of California at Berkeley as a very young assistant professor teaching in those days animal behaviour, and then went back to Oxford after about two years at Berkeley and continued my career as a student of animal behavior.

About 1972 there was a general strike in Britain, and there was no electric power and I couldn't do my research and so I thought I would write a book. And I started to write a book which eventually became my first book *The Selfish Gene* however, unfortunately the electric power came on again and so I shelved the first two chapters of the book that I had already written of the book, put them in a drawer and forgot about them until about three years later in 1975 when I got a sabbatical leave and resumed writing *The Selfish Gene*. Since then I've written about eight more books:

The Extended Phenotype, The Blind Watchmaker, River out of Eden, Climbing Mount Improbable, Unweaving The Rainbow, A Devil's Chaplain, The Ancestor's Tale, and most recently *The God Delusion* which is the subject of tonight's debate.

I regard it as an enormous privilege to be alive, and I regard it as a privilege to be alive especially at the end of the 20th century beginning of the 21st century, a privilege to be a scientist and therefore to be in a position to understand something off the mystery of existence, why we exist. I think that religious explanations although they may have been satisfying for many centuries, are now superseded and outdated. I think moreover that they're petty and parochial and that the understanding we can get from science of all those deep questions that religion once aspired to explain are now better, more grandly, in a more beautiful and elegant fashion explained by science.

Moderator

Thank you Professor Dawkins. Dr Lennox-

Dr John Lennox

Well ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for inviting me. I'm delighted to be here. Each one of us has a biography and a worldview. Our set of answers to the big questions that life throws at us. And so a little about my biography: I'm married to Sally, we have three children and four grandchildren. I work now at the University of Oxford as a mathematician and as a philosopher of science. I was born in the middle of the last century in a country with the tragic reputation for sectarian violence: Northern Ireland. My parents were Christian but they were not sectarian. In the book *The God Delusion* Richard you say that religion teaches us that it is a virtue to be satisfied with not understanding. Well, whatever other religion this may apply to, it certainly did not apply to the Christianity my parents taught me from the Bible.

They encouraged me to be intellectually inquisitive because they were like that themselves. Not in spite of their Christian faith, but because of it. And I owe them an immense debt for setting me free to read everything from Marx and Russell to C.S. Lewis, and developed in those days an interest the big questions of life. I was very fortunate to get the chance to leave Ireland and go to Cambridge where I could indulge my passion for mathematics and for science in general. And Cambridge not only gave me the opportunity to develop those intellectual pursuits, but it gave me the opportunity to meet many people of other worldviews who did not share my background and my convictions. As a result I developed a considerable interest in atheism, an interest which led me subsequently as an Alexander von Humboldt fellow to study in Germany and then travel very frequently to Eastern Europe during the period of the Cold War. After the fall of Communism I went very often to the academies of science at universities in Russia to discuss and reason about these things and to see at first hand the effect systematic exposure to atheist indoctrination of the preceding 70 years. And so I too am very privileged to live at this time and to be involved in the public discussion of these issues.

Now reading Richard's book, I found absolutely fascinating because it strikes me as an impassioned crusade to warn his fellow human beings of the slavery, the oppression and the mental and possibly physical tortures imposed on them by religion. And I actually feel a lot of sympathy for you on this particular point, because I myself am totally opposed to any religion that seeks to impose itself by force or that takes advantage of or abuses people in any way. You cannot impose truth by force. Both of us

I think hold all that religion should be debated in a rational way as anything else. I share his passion for truth, neither of us mercifully as a post-modern relativist. But as a passionate atheist Richard is committed to the idea that God is a delusion. For him, ultimate reality I take it consists of the impersonal man, matter and energy of the universe. I believe the exact opposite. God far from being a delusion is real. Ultimate reality is a personal, eternal and supernatural God who has revealed himself in the universe. It is where the Bible and supremely in Jesus Christ His son who is Lord and God incarnate. I'm very aware that this puts me according to Richard's book firmly in the category of those who sit fluttering among the dove coats of the deluded, sucking my religious dummy or pacifier as you call an Alabama.

You suggest that religion builds a firewall in the mind against scientific truth. Well that might be tragically the case with some religions but it's not so with biblical Christianity. Indeed the reason ladies and gentlemen that I'm passionate about truth is that God is the God of all truth. One of the most famous statements that Jesus ever made was "I am the truth."¹ An astonishing assertion that as C.S. Lewis pointed out long ago:

"Is either megalomaniac, pathologically mistaken or valid since He (Jesus) is claiming not merely to say true things, although that is so, but claiming to be ultimate truth itself. The ultimate truth behind everything from the Andromeda nebula, to human life, conscience and mind."²

Please note that what divides us is not science. We're both committed to it. What divides us is our worldviews, his atheistic mine theistic and Christian. Now his book presents to us a grim world. It is a no holds barred attempt to deliver people from the dragon of religion so that they can lead a life of uninhibited self fulfilment unencumbered with a background threat of an imaginary God. And he says it looks bleak and cold especially from the security blanket of religious ignorance, but ladies and gentlemen we need to take it seriously. If that's the way it is, that that's the way it is and we to face it, but we need to discuss seriously and look at the evidence. Neither of us wishes to base his life of a delusion, but which is the delusion? Atheism or Christianity? That is for each of us to decide on the basis of the evidence of course.

First thesis: "Faith is blind; science is evidence based."

Moderator

Thank you. The first thesis of Professor Dawkins' book, and each of these reflected in your program is a summary. It's not a direct quotation, but the summary is: "faith is blind. Science is evidence based." I have one excerpt at the top of page 126 to illustrate your argument Professor Dawkins:

"One of the truly bad effects of religion is that it teaches us that it is a virtue to be satisfied with not understanding." (Dawkins, 2008, p. 126.)

Could you please elaborate?

¹ John 14:16

² Reference unknown.

Prof. Richard Dawkins

Science uses evidence to discover the truth about the universe. It's been getting better at it over the centuries in the teeth of opposition from religion, although it has to be admitted that of course science grew out of a religious tradition. Religion, as the quotation that Judge Pryor read out, teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding. I think that when you consider the beauty of the world, and you wonder how it came to be what it is, you are naturally overwhelmed with a feeling of awe, a feeling of admiration. And you almost feel a desire to worship something. I feel this and I recognise that other scientists such as Carl Sagan feel this, Einstein felt it.

We all of us share a kind of religious reverence for the beauties of the universe, for the complexity of life, for the sheer magnitude of the cosmos, the sheer magnitude of geological time. And it is tempting to translate that feeling of awe and worship into a desire to worship some particular thing; a person, an agent. You want to attribute it to a maker, to a creator. What science has now achieved is an emancipation from that impulse to attribute these things to a creator and it's a major emancipation because humans have an almost overwhelming desire think that they've explained something by attributing it to a maker. We're so used to explaining things in our own world like these television cameras, like the lights, like everything we make, the clothes we wear, chairs we sit on. Everything we see around us is a manufactured object, and so it's so tempting to believe that living things or the stars or mountains or rivers have all been made by something.

It was a supreme achievement of the human intellect to realise that there is a better explanation for these things, that these things can come about by purely natural causes. When science began, the aim to achieve it was there but we didn't know enough. Nowadays at the end of the 20th century, beginning the 21st century, we still don't know everything but we've achieved an enormous amount in the way of understanding. We now understand essentially how life came into being. We know that we are all cousins of all animals and plants; we know we are descended from a common ancestor which might have been something like bacteria. We know the process by which that came about, we don't know the details but we understand essentially how that came about.

There are still gaps in our understanding. We don't understand how the cosmos came into existence in the first place, but we are working on that. The scientific enterprise is an active seeking, an active seeking out of gaps in our knowledge, seeking out of ignorance so that we can work to plug that ignorance. But religion teaches us to be satisfied with not really understanding. Every one of these difficult questions that comes up science says "right, let's roll up our sleeves and work on it". Religion says, "Oh God did it. We don't need to work on it. God did it. It's as simple as that." We have no thrusting force pushing us on to try to understand. Religion stultifies the impulse to understand because religion provides a facile, easy, apparent explanation although as we'll see later in the evening it isn't really an explanation and it prevents the further work on the problem.

Moderator

Thank you. Dr Lennox-

Dr John Lennox

There are two issues here: faith is blind, science is evidence based. I do not agree with the first one, but I very much agree with the second one. Some faith is blind. And blind faith can be very dangerous especially when it's coupled with a blind obedience to an evil authority. And that ladies and gentleman I would like to emphasise is true whether the blind faith is that of religious or secular people. But not all faith is blind faith because faith itself carries with it the ideas of belief, trust, commitment, and is therefore only as robust as the evidence for it. Faith in the flying spaghetti monster much beloved of Richard Dawkins, a delightful idea, is blind because there is no evidence for the flying spaghetti monster. But faith in relatively theory is not blind because there is evidence supporting it. I can't speak authoritatively for other religions but faith in the Christian sense is not blind, and indeed I do not know a serious Christian who thinks it is.

Indeed, as I read it, blind faith in idols and figments of the human imagination, in other words delusional gods, is roundly condemned in the Bible. My faith in God and Christ as the Son of God is no delusion it is rational and evidenced based. Part of the evidence is objective and some of it comes from science, some comes from history, and some is subjective coming from experience. Now of course we do not speak of 'proof'. You only get proof of the strict sense in my own field of mathematics, but in every other field including science we can't speak of proof, we can speak of evidence of pointers of being convinced beyond reasonable doubt. I think it's important in this context to emphasise that science is limited because it seems to me a creeping danger of equating science with rationality, but what is beyond science is not necessarily irrational.

Science cannot tell us for instance whether a poem or work of literature or a work of art and music is good or beautiful. Science can tell us that if you put strychnine into your grandmother's tea it will kill her, but science cannot tell you whether it is morally right to do so. And the Nobel prize-winner Sir Peter Medawar who is quite a hero I think for both of us, has pointed out that you can easily see the limits of science because it cannot answer the elementary questions of a child: who am I, what is the purpose of my existence, where am I going? Now Richard has just contrasted that science and religion, religion being content with not understanding whereas science is unravelling the understanding about the universe. And I understand and feel the force of that objection very strongly because sometimes Christians I have met have been guilty of a lazy "God of the gaps" kind of solution. "I can't understand it, therefore God did it." And of course God disappears as the gaps close.

But I like to point out that there are two kinds of gaps ladies and gentlemen: there are gaps that science closes, and I call those the bad gaps, but there are also gaps that science opens that we may come to some of those later. But as for the idea itself Richard referred to the very important fact that science and modern science as we know it exploded in the 16th and 17th centuries and it arose out of a theistic background, and many philosophers of science have studied this and come to the conclusion that's now called Whitehead's thesis, that human beings became scientific because they expected law and nature, and they expected law and nature because they believed in the lawgiver. I think that is profoundly important because it means far from religion hindering science it was the driving force behind the rise of science in the first place.

And when Isaac Newton for example discovered his law of gravity and wrote down the equations of motion, he didn't say "marvellous I now understand it. I've got a mechanism therefore I don't need God." In fact it was the exact opposite. It was because

he understood the complexity of sophistication of the mathematical description of the universe that his praise for God was increased. And I would like to suggest Richard that somewhere down in this you're making a category mistake, because you're confusing mechanism with agency. We have a mechanism that does XYZ therefore there's no need for an agent. I would suggest that the sophistication of the mechanism, and science rejoices in finding such mechanisms, is evidence for the sheer wonder of the creative genius of God.

Second thesis: "Science supports atheism not Christianity."

Moderator

Our next thesis is that science supports atheism not Christianity. And on this thesis, Professor Dawkins, I would like to read to excerpts from your book. The first is on page 67. You are quoting your colleague the Chicago geneticist Jerry Coyne with approval, and he writes:

"To scientists like Dawkins and E.O. Wilson, the celebrated Harvard biologist, the real war is between rationalism and superstition. Science is but one form of rationalism while religion is the most common form of superstition." (Dawkins, 2008, p. 67.)

Several pages earlier on page 59 you write:

"NOMA" (which is the idea that religion and science do not overlap; non-overlapping magisteria)" (Dawkins, p. 59).

Would you care to elaborate?

Prof. Richard Dawkins

Yes. First I'd like to respond to a little bit of what John said on the previous occasion. I'd feel happier if we could have a bit more of a dialogue rather than this. When you say faith is rational and evidence-based, I mean if that were true it wouldn't need to be faith would it? If there were evidence for it, why would you need to call it faith? You'd say it was just evidence. And when you said that faith in relativity in Einstein's theory of relativity is evidence-based, that of course it is, but the evidence is all-important. I mean Einstein's predictions fit in with observed fact and with a whole body of theory whereas we only need to use the word "faith" when there isn't any evidence.

Dr John Lennox

No not at all. I presume that you've got faith in your wife. Is there any evidence for that?

Professor Richard Dawkins

Yes, plenty of evidence! (Audience laughter). Let's generalise it. Never mind about my wife. Let's say that in general, how do we know that somebody loves us? Ok? You can use a word faith for that but it's not the right use of the word.

Dr John Lennox

Oh it is!

Professor Richard Dawkins

You know why, you know your wife loves you because of all sorts of little signs, catches in the voice, little looks in the eye, and that's the evidence. That's perfectly good evidence, that's not faith.

Dr John Lennox

Yes it is!

Professor Richard Dawkins

Well, we're coming down to pure semantics.

Dr John Lennox

I think you've influenced too much by Kant you see.

Professor Richard Dawkins

Umm, let's go on. Which of these which of these statements are we now on? It didn't seem to have much connection with the quotes from *The God Delusion*. You read a quote from Jerry Coyne about the real war being between supernaturalism and naturalism. The context of that quote was the turf wars in the sense in American education between creationism and evolution, and are within that context I have been accused of letting this side down because as you know there is a problem with American education where some nutcases are trying to introduce creationism into American schools which is obviously very bad for science, and my scientific colleagues are deeply worried by this and are trying to fight it and all power to them.

They complain that I am not helping matters that I'm in a sense rocking the boat by saying quite openly that it is my understanding of evolution that has led me to atheism. And they point out again quite rightly that if I was called up in a court of law testifying in favour of evolution and against teaching creationism and the lawyer said, "Mr Dawkins is it true that evolution is ready to atheism?" I should have to say yes whereupon he would turn to the jury and say my case rests. It doesn't do the cause of science any good to unite evolution with atheism. That was the context of Jerry Coyne's remark. Coyne was saying okay if you're concerned only with the with the narrow political battle of saving American science in the schools, then you should button your lip and stop talking about atheism. If on the other hand you think as Coyne does, that the real war is between supernaturalism and naturalism, then you would say well the battle over evolution and creationism is only a skirmish.

The real war is over something rather more profound. That was the context of that. NOMA was the second quotation that you read, that's non-overlapping magisteria. The late Stephen Gould argued that there was no real battle between science and religion because they what about non-overlapping magisteria, different things, ships that pass in the night, no contact between them. They are about totally different things. I don't think that for a moment. I think that religion really is in a sense about science; I think that religious claims about the universe are scientific claims. I suspect that John and I may agree about this. Claims about the universe are scientific claims a universe with a God would be a very different kind of universe from a universe without a God.

Scientific methods are the appropriate methods or at least the scientific way of thinking, is an appropriate way of thinking, for deciding whether we live in this kind of universe with a God or that kind of universe without a God. It becomes even more glaring where you talk about miracles which, I mean however much sophisticated

theologians may profess their nonbelief in miracles, the plain fact is that the ordinary person in the pew, the ordinary unsophisticated churchgoer, believes deeply in miracles and it's largely miracles that persuade that person into the church in the first place.

If there are miracles they are to be judged as by scientific means. If there was a virgin birth, if somebody was raised from the dead, these are strictly scientific claims that it be difficult to verify, but as I said in the book *The God Delusion* if you could imagine hypothetically that DNA evidence could be discovered showing the Jesus never had a father, that Jesus was born of a virgin, then can you imagine any theologians saying, "Oh no, not relevant. They are separate magisteria. Science has no bearing on this case." Of course they wouldn't. Science has every bearing on this case. That that's what I have to say about NOMA and I think I've probably run out of my five minutes.

Moderator

Thank you Professor Dawkins.

Dr John Lennox

I agree with you very much on the NOMA issue Richard, and of keeping science and religion separate. Actually if you read the small print on NOMA, they rather disconcert you because it says that science deals with reality and religion and everything else and of course I'm not very happy with that. I certainly agree with you that the modes of logical analysis that science has introduced to you are the right ones to deal with many of the central claims of Christianity. I would widen it a bit. It's historical science of course we're dealing with events of the past. But Christianity is falsifiable in that technical sense I would very much support that.

Now the thesis here is that science supports atheism not Christianity. I think that atheism undermines science very seriously. Because if you think of the basic assumption that all of us who are scientists have, that is we believe that the rational intelligibility of the universe. And it's interesting to me that scientists of the eminence of Eugene Wigner and Albert Einstein use the word "faith". They cannot imagine a scientist without this faith because of course they point out that you've got to believe in the rational intelligibility of the universe before you can do any science at all. Science doesn't give you that. Now the interesting thing is this: suppose we now look at that issue against the background of the two worldviews were discussing tonight, atheism and theism. Atheism tells you, at least Richard tells us in his book, that:

"Since human life has been cobbled together by (unguided) evolution, it unlikely that our view of the world is accurate".³

Quite so. And if you are a reductionist, as you must be as a materialist, reducing beliefs to the physics and chemistry of neurological structures, then it raises a very big question ladies and gentlemen. If in the end my beliefs, my theories, my scientific theories are the results ultimately of the motions of atoms in my brain produced by an unguided, random, mindless process, why should I believe them? In other words it's like someone sitting on the branch of a tree cutting off the branch on which they're sitting. And it seems to me that therefore atheism actually undercuts the scientific endeavour very seriously. That for my mind is a fatal flaw.

³ Exact quote does not appear to be found in *The God Delusion*.

An argument that purports to derive rationality from irrationality doesn't even rise in my opinion to the dignity of being an intelligible delusion. It is logically incoherent. But theism tells us that the reason science is possible, the reason that I can access the universe at least in part through my human intelligence, is because the same God who created the universe is ultimately responsible for the human mind in here. So that's the base level, but when we come up a level now, and look at science itself, we have the fine-tuning of the universe. The fact is that the basic constants of nature have got to be very accurate in order to have a universe just like this one. Now I know that some people "prefer", that's the word that Sir Martin Rees uses, an explanation in terms of a multiverse which actually doesn't in my opinion solve the logical problems. But I'm very interested in the verdict of Arno Penzias who won the Nobel Prize for discovering the microwave background, and he says:

"Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created out of nothing, one with the very delicate balance needed to provide exactly the right conditions required to permit life, and one which has an underlying (one might say 'supernatural') plan."⁴

So that physics itself looking at the constants and the very, very specified numbers they had to have comes that kind of conclusion, and incidentally, and the Bible gets very easily dismissed I'm afraid also in *The God Delusion*, Penzias added:

"The best data we have [concerning the Big Bang] 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."⁵

It's interesting ladies and gentlemen isn't it that we only got the idea that the universe had a beginning, evidence for in the 1960's, and it was very exciting I remember it well. Because for centuries Europe was dominated by the thinking of Aristotle, which put the earth, fixed at the centre of the universe and everything rotating about it and everything existing eternally. The fascinating thing is this: that when the evidence began to arrive, that there was a finite beginning to space and time, some leading people in the journal *Nature*, the editor Maddox, said this is dangerous we don't like this because it will give too much leverage to those who believe in creation. Now what I find very interesting is this: the Bible is frequently dismissed as being anti-scientific because it makes no predictions. Oh no, that's incorrect! It makes a brilliant prediction! For centuries it's been saying there was a beginning, and if scientists had taken that a bit more seriously they might have discovered evidence for the beginning a lot earlier than they did.

Third thesis: "Design is dead otherwise one must explain who designed the designer."

Moderator

Professor Dawkins. I understand your desire in some ways to respond to Dr Lennox but I think this next topic and the excerpt I will read will allow you to both advance the

⁴ H. Margenau & R.A. Varghese (1992, p. 83). *Cosmos, Bios, and Theos*. La Salle, IL: Open Court.

⁵ Arno Penzias to the *New York Times*, March 12, 1978

discussion of the next thesis, which is that “design is dead otherwise one must explain who designed the designer.” I think it will allow you to advance that well. The quote that I’m going to read, the excerpt, is on page 109 and what you wrote is this:

“The whole argument turns on the familiar question ‘Who made God?’, which most thinking people discover for themselves. A designer God cannot be used to explain organized complexity because any God capable of designing anything would have to be complex enough to demand the same kind of explanation in his own right. God presents an infinite regress from which he cannot help us to escape. This argument, as I shall show in the next chapter, demonstrates that God thought not technically disprovable, is very, very improbable indeed.”
(Dawkins, 2008, p. 109.)

Prof. Dawkins

First, I find it deeply unimpressive that the Bible it can be said to predict the big bang. There are only two possibilities: either the universe began or it’s been here forever. Just two possibilities. To get one of them is really not that impressive.

Dr John Lennox

At least it got it right.

Prof. Dawkins

Toss a penny and you have 50% chance of getting it right. Right, “design is dead otherwise one must explain who designed the designer.” Well, we skate over a lot when we say “design is dead”. I think probably John and I would agree that life is explained, Darwin explains life and no serious scientist doubts that, so we go back to the previous and rather more difficult stage in the understanding of where we come from it is the origin of the universe itself. And that really is genuinely difficult. We don't know. We understand essentially biology; we don't understand cosmology. In a sense we could say cosmology is waiting for its Darwin.

John mentioned, in an answer to the previous question, the idea of the physical constants being finely tuned. It is quite true that many scientists, many physicists maintain that the physical constants, the half-dozen or so numbers, that physicists have to simply assume in order to derive the rest of their understanding, just have to be assumed. You can't provide a rationale for why those numbers are there, and physicists have calculated that if any of these numbers was a little bit different, the universe as we know it wouldn't exist. We wouldn't be here. The universe would have perhaps fizzled out in the first yoctosecond and so we wouldn't be here or other things would have gone wrong.

It's tempting, once again, to import the easy, facile idea of the designer and to say that the designer twiddled the knobs of the universe at the big bang and got them exactly right for the gravitational constant right, the strong force right, the weak force right and so on. But it seems to me to be manifestly obvious that that is a futile kind of explanation because as the quotation says, “Who designed the designer?” You have explained precisely nothing because instead of just saying, “Oh the knobs were just tuned to the right values anyways”, you say “oh there was a God who knew how to tune

the knobs to the right values.” And if you’re going to postulate that, then you have in a sense sold the pass.

Some physicists solve that problem by not invoking God of course, but by invoking the anthropic principle saying, “well here we are, we exist, we have to be in the kind of universe in which is capable of giving rise to us.” That in itself I think is unsatisfying and as John Lennox rightly says, some physicists solve that by the multiverse idea, the idea that our universe is just one of many universes. There’s a sort of foaming bubble, a bubbling foam of universes and the one in which, the bubble in which we are is only one of billions of universe and each of these universes has different fundamental constants. Most of them have fundamental constants which are unsuited to give rise to the sort of permanence and the sort of chemistry and the sort of the conditions that give biological evolution, Darwinian evolution the chance to get going.

A tiny minority of those universes has what it takes to give rise to Darwinian evolution, ultimately chemistry, and then evolution. And that tiny minority has to include the universe in which we sit because here we are. The anthropic principle, the principle that we have to be in a universe of giving rise to us, plus the principle of the multiverse, provides at least an interim, satisfying explanation in a way that creator couldn't possibly be a satisfying explanation for the reason that I've given. Then having got ourselves into a universe which is capable of generating stars, capable of generating chemistry and ultimately capable of generating the origin of life, then biological evolution takes over and now we are on a clear run.

Now we understand what happened once biological evolution gets going then it's easy to understand most of what's difficult, most of the difficulty of understanding universe lies in the vast complexity of life. That's what really truly impresses people. That's why people who believe in God mostly do believe in God because they look around the living world and they see how impressive it is. So that level of impressiveness is completely destroyed by Darwin, and Darwin of course doesn't explain the origin of the universe and for that I invoke the anthropic principle and the multiverse, less satisfying admittedly but science makes progress. The one you can be absolutely sure is that a creative designer cannot be a satisfying explanation.

Moderator

Dr Lennox-

Dr John Lennox

The anthropic principle, as you stated Richard, I think is a complete truism. Of course we have to be in such-a-such kind of planet of the kind that we could appear on. That does not answer the question of how we came to exist on it. And I fear I have to disagree with your Darwinism. Darwinism does not explain life. It may explain certain things about what happens when you've got life, but evolution assumes the existence of a mutating replicator. It does not explain how that replicator came to exist in the first place. Now that's a major discussion. I want to address the “who designed the designer” question because it's the old schoolboy question, “who created God?” I am actually very surprised to find it as a central argument in your book because it assumes that God is created and I'm not surprised therefore that you call the book *The God Delusion*, because created gods are by definition a delusion.

Now I know and I ought to explain that Richard doesn't like people who say to him that they don't believe in the God he doesn't believe in but I think that this is possibly touching a sore spot because you leave yourself wide open to the charge. After all, you are arguing that God is a delusion and in order to weigh that argument I need to know what you mean by "God". And if you say, "If there is a God you have to ask who created God", that means that you reduced to thinking about created gods. Well none of us believe in created gods; Jews, Muslims or Christians. I think that argument then it's entirely beside the point and perhaps you ought to put it in your shelf marked 'celestial teapots' where it belongs.

The God who created the universe ladies and gentlemen was not created. He is eternal. This is the fundamental distinction between God and the universe. It came to exist, He did not. And this is precisely the point that Christian apostle John makes at the beginning of his gospel: "In the beginning was the word"⁶. The word already was. All things came to be by him. God is uncreated. The universe was created by Him. Now I don't know whether Richard has difficulty with the concept of the uncreated. I don't know and I'd love to know whether he believes as a materialist that matter and energy of the laws of nature were always there, because if they were he does believe in something eternal. So perhaps the difficulty lies in believing in an eternal person.

But I want to probe deeper into this because he suggested that introducing God would mean an end of science. God is no explanation since by definition God is more complex than the thing you are explaining. Now this he states is the central argument of his book. I would not have expected an argument like this from a scientist because explanations in science themselves are usually in terms of increasing complexity. An apple falling is a simple event. The explanation of terms of Newton's law of gravitation is already stretching the minds of many people, but his explanation in terms of a warp in space-time is stretching the minds of the cleverest. Simplicity isn't the only criterion of truth. Let me give you an example: suppose you're an archaeologist and I'm exploring a cave with you, and you're a Chinese expert. On this cave you see two scratches and you say, "Human intelligence!" And I say, "Pardon? They're just two scratches." And you say "but those are the Chinese character 人 (rén) which means a human being." But I say, "Look Richard, that's no explanation at all!"

You're postulating something as complex as a human brain to explain two scratches. That means that your explanation is more complex than the thing you're explaining. That's no explanation at all. And that seems to me that's exactly what you're saying in your book. The reason we can deduce something as sophisticated as human intelligence from two scratches on a cave wall is because they have a semiotic dimension. They carry meaning. And that fascinates me as a mathematician because the reductionist is committed to deducing things that carry meaning, and I would include the DNA molecule among them. Is committed to explain you those in terms of the basic materials.

But as was pointed out a long time ago by Nobel Prize winner Roger Sperry, the meaning of the message is not going to be found in the physics and chemistry of the paper and ink. And it fascinated me too, to see that you approved in your book of the physicist looking for a TOE, a 'theory of everything', but that's a theory where the buck stops. Incidentally there is no hope for a TOE as Stephen Hawking has said in 2004 on

⁶ John 1:1

the basis of Gödel's mathematics and its application to physicists. So I'm interested that you were prepared as I understand it to agree that a TOE was a good thing in physics, as perhaps you'd like a TOE provided there is no God attached to it.

Fourth thesis: "Christianity is dangerous."

Moderator

Professor Dawkins. My next excerpt, we're going to change gears to some extent to the fourth thesis, which is that "Christianity is dangerous". I think you'll like this one. It comes from the very first page of the book, from the preface. You write, and I have a few excerpts to read:

"Imagine, with John Lennon, a world with no religion. Imagine no suicide bombers, no 9/11, no 7/7, no Crusades, no witch-hunts, no Gunpowder Plot, no Indo/Pakistan partition, no Israel/Palestine wars, no Serb/Croat/Muslim massacres, no persecution of Jews as 'Christ-killers', no Northern Ireland 'troubles', no 'honour killings', no shiny-suited bouffant haired televangelists fleecing gullible people of their money ('God wants you to give till it hurts'). Imagine no Taliban to blow up ancient statues, no public beheadings of blasphemers, no flogging of female skin for the crime of showing an inch of it." (Dawkins, 2008, p. 24.)

You then write, on page 303, that:

"Even mild and moderate religion helps to provide the climate of faith in which extremism naturally flourishes". (Dawkins, p. 303.)

And finally, you write, on pages 347 and 348:

"More generally (and this applies to Christianity no less than to Islam), what is really pernicious is the practice of teaching children that faith itself is a virtue. Faith is an evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument." (Dawkins, pp. 347-348.)

Prof. Richard Dawkins

This is supposed to be a debate and I feel intensely frustrated. I'm going to reply to what John Lennox said about (inaudible). "Who created God?" I mean the word "created" was smuggled in by somebody else. I didn't, or maybe I did, but that's not the point. The point is not whether God is a create thing or not. The point is this issue of simplicity which you rightly went on to talk about. In order to understand the existence of complexity, we can't just postulate complexity. We have to go back to simplicity. Now John used the illustration of an archaeologist wasn't it, who found some scratches on a cave? It was supposed to be a powerful argument that said, "Well these scratches are very simple, but the person who did this if was complex." That's nothing to do with the argument I'm putting. The argument I'm putting is that if we're trying to explain complexity, we need some kind of an ultimate explanation for the existence of a complex object, an improbable object.

Certainly the scratches on the cave are simple and certainly that made those scratches is complex. If you found, if you went to another planet and you found some scratches that indicated the existence of life, you would of course, we would both

postulate the existence of a complex living being. But we would both need an explanation for where that complex living being came from. And I put it to you that just to say "it was always there" or "it just happened" is precisely kind of non-explanation which creationists accuse evolutionists of erecting. They say, "How could an eye come about by sheer chance?" Well of course an eye couldn't come about by sheer chance. It has to come about by a gradual, incremental process from simple beginnings. Exactly the same is true of anything complex. And a God, you can't just duck the issue, you can't just evade the issue by saying, "God was always there". You still need an explanation.

So it tells you nothing to say that the scratches on the wall are simple. And by the way the idea that physics is complex because it is difficult, that's a confusion of the two words, of the two meanings of the word simple. Simple meaning 'easy to understand', and certainly modern physics isn't too easy to understand. But there is a sense in which it's simple in the way that biology isn't. I haven't got much time to deal with the...

Moderator

I'll give you a couple extra minutes.

Prof. Richard Dawkins

Sorry, I didn't mean to steal that. Let me come onto the thing about Christianity being dangerous. The reading from the preface, the quote from John Lennon imagine no Taliban and all that, that I think is self-explanatory and I won't go into that. I think what I will do is zero in on a particular point of the third quotation I think it was, which was about children and the evils of teaching children that certain things are true without evidence. Teaching them that that faith is a virtue. I would not for a moment say that all religion is bad or all religion is dangerous or Christianity is dangerous. Certainly only a minority of religious people are bad or do bad things.

The point about teaching children that faith is a virtue, is that you are teaching them that you don't have to justify what you do. You can simply shelter behind the statement, "That's my faith and you're not to question that". What I'm objecting to is the convention that we have all of us bought into whether we are religious or not, that religious faith is something to be respected, something not to be questioned, and if somebody says "that's my faith" then you simply have to respect it, tiptoe gently away and say nothing more. In most cases that's quite harmless, but if you are the kind of person who takes your faith really literally, and who believes that Allah has ordered you or that it be the will of Allah that you go blow somebody up, then it is the fact that you were educated as a child in madrassa to believe implicitly in the faith that you were taught and not to question it which if you happen to be of an unstable turn of mind or if you happen to be of a violent turn of mind leads to the sorts of terrible acts which are done in the name of religion.

I must stress again I'm not saying that the majority of religious people do terrible acts. I am saying that faith is a terrible weapon because it justifies the performance of terrible acts which do not have to be justified by reason or evidence. The one gift I would wish to give to any child is scepticism. Don't believe something just because you're told it, don't leave something because of your tradition, don't believe something because it's in a holy book. Look for the evidence and question sceptically. If everybody

did that we wouldn't be suffering some of the terrible things that are going on in the world the moment.

Moderator

Dr Lennox-

Dr John Lennox

I'd dearly love to come back on the first one Richard. I think there is a slight obsession with the simple to complex. If you're building a factory, say for manufacturing computers, you dig a hole in the ground first and that sounds very simple, but it gets more complex as it goes up. Everything comes from the mind of the planners, and what I'm talking about is inference to the best explanation, and the inference when we look at this semiotic say of DNA and the fact that it carries a biological message so to speak to an intelligent designer, seems to me to be much more sensible than the inference to mindless processes that we do not know can do any such thing.

But that's a big debate and we've both written about it and you have to be referred to the literature, because I want to come to this topic about Christianity being dangerous and I want to agree very largely with a lot of what you say. The danger of fanatical religion that fans the flames of violence. And quite frankly I'm ashamed as a Christian of the reputation particularly in the Middle Ages, the Crusades and so on, that they are associated with Christianity. But I would like to point out that the perpetrators of that kind of atrocity were not following Christ but they were actually disobeying his explicit command as he prohibited, very famously as you know, his followers from using physical weapons: "My kingdom is not of this world" He told them; He told Pilate.⁷

And it's very interesting to my mind that Christ was actually put on trial for being a fanatical terrorist. That is very easy to forget. And he was publicly exonerated from the charge by the Roman procurator. Truth cannot be imposed by violence, particularly the truth that Christ had come into the world to bring a message of God's love and forgiveness. So I would agree with you and the danger of training children to be fanatics by not allowing them to question is a very serious one. And I'm so glad that I had parents who encouraged me to think and part of parcel of the Christian faith was that thinking.

You ask is to imagine with John Lennon a world without religion. Well I'd like you to imagine with John Lennox a world without atheism: with no Stalin, with no Mao, with no Pol Pot, today the heads of the three officially atheistic states. A world with no Gulag, no Cultural Revolution, no Killing Fields. I think that would be a world worth imagining too. And I must say, I am very disturbed in your book by what seems to me to be an attempt to airbrush out the atrocities of the Communist world. I've spent a lot of time visiting that part of the world and I don't recognise any thing that you say. Atheism was not peripheral to Marxism. For Marx the criticism of religion was the foundation of all criticism. And so it concerns me that a scientist who is very interested in historical science in the sense of evolutionary biology unravelling history, is content with a very superficial analysis of the period of the Cold War. And I'm even more disturbed to read things like this:

⁷ John 18:36

“Even if we accept that Hitler and Stalin shared atheism, they both also have moustaches as do Saddam Hussein.” (Dawkins, 2008, p. 309).

So what? Well yes! All three of them had noses in common with the rest of us, but what kind of reasoning is this? We are not talking about shared characteristics in general, but the motivating ideology that drove these men to murder millions in their attempt to get rid of religion whether Jewish, Christian or anything else. So I'm very disturbed at your historical analysis. You write:

“I do not believe there is an atheist in the world who would bulldoze Mecca — or Chartres, York Minster or Notre Dame.” (Dawkins, 2008, p. 249).

But what about the thousands of churches that were demolished in Stalin's Russia, and the forced transformation of them into museums? I can understand why one would want to rewrite the history of the 20th century to airbrush out the role of atheism, because one can very easily draw a parallel between the antireligious agenda of the new atheists and the attempt of communism to obliterate religion. That's not going the right way I think and I'm sure that you would be rightly insulted, and I wouldn't suggest it for a moment, if I were to say that because you and Stalin were atheists that you would have approved of the ruthless elimination of millions. You rightly expect me to differentiate between atheists. I would like you to write another book in which you differentiate between religions because they are not all the same. Some support fanaticism others don't.

Then finally you contend that the teachings of moderate religion an open invitation to extremism. Well that is not true of the teachings of Christ. I can't speak for other religions, but what about the moderate teaching of atheism? I've sat beside a young girl of thirteen of the GDR (German Democratic Republic) who just been told as the brightest child at the school that she cannot have any more education since she is not prepared to swear public allegiance to the atheistic state. I will call that intellectual murder, and it was committed many times in the name of atheism. But according to you, it's far worse than bulldozing buildings, but you say there is not the smallest evidence that atheists do such things? But there is. But perhaps I've misunderstood you.

Prof. Dawkins

Yes you did.

Moderator

(To Richard Dawkins) Do you want to take a moment?

Prof. Richard Dawkins

Well I'm very happy to give up on the next one.

Moderator

Which would you prefer?

Dr John Lennox

I'm very happy. I would like Richard to choose what he wants to do because I've made some strong statements.

Prof. Richard Dawkins

In *The God Delusion* I very deliberately made very little of all the individual evils of religion. I mention them occasionally but I didn't go on about the Crusades, the Conquistadors or anything like that. I am not trying to say that religion, that religious people do bad things. I agree fully that Stalin and Hitler and Pol Pot and Mao did terribly bad things. It may even be that atheism was an integral part of the Marxism which led them to do terrible things if indeed it was their Marxism that led them to do bad things. What interests me is that I think that there is a logical path from religion to doing terrible things and I kind of touched on it in the last in the last answer when I was talking about faith leading you to things.

There is a logical part that says if you really, really, really believe that your God, Allah, whoever it is, wants you to do something, you go to heaven, you go to paradise if you do it, then it's possible for an entirely logical rational person to do hideous things. I cannot conceive of a logical path that would lead one to say "because I am an atheist therefore it is rational for me to kill or murder be cruel to some horrible thing." I can easily see that there are plenty of individuals who happen to be atheists maybe even individuals who have some other philosophy which incidentally happened to be associated with atheism. But there is no logical path.

Those young men who bombed the London subway and the buses, those 19 men who flew planes into various targets in the United States in September 2001, they were not psychopaths, they were not downtrodden ignorant people. They were well-educated rational people who passionately believed they were right. They thought they were righteous, they thought they were good, by the likes of their religion they were good. The same things could be said of the hideous things done by the Taliban, the oppression of women. These people believe deeply in what they're doing and it follows logically once you grant them the premise of their faith then the terrible things that they do follow logically. The terrible things that Stalin did did not follow from his atheism. They followed from something horrible within him.

Christopher Hitchens has made the point that Stalin was in effect a new Tsar of a country which for centuries had been brought up to believe that there was a semi-divine king, the Tsar, and it would have been madness for Stalin not to have exploited this cringing loyalty in the peasantry that had been for centuries subjugated to the Tsars. It would have been madness for Stalin not to have done that. It would be madness for Hitler, whether or not Hitler himself was religiousness, and there's some dispute about that, there's a good case to be made that Hitler was religious, but I don't care whether he was not. The fact is that Hitler's terrible deeds were done by Christians who were, I think I leave that. Even that's not relevant. The point I would return to yet again is that you will not do terrible deeds because you are an atheist. You may, not for rational reasons, you may well for very rational reasons do terrible things because you are religious. That's what faith is about. That's what faith means. I suppose you could say that there was a kind of faith that motivated Hitler's followers and Stalin's followers as well but that's a separate point.

Moderator

Let's have a brief response. We do want to get through all of the topics tonight, but Dr Lennox-

Dr John Lennox

Well I would want to argue that there is a logical path from any ideology that is fanatical and oppressive to the kind of behaviour you say whether it's religion or atheistic, because atheism is a faith of course as well.

Prof. Richard Dawkins

It's not.

Dr John Lennox

Of course it is. Don't you believe it?

Prof. Richard Dawkins

You're an atheist with respect to Thor, Wotan, and Zeus.

Dr John Lennox

That's right. I don't believe them, but you believe atheism. It is your faith.

Prof. Richard Dawkins

No, I'm in exactly the same position with respect to your YHWH, your Jehovah, what ever you call him. I'm in exactly the same position with the respect to him as you are to respect to Zeus. And I cannot imagine not believing in Zeus leading one to do terrible deeds. It's exactly the same with not believing in God.

Moderator

I'm going to wrap (inaudible). I mean it now this time Dr Lennox. If we're going to get to the rest of the debate.

Dr John Lennox

Yes, let's go on. Let's go on, I think the issue is nothing to do with Zeus and so on. They are non-existent deities. The issue is to deal with two alternative explanations of the universe and each of us have our faith. I believe there is a God behind this universe; you believe the universe is all there is. The cosmos is all there is. Those are both statements of faith. You have evidence you believe for them.

Fifth thesis: "No one needs God to be moral."

Moderator

The fifth thesis is that "no one needs God to be moral". I only have one quote. It's from page 226:

"We do not need God in order to be good or evil." (Dawkins, 2008, p. 226.)

Prof. Richard Dawkins

If you think about why you might need God in order to the moral, I could only think of two reasons how that might come about. You might say you need a book to tell you what's moral. Well as for that I sincerely hope that nobody in this room bases their morals on the Christian Bible or the Quran because if they do then their morals are likely to be hideous. Needless to say, you can find some decent verses (audience clapping) you can find some decent verses in both the Bible and the Quran and if you pick and choose those verses you can say with hindsight, "this verse fits in with my view of what's moral, that verse doesn't, so I can ignore that verse and choose this verse" but

you didn't need the Bible in order to do that picking and choosing. You did the picking and choosing on the basis of something else, something which we all have in common whether we are religious or not.

We are all, to a greater or lesser extent, moral, some of us more so than others. Whether we are moral or not has nothing to do with whether we read the Bible. Some people are kind, some people are sympathetic; some people care about suffering, other people don't. It has nothing to do with the Bible. The other reason why you might need religion in order to be moral is that you are either afraid of God, you're afraid if you're not moral you'll get punished, or you're trying to suck up to God (audience laughter) and be good so that you'll get a reward. Neither of those two is a very noble reason to be good to say the least.

Now you might say that that forces me into a challenge: how do I know what's moral? I don't on the whole, but the point I want to make is that there does seem to be a kind of universal human acceptance that certain things are right and other things are not. If you look cross culturally, look at different anthropologic findings on different cultures, you'll find there's a kind of agreement that certain things are wrong and other things are right, there is disagreement in detail. The golden rule, "do as you would be done by", "do unto others what you would expect them to do to you". This is a very widespread principle, and it almost amounts to common sense in a way. You certainly don't need a Holy book to tell you to do that.

Now as an evolutionist, I think it comes partly from our evolutionary past. I think that there was a time in our history when we lived in small kin groups and we lived in small groups where good deeds could be expected to be reciprocated and under those conditions we developed a kind of lust to be good which was parallel to the lust for sex, which has obvious Darwinian advantages. Now we no longer live in small villages, in small clans, and so the Darwinian pressure to be good is no longer so strong nor is the Darwinian pressure for lust as strong as it once was because nowadays we often use contraceptives and therefore sexual behaviour does not lead to the reproductive consequence which is of course the Darwinian reason for it. But that doesn't matter. The point is that our evolutionary past built into us a lust for sex and by the same token it built into us a lust to be good. A lust to be friendly, a lust to cooperate. A lust to be sympathetic towards suffering.

So I think it partly comes from that, but I think it also comes from something less easy to define but which is clearly there, something I call it the shifting moral zeitgeist. It's something that changes from decade to decade. Living as we do in 2007 it would be a broad consensus of what's right and wrong. Racism is wrong, sexual discrimination is wrong. Cruelty is wrong, which characterize how we live in the early 21st century, which would not necessarily have characterized our ancestors in this place 200 years ago. The consensus has moved on and I find this a very interesting, fascinating fact which suggests that there really is a kind of something in the air about what is regarded as moral, and it clearly has nothing to do with religion because it doesn't come from scripture. Scripture doesn't change over the decades in the way our attitude to slavery, our attitudes towards women etc. do. There really does seem to be a powerful shifting Zeitgeist effect which doesn't tell you anything in itself, but which indicates that there is something in the air, some other force, something which we can't understand with sufficient sociological, psychological sophistication, but whatever else it is, it's not religion.

Moderator

Dr Lennox-

Dr John Lennox

The question is, "Do we need God to be moral". If we formulate it as, "Can an atheist be good?" of course. Because as I see it, the very fact that human beings all around the world show a common core of morality is evidence for the truth of the Biblical claim that we are moral beings made in the image of God. So what I would want to say is this: of course we can be good without God in the sense of our personal behaviour, but I'm not sure whether we can find foundations for the concept of being good without God.

You admit that you cannot get ethics from science in your book *A Devils Chaplain*. Science is no method for deciding what is ethical and I find it very interesting reading one of your other books, *River Out of Eden*, to find what I understand is your analysis of what the universe is like at bottom, in a universe of:

"...blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, and no good, nothing but pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music." (Dawkins, 1996, p.133).

Now that seems to me to be saying that good and evil don't exist, so I don't even know where you get the moral criteria to discuss it. If a rock falls off of a mountain onto your head and kills you, it makes no sense calling the rock evil. It just exists. If Pol Pot chooses to eliminate a million intellectuals or the 9/11 terrorists choose to fly hundreds of people to their deaths into the twin towers, how can you call them evil if they were simply dancing to their DNA? Now that strikes me as a hideous world you're delivering us into. That is no morality at all.

And so therefore just pushing this a little bit further, if good and evil don't exist, there is no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference, how can it possibly make sense to talk of the evils of religion or of the good of atheism? Now I know that you suggest elsewhere that we have to rebel against our genes, but that creates to my mind an immense problem with what you say because if we are nothing but our genes dancing to the tune of our DNA, what part of us can rebel against them? So I want to suggest this, that far from atheism delivering an adequate explanation for morality it dissolves it, and it's a problem that's been around for centuries. How can something mindless and impersonal like the universe impose a sense of morality upon us? And David Hume, a philosopher whom you quote, pointed this out very clearly. He said:

"You just cannot get an ought from an is. You cannot derive morality and ethics from matter and energy. You can not go from facts to values."⁸

And what concerns me greatly is that although you don't say it in your book, is that this kind of philosophy, that has no base for morals in a transcendent God, has got to find morality either in raw nature or a combination of nature and society, and often leads to a kind of utilitarianism. And we are in serious ethical confusion I think in our

⁸ Reference unknown.

contemporary world, in the legal sphere, in the ethical and the medical sphere, and in the business sphere, because the foundations are crumbling. And I want to suggest, I know it's provocative, but I want to suggest that Dostoevsky was very perceptive, and I've had many Russians agree with me when he said:

"If God does not exist, everything is permissible".⁹

He's not saying that people can't be good; he's saying that the foundations of morality are removed, and Niche predicted exactly the same thing. So I find that trying to get morality elsewhere is something that is doomed to destruction. I would love to spend time discussing the Bible. I think your view of the Bible is a bit one sided. There are things there to be discussed.

Moderator

We're about to turn to it.

Dr John Lennox

Ok, fine.

Sixth thesis: "Christian claims about the person of Jesus are not true."

Moderator

The last thesis, "Christian claims about the person of Jesus are not true." His alleged miracles violate the laws of nature. I'm going to read to excerpts Prof Dawkins. The first comes from page 92 of your book:

"The historical evidence that Jesus claimed any sort of divine status is minimal."
(Dawkins, 2008, p. 92.)

The next comes from page 257:

"Jesus was a devotee of the same in-group morality — coupled with outgroup hostility - that was taken for granted in the Old Testament. Jesus was a loyal Jew. It was Paul who invented the idea of taking the Jewish God to the Gentiles. Jesus would have turned over in his grave if he had known that Paul would be taking his plan to the pigs." (Dawkins, p. 257.)

Prof. Richard Dawkins

Once again I can't let pass. That rhetoric of mine about blind physical forces and indifference and nature neither cares, DNA neither cares nor knows; maybe you're right that that portrays a hideous world. Well maybe the world is a hideous world. It doesn't make it not true. That's the fundamental point that I would wish to leave with you, that you can talk to your blue in the face about how it would be nice if such-and-such were true, it would be nice if the world were friendly to us, it would be nice if the world was

⁹ Although it is debated whether Dostoevsky stated these exact words, some (such as http://infidels.org/library/modern/andrei_volkov/dostoevsky.html) suggest that this key phrase appears word for word in Part 4, Book 11, Chapter 4 ("A Hymn and a Secret") of *The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts*, by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1880).

not such a hideous one. But I see it as first it tells you nothing about whether it's true or not. We have to decide whether or not separately.

It gives us, if it is a hideous world, it gives us something to rise above and we clearly do rise above it. You raise the question "how do we rebel?" and seem to think there was some kind of contradiction. There is no contradiction with rising above Darwinian dictates. We do it every time we use a contraceptive. It's easy! Every time you use a contraceptive you are defying the Darwinian imperative to reproduce. You're enjoying sex using the Darwinian, the pleasure with built into your brains by Darwinism because normally sex leads to reproduction. You're cutting off that link and you're using sex for pure enjoyment without reproduction. That's defying, that's rebelling against the selfish genes and we can do a grand job of rebelling against the hideous blind physical forces that put us here. We understand what put us here. We understand that we are here as a result of a truly hideous process, never mind about the effects on humanity. Natural selection, the process which guides evolution, the process whereby...

Moderator

I'm going to have to cut you off.

Prof. Richard Dawkins

Ok. Natural selection is an ugly process that has beautiful consequences. We humans can rise above it. That's only 2 1/2 minutes.

Moderator

Well, our time has been used a lot by pre-exchange.

Prof. Richard Dawkins

I understand.

Moderator

If you would like to take thirty seconds to wrap up.

Prof. Richard Dawkins

What about the final wrap up that we're going to do?

Moderator

We will do that and that's our best opportunity if it's still left. Dr Lennox-

Dr John Lennox

Which question do you want me to refer to?

Moderator

Well it's your choice I guess.

Dr John Lennox

Well I think I'd like to make a comment on what Richard just said because I think you are talking about the about two different things. My point was this: that if you believe that the universe is at bottom, there is no good and evil, you remove from yourself the categories you're using to discuss morality. That's my point. You're assuming it's true. I'm arguing on the basis of its truth that you are removing those categories and therefore you leave yourself powerless to comment.

Prof. Richard Dawkins

You make a good point that I've removed any absolute standard of morality. The empirical fact is however that we all very largely share what they regard as morality and that's a very interesting fact.

Dr John Lennox

It goes much further than that. If that's what you meant you should have written that.

Prof. Richard Dawkins

Well, I kind of did.

Dr John Lennox

Saying "there's no good or evil" is a very strong absolutist statement I would have thought.

Moderator

How about...

Dr John Lennox

But I want to refer to this...

Moderator

How about the topic.

Dr John Lennox

Let me say something about this thesis about the person of Jesus and so on. Again I have concerns about *The God Delusion* in its treatment of the authority and reliability of Scripture because those who have studied it in detail, I see you've referenced a very few scholars in his book, have come to the conclusion that say for example the historian Luke, is one of the most authoritative historians of all ancient history. And A.N. Sherwin-White of Oxford, a Roman historian, says that:

"It would be absurd to suggest that Luke's basic historicity was false even in matters of detail."¹⁰

And I'm concerned too not only about your attitude to history Richard, but your description of Jesus as belonging to a person who practised an 'in-group morality and out-group hostility'. And your interpretation of "love your neighbour"¹¹, which I note doesn't come from a theologian but from an anaesthesiologist, and I think he just might have put you to sleep just a little bit as you read it, because in Leviticus which quotes "love your neighbour as yourself" just a bit further down it says:

"And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt..."¹²

¹⁰ A. N. Sherwin-White (1963, p. 189). *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

¹¹ Leviticus 19:18

¹² Leviticus 19:33-34a. Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

So in point of historicity, you are totally wrong about the attitude of Jesus. In fact, I would have thought you'd have been very familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan, and in the parable it was a Samaritan, one of the strangers that showed mercy. And that was precisely the parable that Jesus taught to illustrate the "love your neighbour as yourself" of Leviticus. A mistake like that seems to me to be very serious indeed. I mean I react to it a bit like this: what would you think if I got all my reviews of Darwin from an engineer, and never bothered to read the *Origin of Species*?¹³ I think you would be distressed by that.

Finally a word about miracles: this is a massive subject. You claim with David Hume that miracles violate the laws of nature. Well David Hume is a very curious person to quote on this topic because David Hume didn't believe really in the laws of cause and effect, on which laws of nature are founded. He didn't believe in causality and he didn't appear to believe in the principle of induction. And so that he's not a very good authority to quote. Secondly, I do not think that miracles are violations of the laws of nature. Because the laws of nature describe what normally happens. God, who is the God of this universe, and created it with its regularities, is perfectly at liberty to feed a new event into the universe. Just as CS Lewis makes the point, if I put two dollars plus two dollars in my desk tonight, (I have) four dollars. If I find in the morning there is one dollar, I don't say that the laws of arithmetic have been broken. I say the laws of Alabama have been broken, and I call for a federal judge (audience laughter).

Moderator

Well, the Federal Judge is going to ask that you continue your remarks with the understanding that you really are needing to conclude them within the next couple of minutes to give Professor Dawkins the last word. There is a broadcast audience and that's part of the reason for our time limits.

Dr John Lennox

Where those meant to be my concluding remarks?

Moderator

No, I'm giving you an extra minute or so to make your concluding remarks before giving the last word to Professor Dawkins.

Concluding statements:

Dr John Lennox

Well ladies and gentlemen, it's been an interesting discussion. I'll have to make my remarks very briefly. I do not think the answer is atheism though I agree with much of the criticism that Richard makes of religion. I think the book *The God Delusion* gives the game away in the dedication of the front of the book to Douglas Adams where he says:

"Isn't enough to see that the garden is beautiful without having to believe that there are fairies at the bottom of it too?" (Dawkins, 2008, p. 7)

¹³ Darwin, C. (1859). *On The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection of the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*.

You do a brilliant job of getting rid of the fairies, thought it must be said that most of them didn't believe in them any way. But when you see the beauty of a garden, in say a new college in Oxford, do you believe there is no gardener or no owner? That its sublime beauty has come about from raw nature by pure chance? Of course not. For gardens are to be distinguished from raw nature by the operation of intelligence, and what you doing in your but I think is presenting us with an obviously false set of alternatives. Either we take gardens on their own or the garden plus fairies, but they don't appear on their own. They have gardeners and owners. So does the universe. You say there is no evidence of God, and yet your very description of the universe as a garden bears witness that the evidence is all around you.

Atheism ladies and gentlemen is not only false, it contains no message that deals with the central problem of human rebellion against God. History is littered with attempts to build a godless utopia, each one of them based as the book of Genesis suggests that they would be, on a denial that God has ever spoken or even that He exists. And I would remind you that the world that Richard Dawkins wishes to bring us to is no paradise except for the few. It denies the existence of good and evil, it even denies justice. But ladies and gentlemen our hearts cry out for justice, and centuries about the apostle Paul spoke to the philosophers of Athens, and pointed out that there would be a day in which God would judge the world by the man that he had appointed, Jesus Christ, and that he had given assurance to all people by raising Him from the dead. And the resurrection of Jesus Christ, a miracle, something supernatural, for me constitutes the central evidence upon which I base my faith not only that atheism is a delusion, but that justice is real and our sense of morality does not mock us, because if there is no resurrection, if there is nothing after death, in the end the terrorists and the fanatics have got away with it.

Moderator

Ok, thank you. Professor Dawkins-

Prof. Richard Dawkins

Yes, well that conclusion rather gives the game away doesn't it? And all that stuff about science and physics, and the complications of physics and things, what it really comes down to the resurrection of Jesus. There is a fundamental incompatibility between the sort of sophisticated scientists which we hear part of the time from John Lennox, and its impressive and we are interested in the argument about multiverses and things. And then having produced some sort of a case for a kind of deistic God, perhaps some God the great physicist who adjusted the laws and constants of the universe, that's all very grand and wonderful then suddenly we come down to the resurrection of Jesus. It's so petty, it so trivial, it's so local, it's so earthbound, it's so unworthy of the universe.

When we go into a garden and we see how beautiful it is, and we see coloured flowers and we see butterflies and the bees, of course it's natural to think there must be a gardener. Any fool is likely to think there must be a gardener. The huge achievement of Darwin was to show that that didn't have to be true. Of course it's difficult, of course it had to wait until the mid-19th century before anybody thought of it. It seems so obvious that if you've got a garden there must be a gardener who created it and all that goes with that. What Darwin did, was to show the staggeringly counterintuitive fact that this not only can be explained by an undirected process, it's not chance by the way entirely wrong to say it's chance, it's not chance.

Natural selection is the very opposite of chance and that's the essence of it. That was what Darwin discovered. He showed not only a garden but everything in the living world, and in principle not just on this earth but on any other planet, where ever you see the organised complexity that we understand that we call life, that it has an explanation which can derive it from simple beginnings, by comprehensible, by rational means. That is possibly the greatest achievement that any human mind has ever accomplished. Not only did he show that it could be done, I believe that we can argue that the alternative is so unparsimonious and so counter to the laws of common sense that reluctant as we might be because it might be unpleasant for us to admit it, although we can't disprove that there is a God, it is very, very unlikely indeed.

Larry Taunton:

We are told that in the earlier part of the last century, that GK Chesterton and George Bernard Shaw engaged in a lively but very friendly debate. It may be said that perhaps we haven't seen anything quite like that until tonight. Ladies and gentleman, please join me in thanking them.

---End of debate and transcript---

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