

DEAR READER OF *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

"I can't believe that," said Alice.
"Can't you?" the Queen said in a pitying tone. "Try again, draw a long breath and shut your eyes."
Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said. "One can't believe impossible things."
"I dare say you haven't had much practice," said the Queen...
Lewis Carroll¹

In September, 2009, the Editor of *The Wall Street Journal* asked evolutionist and atheist, Richard Dawkins, and religious writer, Karen Armstrong, to respond to the question *Where does evolution leave God?* The topic for their debate was loaded with materialist preconceptions. What the question really amounted to was this: *Where does the reality of evolution leave the idea of God?* For who could doubt that Darwinian evolution is a reality. Overwhelming numbers accept it and, even it be conceded that it is only a theory, it has surely been demonstrated in any number of ways. Does it not, for example, ground the whole of biological science? On the other hand, since one cannot prove the existence of something that does not fall under the senses, and God does not fall under the senses, it is inevitable that God can only be an idea.

The alleged debate between the two was what in Australia we call 'a furphy'. There was no debate, for both contributors are materialists. Karen Armstrong did not challenge Richard Dawkins' atheistic views; she confirmed them. The *WSJ* question might, then, be reduced to this assertion: *How on earth could our materialist perspective of the world possibly be disturbed.*

Dawkins' materialism, with its attendant atheism, is well known. On the other hand, Armstrong was born a Catholic and became a nun in a religious order in England in 1962 which she left in 1969. She published subsequently a thoughtful and dispassionate account of the problems she had encountered there in *Through the Narrow Gate* (1982). The Catholic faith that she seemed to retain on leaving the order became submerged in Modernism and is now manifested in a religious syncretism which, as the reader will see from her contribution, glosses over any distinction between one 'faith' and another. The 'faith' about which she writes so fulsomely was delineated and condemned by Pius X 100 years ago in the encyclical *Pascendi* as inchoate atheism. In the final paragraph of *his* contribution, Dawkins roundly, and rightly, condemns it as such.

Let us get one thing clear: the materialist is no less a believer than the one with religious faith. Indeed, he is *even more* a believer. For whereas the religious believer, no matter how poorly he may be able to state it, founds his belief on reality—*I did not bring myself into existence; I do not keep myself in existence; ergo I am dependent upon some greater being than myself*—the materialist believes in nothing more than an idea.

¹ *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*, 1871, ch. 5.

The materialist will tell you that he is a man of facts, not beliefs. But it is not so: he is not at all interested in facts, except where they support this idea. What is the idea? That all the effects in the universe can be explained without recourse to any cause but matter. What drives the materialist scientist, and the huge numbers that support him, is not reason *but faith in this idea*.

Which of these two has more justification for his belief?

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Life is simple for the materialist. He does not bother his head with distinctions between the real and the conceptual. If he can *imagine* some thing to be true, that is enough for him to judge that *it is* true. He can, with the White Queen, believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast.

A quick dip into Dawkins' contribution demonstrates some of the impossible things in which he believes. As Aristotle remarked, *for living things, to live is the same as to be*. If you kill a hen you not only take away its life but also its existence. Put another way, whatever it is that gives the hen *life* also gives it *existence*. Every conception of a living being, its first moment of life, involves a new creation. Now Dawkins says this:

"Evolution is the universe's greatest work... the creator of life."

Hence, he believes, (one) that mere dumb matter has not only the power of intellect (for works are the effect of intellect), but also (two) the infinite power of bringing living things into existence. Ancillary to these, he must also believe (three) that mere matter can produce something out of nothing, and, (four) that the non-living can produce the living.

A little later he says:

"The laws of physics... can make rocks and sand, gas clouds and stars, whirlpools and waves..."

No, they can't. Laws are not causes, but effects, the means used by intellect to order reality. Doubtless, Dawkins made rules for the governance of his children. The rules did not regulate their conduct: it was Dawkins who did that; the rules were the means he used to impose his order upon them. How are the laws of physics to which he pays such fealty any different? If there is a law, there has to be a law maker. What does his claim amount to then? He believes (five) that it is the law, not the lawmaker—i.e., the instrument, not the principal—which made the universe in all its intricacy. Which is bit like saying it is the saw rather than the carpenter that builds the house. Whatever the price to be paid, Dawkins cannot allow that there is a God. Which leads him to assert:

"Making the universe is the one thing no intelligence, however superhuman, could do..."

Intelligence can make a table, a computer and what he calls "the miracle of a 747 jet". It can certainly make a working model of the solar system. Why, then, as a matter of principle, could it not make the solar system—provided it was sufficiently 'super-human'? Here Dawkins believes (six) in the impossibility of the possible.

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Dawkins and his ilk think they have discovered the secret of the universe. They have not. Darwinian evolutionary theory is simply applied materialism. Look at its provenance. Darwin borrowed his theory from Spencer. And Spencer got *his* delusions from the philosophers who had preceded him, notably Hegel, Kant and, ultimately, Descartes, the first to reject reality in favour of his own perceptions. Descartes' rejection of the authority of reality parroted Luther's rejection of the authority of God—which was incipient atheism. With Darwin's theory, Luther's rejection of God has achieved its apotheosis. No one can be an atheist who is not first a materialist.

Consider Richard Dawkins sitting at his computer. If pressed, he will concede the machine's fourfold causality: the matter from which it is made—its *material* cause; the intricate formality according to which the matter is designed and constructed—its *formal* cause; the inevitability of a maker, or makers—its *efficient* cause; and, the reason it was brought into existence, as instrument to aid men in their considerations and works—its *final* cause. Yet when he turns to his proper subject, the elements of the natural world, he denies the existence of any but the *material* cause, and pretends that factors which are not causes at all, time and chance, are sufficient to make up for any *lacunae* in logic. He is not compelled to this strange view by science, but by the philosophy to which science has given its allegiance. Dawkins acknowledges this accident of history explicitly:

“Before 1859 it would have seemed natural to agree with the Reverend William Paley... that the creation of life was God's greatest work...”

Then materialism began to gain ascendancy in men's minds.

A work of human art such as a computer is nothing but the application by man of his intellect to the works of nature, in imitation of those works. Hence, by art man does nothing but reproduce in the things he makes the fourfold causality that obtains in all natural things. Just as there are four causes of the computer at which Richard Dawkins sits, there are four causes of Richard Dawkins. His *material* cause is patent; it is the matter out of which he is made. The *formal* cause, that which makes him be a man (and not a mineral, or a tree, or a monkey, a donkey or some other beast) is his human, and immaterial, soul. The *efficient* cause is his Creator. And the *final* cause is the reason why his Creator made him, the end consistent with his human nature He intends for him.

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Dear Reader of *The Wall Street Journal*, one hundred years ago you did not exist. In another hundred you shall have ceased to do so (at least as far as your body goes). You are *contingent*: you *have* existence—and are only too conscious of the fact that you can lose it. You are *dependent*: you do not keep yourself in existence; another does that for you. In these two characteristics you share the lot of every creature in the universe, for each is a compound *entis et essentiae*, of *what* it is, and *that* it is.

Now why may there not exist—as a possibility—a being which is not compound, but simple? whose essence *is* existence? a being that is not contingent, but *necessary*? not dependent, but *self-sufficient*? a being that encompasses within itself *actually* all the potentiality of every contingent and dependent thing in the universe?

Why exclude the possibility of such a being just because no one has ever observed it? Why allow your intellect to be fettered by the materialist imperative? We are surrounded by realities that are not observable, but no less real for that. We may see a *just* action performed, but no one has ever seen *justice*. A judge may exercise *mercy* in passing sentence on an offender, but the thing, *mercy*, does not fall under the senses: it is known only through its effects. We may observe a loving mother, but the thing, *love*, has never been seen. The reason is that *justice*, *mercy* and *love* are not material things. Yet who will deny that these *immaterial* things are real? We can see that a man is alive, we observe in him the effects of life; but no one has ever seen the reality that keeps him alive, his soul. It is not material, yet it is real. Indeed, the soul of a man is the greater part of his reality. Remove it and what is left but a material shell which quickly resolves into its elements. Why is it impossible, then, that there exists such a BEING just because it does not fall under our senses?

However imprecisely he may understand or express it, the religious believer *has* a logical solution to the conundrum of existence. He accepts with humility that he is an effect of intrinsic and extrinsic causes: he faces reality. In contrast, the believer in the secular faith of atheism has no logical solution to the issue: he refuses to face reality: he is a fool. St Paul spells out the measure of his folly:

“Ever since God created the world his everlasting power and deity—however invisible—have been there for the mind to see in the things he has made. That is why such people are without excuse: they knew God and yet refused to honour him as God or to thank him...” [Romans 1: 20-21]

Take the advice Boëthius gave mankind some 1,500 years ago. Abandon for a moment the corybantic in which you live—the blaring of automobile horns, the flashing of neon signs, the burden of material possessions—and take yourself off into the wilds. Go out into the dark in the middle of a moonless night and look up at the myriad of the stars above you. Understand that *He Who Is* made them all an aeon of time ago, just as He made you. He did not give to them, dumb material things that they are, despite their majesty, what He has given you; for He chose to make you in His own image and likeness, with intellect and will. *They* will endure but *you* are quickly coming to your end. He will not require of them what he will require of you, an account of your stewardship. Throw off now, while you still have time, the nonsense of Darwin and of Dawkins, and realise your utter dependence upon God.

Michael Baker

1st October 2009—*St Thérèse of the Infant Jesus*

APPENDIX

From *The Weekend Australian*, September 19-20, 2009 (reproduced from *The Wall Street Journal*).

NOTHING BEYOND BELIEF

Karen Armstrong, a British writer on comparative religion and a former nun, says we need God to grasp the wonder of our existence

Richard Dawkins has been right all along, of course—at least in one important respect. Evolution has indeed dealt a blow to the idea of a benign creator, literally conceived. It tells us that there is no Intelligence controlling the cosmos, and that life itself is the result of a blind process of natural selection, in which innumerable species failed to survive. The fossil record reveals a natural history of pain, death and racial extinction, so if there was a divine plan, it was cruel, callously prodigal and wasteful. Human beings were not the pinnacle of a purposeful creation; like everything else, they evolved by trial and error and God had no direct hand in their making. No wonder so many fundamentalist Christians find their faith shaken to the core.

But Darwin may have done religion—and God—a favor by revealing a flaw in modern Western faith. Despite our scientific and technological brilliance, our understanding of God is often remarkably undeveloped—even primitive. In the past, many of the most influential Jewish, Christian and Muslim thinkers understood that what we call "God" is merely a symbol that points beyond itself to an indescribable transcendence, whose existence cannot be proved but is only intuited by means of spiritual exercises and a compassionate lifestyle that enable us to cultivate new capacities of mind and heart.

But by the end of the 17th century, instead of looking through the symbol to "the God beyond God," Christians were transforming it into hard fact. Sir Isaac Newton had claimed that his cosmic system proved beyond doubt the existence of an intelligent, omniscient and omnipotent creator, who was obviously "very well skilled in Mechanicks and Geometry." Enthralled by the prospect of such cast-iron certainty, churchmen started to develop a scientifically-based theology that eventually made Newton's Mechanick and, later, William Paley's Intelligent Designer essential to Western Christianity.

But the Great Mechanick was little more than an idol, the kind of human projection that theology, at its best, was supposed to avoid. God had been essential to Newtonian physics but it was not long before other scientists were able to dispense with the God-hypothesis and, finally, Darwin showed that there could be no proof for God's existence. This would not have been a disaster had not Christians become so dependent upon their scientific religion that they had lost the older habits of thought and were left without other resource.

Symbolism was essential to premodern religion, because it was only possible to speak about the ultimate reality—God, Tao, Brahman or Nirvana—analogically, since it lay beyond the reach of words. Jews and Christians both developed audaciously innovative and figurative methods of reading the Bible, and every statement of the Quran is called an ayah ("parable"). St Augustine (354-430), a major authority for both Catholics and Protestants, insisted that if a biblical text contradicted reputable science, it must be interpreted allegorically. This remained standard practice in the West until the 17th century, when in an effort to emulate

the exact scientific method, Christians began to read scripture with a literalness that is without parallel in religious history.

Most cultures believed that there were two recognized ways of arriving at truth. The Greeks called them *mythos* and *logos*. Both were essential and neither was superior to the other; they were not in conflict but complementary, each with its own sphere of competence. *Logos* ("reason") was the pragmatic mode of thought that enabled us to function effectively in the world and had, therefore, to correspond accurately to external reality. But it could not assuage human grief or find ultimate meaning in life's struggle. For that people turned to *mythos*, stories that made no pretensions to historical accuracy but should rather be seen as an early form of psychology; if translated into ritual or ethical action, a good myth showed you how to cope with mortality, discover an inner source of strength, and endure pain and sorrow with serenity.

In the ancient world, a cosmology was not regarded as factual but was primarily therapeutic; it was recited when people needed an infusion of that mysterious power that had—somehow—brought something out of primal nothingness: at a sickbed, a coronation or during a political crisis. Some cosmologies taught people how to unlock their own creativity, others made them aware of the struggle required to maintain social and political order. The Genesis creation hymn, written during the Israelites' exile in Babylonia in the 6th century BC, was a gentle polemic against Babylonian religion. Its vision of an ordered universe where everything had its place was probably consoling to a displaced people, though—as we can see in the Bible—some of the exiles preferred a more aggressive cosmology.

There can never be a definitive version of a myth, because it refers to the more imponderable aspects of life. To remain effective, it must respond to contemporary circumstance. In the 16th century, when Jews were being expelled from one region of Europe after another, the mystic Isaac Luria constructed an entirely new creation myth that bore no resemblance to the Genesis story. But instead of being reviled for contradicting the Bible, it inspired a mass-movement among Jews, because it was such a telling description of the arbitrary world they now lived in; backed up with special rituals, it also helped them face up to their pain and discover a source of strength.

Religion was not supposed to provide explanations that lay within the competence of reason but to help us live creatively with realities for which there are no easy solutions and find an interior haven of peace; today, however, many have opted for unsustainable certainty instead. But can we respond religiously to evolutionary theory? Can we use it to recover a more authentic notion of God?

Darwin made it clear once again that—as Maimonides, Avicenna, Aquinas and Eckhart had already pointed out—we cannot regard God simply as a divine personality, who single-handedly created the world. This could direct our attention away from the idols of certainty and back to the "God beyond God." The best theology is a spiritual exercise, akin to poetry. Religion is not an exact science but a kind of art form that, like music or painting, introduces us to a mode of knowledge that is different from the purely rational and which cannot easily be put into words. At its best, it holds us in an attitude of wonder, which is, perhaps, not unlike the awe that Mr. Dawkins experiences—and has helped me to appreciate—when he contemplates the marvels of natural selection.

But what of the pain and waste that Darwin unveiled? All the major traditions insist that the faithful meditate on the ubiquitous suffering that is an inescapable part of life; because, if we

do not acknowledge this uncomfortable fact, the compassion that lies at the heart of faith is impossible. The almost unbearable spectacle of the myriad species passing painfully into oblivion is not unlike some classic Buddhist meditations on the First Noble Truth ("Existence is suffering"), the indispensable prerequisite for the transcendent enlightenment that some call Nirvana—and others call God."

Richard Dawkins, a British evolutionary biologist and atheist, argues that evolution leaves God with nothing to do

Before 1859 it would have seemed natural to agree with the Reverend William Paley, in "Natural Theology," that the creation of life was God's greatest work. Especially (vanity might add) human life. Today we'd amend the statement: Evolution is the universe's greatest work. Evolution is the creator of life, and life is arguably the most surprising and most beautiful production that the laws of physics have ever generated. Evolution, to quote a T-shirt sent me by an anonymous well-wisher, is the greatest show on earth, the only game in town.

Indeed, evolution is probably the greatest show in the entire universe. Most scientists' hunch is that there are independently evolved life forms dotted around planetary islands throughout the universe—though sadly too thinly scattered to encounter one another. And if there is life elsewhere, it is something stronger than a hunch to say that it will turn out to be Darwinian life. The argument in favor of alien life's existing at all is weaker than the argument that—if it exists at all—it will be Darwinian life. But it is also possible that we really are alone in the universe, in which case Earth, with its greatest show, is the most remarkable planet in the universe.

What is so special about life? It never violates the laws of physics. Nothing does (if anything did, physicists would just have to formulate new laws—it's happened often enough in the history of science). But although life never violates the laws of physics, it pushes them into unexpected avenues that stagger the imagination. If we didn't know about life we wouldn't believe it was possible—except, of course, that there'd then be nobody around to do the disbelieving!

The laws of physics, before Darwinian evolution bursts out from their midst, can make rocks and sand, gas clouds and stars, whirlpools and waves, whirlpool-shaped galaxies and light that travels as waves while behaving like particles. It is an interesting, fascinating and, in many ways, deeply mysterious universe. But now, enter life. Look, through the eyes of a physicist, at a bounding kangaroo, a swooping bat, a leaping dolphin, a soaring Coast Redwood. There never was a rock that bounded like a kangaroo, never a pebble that crawled like a beetle seeking a mate, never a sand grain that swam like a water flea. Not once do any of these creatures disobey one jot or tittle of the laws of physics. Far from violating the laws of thermodynamics (as is often ignorantly alleged) they are relentlessly driven by them. Far from violating the laws of motion, animals exploit them to their advantage as they walk, run, dodge and jink, leap and fly, pounce on prey or spring to safety.

Never once are the laws of physics violated, yet life emerges into uncharted territory. And how is the trick done? The answer is a process that, although variable in its wondrous detail, is sufficiently uniform to deserve one single name: Darwinian evolution, the nonrandom survival of randomly varying coded information. We know, as certainly as we know anything in science, that this is the process that has generated life on our own planet. And my

bet, as I said, is that the same process is in operation wherever life may be found, anywhere in the universe.

What if the greatest show on earth is not the greatest show in the universe? What if there are life forms on other planets that have evolved so far beyond our level of intelligence and creativity that we should regard them as gods, were we ever so fortunate (or unfortunate?) as to meet them? Would they indeed be gods? Wouldn't we be tempted to fall on our knees and worship them, as a medieval peasant might if suddenly confronted with such miracles as a Boeing 747, a mobile telephone or Google Earth? But, however god-like the aliens might seem, they would not be gods, and for one very important reason. They did not create the universe; it created them, just as it created us. Making the universe is the one thing no intelligence, however superhuman, could do, because an intelligence is complex—statistically improbable—and therefore had to emerge, by gradual degrees, from simpler beginnings: from a lifeless universe—the miracle-free zone that is physics.

To midwife such emergence is the singular achievement of Darwinian evolution. It starts with primeval simplicity and fosters, by slow, explicable degrees, the emergence of complexity: seemingly limitless complexity—certainly up to our human level of complexity and very probably way beyond. There may be worlds on which superhuman life thrives, superhuman to a level that our imaginations cannot grasp. But superhuman does not mean supernatural. Darwinian evolution is the only process we know that is ultimately capable of generating anything as complicated as creative intelligences. Once it has done so, of course, those intelligences can create other complex things: works of art and music, advanced technology, computers, the Internet and who knows what in the future? Darwinian evolution may not be the only such generative process in the universe. There may be other "cranes" (Daniel Dennett's term, which he opposes to "skyhooks") that we have not yet discovered or imagined. But, however wonderful and however different from Darwinian evolution those putative cranes may be, they cannot be magic. They will share with Darwinian evolution the facility to raise up complexity, as an emergent property, out of simplicity, while never violating natural law.

Where does that leave God? The kindest thing to say is that it leaves him with nothing to do, and no achievements that might attract our praise, our worship or our fear. Evolution is God's redundancy notice, his pink slip. But we have to go further. A complex creative intelligence with nothing to do is not just redundant. A divine designer is all but ruled out by the consideration that he must at least as complex as the entities he was wheeled out to explain. God is not dead. He was never alive in the first place.

Now, there is a certain class of sophisticated modern theologian who will say something like this: "Good heavens, of course we are not so naive or simplistic as to care whether God exists. Existence is such a 19th-century preoccupation! It doesn't matter whether God exists in a scientific sense. What matters is whether he exists for you or for me. If God is real for you, who cares whether science has made him redundant? Such arrogance! Such elitism."

Well, if that's what floats your canoe, you'll be paddling it up a very lonely creek. The mainstream belief of the world's peoples is very clear. They believe in God, and that means they believe he exists in objective reality, just as surely as the Rock of Gibraltar exists. If sophisticated theologians or postmodern relativists think they are rescuing God from the redundancy scrap-heap by downplaying the importance of existence, they should think again. Tell the congregation of a church or mosque that existence is too vulgar an attribute to fasten onto their God, and they will brand you an atheist. They'll be right.