



Dawkins' The God Delusion: A Public Debate

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The God Hypothesis:

There is a superhuman, supernatural intelligence that deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it including us.

I shall be arguing against Dawkins...

...but I do not believe that God created the physical universe...

...(though I do believe he created us, or at least our minds)...

...and, importantly, I hold no brief for any particular religion.

Dawkins' argument for the GH can be encapsulated in two claims:

1. The God Hypothesis is a scientific hypothesis;
2. The truth of the God Hypothesis is highly improbable.

The GH is a scientific hypothesis because:

- It is either true or false, and made so by a scientific fact
- The universe with a God in it is very different from a universe without a God in it.

The GH is highly improbable because:

the postulation of God explains *nothing*...

... and without an explanatory role God is redundant...

....there is no reason to think he exists.

Dawkins's argument stripped to its basics in this way is a good one...

...in that IF the premises are true then the conclusion is also true

I shall not, therefore question the validity of Dawkins's argument....

...but I shall question his premises...

...starting with the claim that the GH is a scientific hypothesis

Dawkins is right to claim that the GH is:

- either true or false, and made so by a fact
- the universe with a God in it is very different from a universe without a God in it.

But satisfaction of these conditions does not suffice to show that a hypothesis is a scientific hypothesis

Other hypotheses that satisfy these conditions:

- The universe is as Berkeley claimed it to be
- The right action is the action that produces the greatest happiness of the greatest number
- The future will always be like the past

These hypotheses all satisfy Dawkins's conditions...

...but none of them is a scientific hypothesis...

...because none of them is such that its truth/falsehood can be established by observation and experimentation

Please note that this is not a case of
'NOMA' ('non-overlapping magisteria')...

....although I am claiming that there are
hypotheses that are not scientific...

....I am not doing so on the grounds that
the domains of science and religion do not
overlap.

Q: Is the GH a scientific hypothesis or not?

A: Could the truth of the GH be established by observation and experiment?

It's true God could reveal Himself...but why would he?

If the truth of eliminativism could be demonstrated by science....

...then I would accept this as scientific evidence for the non-existence of God....

...but I am not convinced that eliminativism could be shown to be true by science.

The jury is out on the question of whether the God Hypothesis is a scientific hypothesis

I'll now look at the second premise...

...the claim that God is a theoretical entity...

...that can be shown to be redundant

1. Is God nothing more than a theoretical entity?
2. Has He been shown to be redundant?

Some people have personal experience of God...

....and to them he is not a theoretical entity....

Bertrand Russell:

I have tried very hard to be a behaviourist...
but I cannot convince myself that qualia do
not exist.

But let's assume that there is no reason for believing in God other than that he plays an explanatory role within a theory...

...is it really the case that He has been made redundant?

If eliminativism is true...

...then there is nothing that God is needed to explain...

...there is no meaning, no truth, no reason, no right and wrong...

...but we are a million miles from establishing that eliminativism is true

If meaning, truth, reason, love, right and wrong could all be shown to be reducible...

...to things visible to science...

...then science might be able to explain them all...

...but we are a million miles from reducing such things in this way

I believe that it is highly improbable that eliminativism will ever be shown to be true...

...and just as improbable that we will ever reduce all these things to something visible to science

I therefore think the God Hypothesis has a fighting chance of being true even if it does seem improbable to those of us who have faith in the ability of science one day to explain everything.