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10.23.2006

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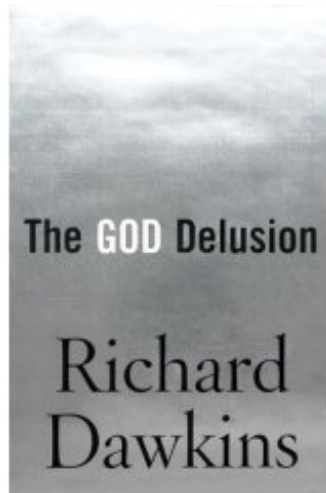
America, founded in secularism as a beacon of eighteenth century enlightenment, is becoming the victim of religious politics, a circumstance that would have horrified the Founding Fathers. The political ascendancy today values embryonic cells over adult people. It obsesses about gay marriage, ahead of genuinely important issues that actually make a difference to the world. It gains crucial electoral support from a religious constituency whose grip on reality is so tenuous that they expect to be 'raptured' up to heaven, leaving their clothes as empty as their minds. More extreme specimens actually long for a world war, which they identify as the 'Armageddon' that is to presage the Second Coming. Sam Harris, in his new short book, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, hits the bull's-eye as usual:

It is, therefore, not an exaggeration to say that if the city of New York were suddenly replaced by a ball of fire, some significant percentage of the American population would see a silver-lining in the subsequent mushroom cloud, as it would suggest to them that the best thing that is ever going to happen was about to happen: the return of Christ . . . Imagine the consequences if any significant component of the U.S. government actually believed that the world was about to end and that its ending would be *glorious*. The fact that nearly half of the American population

apparently believes this, purely on the basis of religious dogma, should be considered a moral and -intellectual emergency.

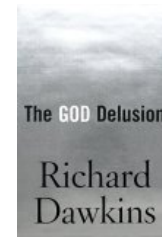
Does Bush check the Rapture Index daily, as Reagan did his stars? We don't know, but would anyone be surprised?

My scientific colleagues have additional reasons to declare emergency. Ignorant and absolutist attacks on stem cell research are just the tip of an iceberg. What we have here is nothing less than a global assault on rationality, and the Enlightenment values that inspired the founding of this first and greatest of secular republics. Science education - and hence the whole future of science in this country - is under threat. Temporarily beaten back in a Pennsylvania court, the 'breathtaking inanity' (Judge John Jones's immortal phrase) of 'intelligent design' continually flares up in local bush-fires. Dowsing them is a time-consuming but important responsibility, and scientists are finally being jolted out of their complacency. For years they quietly got on with their science, lamentably underestimating the creationists who, being neither competent nor interested in science, attended to the serious political business of subverting local school boards. Scientists, and intellectuals generally, are now waking up to the threat from the American Taliban.



Scientists divide into two schools of thought over the best tactics with which to face the threat. The Neville Chamberlain 'appeasement' school focuses on the battle for evolution. Consequently, its members identify fundamentalism as the enemy, and they bend over backwards to appease 'moderate' or 'sensible' religion (not a difficult task, for bishops and theologians despise fundamentalists as much as scientists do). Scientists of the Winston Churchill school, by contrast, see the fight for evolution as only one battle in a larger war: a looming war between supernaturalism on the one side and rationality on the other. For them, bishops and theologians belong with creationists in the supernatural camp, and are not to be appeased.

The Chamberlain school accuses Churchillians of rocking the boat to the point of muddying the waters. The philosopher of science Michael Ruse wrote:



The God Delusion
by Richard Dawkins

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We who love science must realize that the enemy of our enemies is our friend. Too often evolutionists spend time insulting would-be allies. This is especially true of secular evolutionists. Atheists spend more time running down sympathetic Christians than they do countering –creationists. When John Paul II wrote a letter endorsing Darwinism, Richard Dawkins's response was simply that the pope was a hypocrite, that he could not be genuine about science and that Dawkins himself simply preferred an honest fundamentalist.

A recent article in the *New York Times* by Cornelia Dean quotes the astronomer Owen Gingerich as saying that, by simultaneously advocating evolution and atheism, 'Dr Dawkins "probably single-handedly makes more converts to intelligent design than any of the leading intelligent design theorists".' This is not the first, not the second, not even the third time this plonkingly witless point has been made (and more than one reply has aptly cited Uncle Remus: "Oh please please Brer Fox, don't throw me in that awful briar patch").

Chamberlainites are apt to quote the late Stephen Jay Gould's 'NOMA' - 'non-overlapping magisteria'. Gould claimed that science and true religion never come into conflict because they exist in completely separate dimensions of discourse:

To say it for all my colleagues and for the umpteenth millionth time (from college bull sessions to learned treatises): science simply cannot (by its legitimate methods) adjudicate the issue of God's possible superintendence of nature. We neither affirm nor deny it; we simply can't comment on it as scientists.

This sounds terrific, right up until you give it a moment's thought. You then realize that the presence of a creative deity in the universe is clearly a scientific hypothesis. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a more momentous hypothesis in all of science. A universe with a god would be a completely different kind of universe from one without, and it would be a scientific difference. God could clinch the matter in his favour at any moment by staging a spectacular demonstration of his powers, one that would satisfy the exacting standards of science. Even the infamous Templeton Foundation recognized that God is a scientific hypothesis - by funding double-blind trials to test whether remote prayer would speed the recovery of heart patients. It didn't, of course, although a control group who knew they had been prayed for tended to get worse (how about a class action suit against the Templeton Foundation?) Despite such well-financed efforts, no evidence for God's existence has yet appeared.

To see the disingenuous hypocrisy of religious people who embrace NOMA, imagine that forensic archeologists, by some unlikely set of circumstances, discovered DNA evidence demonstrating that Jesus was born of a virgin mother and had no father. If NOMA enthusiasts were sincere, they should dismiss the archeologists' DNA out of hand: "Irrelevant. Scientific evidence has no bearing on theological questions. Wrong magisterium." Does anyone seriously imagine that they would say anything remotely like that? You can bet your boots that not just the fundamentalists but every professor of theology and every bishop in the land would trumpet the archeological evidence to the skies.

Either Jesus had a father or he didn't. The question is a scientific one, and scientific evidence, if any were available, would be used to settle it. The same is true of any miracle - and the deliberate and intentional creation of the universe would have to have been the mother and father of all miracles. Either it happened or it didn't. It

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is a fact, one way or the other, and in our state of uncertainty we can put a probability on it - an estimate that may change as more information comes in. Humanity's best estimate of the probability of divine creation dropped steeply in 1859 when *The Origin of Species* was published, and it has declined steadily during the subsequent decades, as evolution consolidated itself from plausible theory in the nineteenth century to established fact today.

The Chamberlain tactic of snuggling up to 'sensible' religion, in order to present a united front against ('intelligent design') creationists, is fine if your central concern is the battle for evolution. That is a valid central concern, and I salute those who press it, such as Eugenie Scott in *Evolution versus Creationism*. But if you are concerned with the stupendous scientific question of whether the universe was created by a supernatural intelligence or not, the lines are drawn completely differently. On this larger issue, fundamentalists are united with 'moderate' religion on one side, and I find myself on the other.

Of course, this all presupposes that the God we are talking about is a personal intelligence such as Yahweh, Allah, Baal, Wotan, Zeus or Lord Krishna. If, by 'God', you mean love, nature, goodness, the universe, the laws of physics, the spirit of humanity, or Planck's constant, none of the above applies. An American student asked her professor whether he had a view about me. 'Sure,' he replied. 'He's positive science is incompatible with religion, but he waxes ecstatic about nature and the universe. To me, that *is* religion!' Well, if that's what you choose to mean by religion, fine, that makes me a religious man. But if your God is a being who designs universes, listens to prayers, forgives sins, wreaks miracles, reads your thoughts, cares about your welfare and raises you from the dead, you are unlikely to be satisfied. As the distinguished American physicist Steven Weinberg said, "If you want to say that 'God is energy,' then you can find God in a lump of coal." But don't expect congregations to flock to your church.

When Einstein said 'Did God have a choice in creating the Universe?' he meant 'Could the universe have begun in more than one way?' 'God does not play dice' was Einstein's poetic way of doubting Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle. Einstein was famously irritated when theists misunderstood him to mean a personal God. But what did he expect? The hunger to misunderstand should have been palpable to him. 'Religious' physicists usually turn out to be so only in the Einsteinian sense: they are atheists of a poetic disposition. So am I. But, given the widespread yearning for that great misunderstanding, deliberately to confuse Einsteinian pantheism with supernatural religion is an act of intellectual high treason.

Accepting, then, that the God Hypothesis is a proper scientific hypothesis whose truth or falsehood is hidden from us only by lack of evidence, what should be our best estimate of the probability that God exists, given the evidence now available? Pretty low I think, and here's why.

First, most of the traditional arguments for God's existence, from Aquinas on, are easily demolished. Several of them, such as the First Cause argument, work by setting up an infinite regress which God is wheeled out to terminate. But we are never told why God is magically able to terminate regresses while needing no explanation himself. To be sure, we do need some kind of explanation for the origin of all things. Physicists and cosmologists are hard at work on the problem. But whatever the answer - a random quantum fluctuation or a Hawking/Penrose singularity or whatever we end up calling it - it will be *simple*. Complex, statistically improbable things, by definition, don't just *happen*; they demand an explanation in their own right. They are impotent to terminate regresses, in a way that simple things are not. The first cause cannot have been an

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intelligence - let alone an intelligence that answers prayers and enjoys being worshipped. Intelligent, creative, complex, statistically improbable things come late into the universe, as the product of evolution or some other process of gradual escalation from simple beginnings. They come late into the universe and therefore cannot be responsible for designing it.

Another of Aquinas' efforts, the Argument from Degree, is worth spelling out, for it epitomises the characteristic flabbiness of theological reasoning. We notice degrees of, say, goodness or temperature, and we measure them, Aquinas said, by reference to a maximum:

Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus, as fire, which is the maximum of heat, is the cause of all hot things . . . Therefore, there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.

That's an argument? You might as well say that people vary in smelliness but we can make the judgment only by reference to a perfect maximum of conceivable smelliness. Therefore there must exist a pre-eminently peerless stinker, and we call him God. Or substitute any dimension of comparison you like, and derive an equivalently fatuous conclusion. That's theology.

The only one of the traditional arguments for God that is widely used today is the teleological argument, sometimes called the Argument from Design although - since the name begs the question of its validity - it should better be called the Argument *for* Design. It is the familiar 'watchmaker' argument, which is surely one of the most superficially plausible bad arguments ever discovered - and it is rediscovered by just about everybody until they are taught the logical fallacy and Darwin's brilliant alternative.

In the familiar world of human artifacts, complicated things that look designed are designed. To naïve observers, it seems to follow that similarly complicated things in the natural world that look designed - things like eyes and hearts - are designed too. It isn't just an argument by analogy. There is a semblance of statistical reasoning here too - fallacious, but carrying an illusion of plausibility. If you randomly scramble the fragments of an eye or a leg or a heart a million times, you'd be lucky to hit even one combination that could see, walk or pump. This demonstrates that such devices could not have been put together by chance. And of course, no sensible scientist ever said they could. Lamentably, the scientific education of most British and American students omits all mention of Darwinism, and therefore the only alternative to chance that most people can imagine is design.

Even before Darwin's time, the illogicality was glaring: how could it ever have been a good idea to postulate, in explanation for the existence of improbable things, a designer who would have to be even more improbable? The entire argument is a logical non-starter, as David Hume realized before Darwin was born. What Hume didn't know was the supremely elegant alternative to both chance and design that Darwin was to give us. *Natural selection* is so stunningly powerful and elegant, it not only explains the whole of life, it raises our consciousness and boosts our confidence in science's future ability to explain everything else.

Natural selection is not just *an* alternative to chance. It is the *only* ultimate alternative ever suggested. Design is a workable explanation for organized complexity only in the short term. It is not an ultimate explanation,

because designers themselves demand an explanation. If, as Francis Crick and Leslie Orgel once playfully speculated, life on this planet was deliberately seeded by a payload of bacteria in the nose cone of a rocket, we still need an explanation for the intelligent aliens who dispatched the rocket. Ultimately they must have evolved by gradual degrees from simpler beginnings. Only evolution, or some kind of gradualistic 'crane' (to use Daniel Dennett's neat term), is capable of terminating the regress. Natural selection is an anti-chance process, which gradually builds up complexity, step by tiny step. The end product of this ratcheting process is an eye, or a heart, or a brain - a device whose improbable complexity is utterly baffling until you spot the gentle ramp that leads up to it.

Whether my conjecture is right that evolution is the only explanation for life in the universe, there is no doubt that it is the explanation for life on this planet. Evolution is a fact, and it is among the more secure facts known to science. But it had to get started somehow. Natural selection cannot work its wonders until certain minimal conditions are in place, of which the most important is an accurate system of replication - DNA, or something that works like DNA.

The origin of life on this planet - which means the origin of the first self-replicating molecule - is hard to study, because it (probably) only happened once, 4 billion years ago and under very different conditions from those with which we are familiar. We may never know how it happened. Unlike the ordinary evolutionary events that followed, it must have been a genuinely very improbable - in the sense of unpredictable - event: too improbable, perhaps, for chemists to reproduce it in the laboratory or even devise a plausible theory for what happened. This weirdly paradoxical conclusion - that a chemical account of the origin of life, in order to be plausible, has to be implausible - would follow if it were the case that life is extremely rare in the universe. And indeed we have never encountered any hint of extraterrestrial life, not even by radio - the circumstance that prompted Enrico Fermi's cry: "Where is everybody?"

Suppose life's origin on a planet took place through a hugely improbable stroke of luck, so improbable that it happens on only one in a billion planets. The National Science Foundation would laugh at any chemist whose proposed research had only a one in a hundred chance of succeeding, let alone one in a billion. Yet, given that there are at least a billion billion planets in the universe, even such absurdly low odds as these will yield life on a billion planets. And - this is where the famous anthropic principle comes in - Earth has to be one of them, because here we are.

If you set out in a spaceship to find the one planet in the galaxy that has life, the odds against your finding it would be so great that the task would be indistinguishable, in practice, from impossible. But if you are alive (as you manifestly are if you are about to step into a spaceship) you needn't bother to go looking for that one planet because, by definition, you are already standing on it. The anthropic principle really is rather elegant. By the way, I don't actually think the origin of life was as improbable as all that. I think the galaxy has plenty of islands of life dotted about, even if the islands are too spaced out for any one to hope for a meeting with any other. My point is only that, given the number of planets in the universe, the origin of life could in theory be as lucky as a blindfolded golfer scoring a hole in one. The beauty of the anthropic principle is that, even in the teeth of such stupefying odds against, it still gives us a perfectly satisfying explanation for life's presence on our own planet.

The anthropic principle is usually applied not to planets but to universes. Physicists have suggested that the laws and constants of physics are too good - as if the universe were set up to favour our eventual evolution. It is as

though there were, say, half a dozen dials representing the major constants of physics. Each of the dials could in principle be tuned to any of a wide range of values. Almost all of these knob-twiddlings would yield a universe in which life would be impossible. Some universes would fizzle out within the first picosecond. Others would contain no elements heavier than hydrogen and helium. In yet others, matter would never condense into stars (and you need stars in order to forge the elements of chemistry and hence life). You can estimate the very low odds against the six knobs all just happening to be correctly tuned, and conclude that a divine knob-twiddler must have been at work. But, as we have already seen, that explanation is vacuous because it begs the biggest question of all. The divine knob twiddler would himself have to have been at least as improbable as the settings of his knobs.

Again, the anthropic principle delivers its devastatingly neat solution. Physicists already have reason to suspect that our universe - everything we can see - is only one universe among perhaps billions. Some theorists postulate a multiverse of foam, where the universe we know is just one bubble. Each bubble has its own laws and constants. Our familiar laws of physics are parochial bylaws. Of all the universes in the foam, only a minority has what it takes to generate life. And, with anthropic hindsight, we obviously have to be sitting in a member of that minority, because, well, here we are, aren't we? As physicists have said, it is no accident that we see stars in our sky, for a universe without stars would also lack the chemical elements necessary for life. There may be universes whose skies have no stars: but they also have no inhabitants to notice the lack. Similarly, it is no accident that we see a rich diversity of living species: for an evolutionary process that is capable of yielding a species that can see things and reflect on them cannot help producing lots of other species at the same time. The reflective species must be surrounded by an ecosystem, as it must be surrounded by stars.

The anthropic principle entitles us to postulate a massive dose of luck in accounting for the existence of life on our planet. But there are limits. We are allowed one stroke of luck for the origin of evolution, and perhaps for a couple of other unique events like the origin of the eukaryotic cell and the origin of consciousness. But that's the end of our entitlement to large-scale luck. We emphatically cannot invoke major strokes of luck to account for the illusion of design that glows from each of the billion species of living creature that have ever lived on Earth. The evolution of life is a general and continuing process, producing essentially the same result in all species, however different the details.

Contrary to what is sometimes alleged, evolution is a predictive science. If you pick any hitherto unstudied species and subject it to minute scrutiny, any evolutionist will confidently predict that each individual will be observed to do everything in its power, in the particular way of the species - plant, herbivore, carnivore, nectivore or whatever it is - to survive and propagate the DNA that rides inside it. We won't be around long enough to test the prediction but we can say, with great confidence, that if a comet strikes Earth and wipes out the mammals, a new fauna will rise to fill their shoes, just as the mammals filled those of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. And the range of parts played by the new cast of life's drama will be similar in broad outline, though not in detail, to the roles played by the mammals, and the dinosaurs before them, and the mammal-like reptiles before the dinosaurs. The same rules are predictably being followed, in millions of species all over the globe, and for hundreds of millions of years. Such a general observation requires an entirely different explanatory principle from the anthropic principle that explains one-off events like the origin of life, or the origin of the universe, by luck. That entirely different principle is natural selection.

We explain our existence by a combination of the anthropic principle and Darwin's principle of natural

selection. That combination provides a complete and deeply satisfying explanation for everything that we see and know. Not only is the god hypothesis unnecessary. It is spectacularly unparsimonious. Not only do we need no God to explain the universe and life. God stands out in the universe as the most glaring of all superfluous sore thumbs. We cannot, of course, disprove God, just as we can't disprove Thor, fairies, leprechauns and the Flying Spaghetti Monster. But, like those other fantasies that we can't disprove, we can say that God is very very improbable.

Richard Dawkins is the Charles Simonyi Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society, and the author of nine books, including *The Selfish Gene*, *The Blind Watchmaker* and *The Ancestor's Tale*. His new book, *The God Delusion*, published last week by Houghton Mifflin, is already a NEW YORK TIMES bestseller, and his Foundation for Reason and Science launched at the same time (see RichardDawkins.net).

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Comments (Page 1 of 14 [»](#)):

The Republican Party uses God name in vain every time they mention it.

Assimilated Press

Read "It's Official: God Is A White Male Heterosexual Christian" at:

<http://assimilatedpress.blogspot.com/2006/07/its-official-god-is-wh...>

By: **Virt** on October 20, 2006 at 06:37pm

Flag: [abusive]

Give 'em hell, Richard. Nitwits pimping sky fairies have done enough damage in human history - it's time for rational humanists everywhere to express skepticism whenever possible. America's slide into a moral and intellectual hole accelerated when it elected a moronic fundamentalist from Texas who said his favorite political philosopher was Jesus Christ. The idiot couldn't think of a real answer so he trotted out his sky fairy. He should have been laughed off the podium.

By: MoeLarryAndJesus on October 20, 2006 at 06:41pm

Flag: [abusive]

THANK-YOU DR. DAWKINS!!!

For one of the most important and thought-provoking blogs EVER to appear on the Huffington Post. It's a shame some of us had to cry bloody-murder for it to appear in the first place. Here's hoping the HuffPOO finally learned their lesson, although I for one, will not hold my breath.

V.

By: Virion on October 23, 2006 at 11:36am

Flag: [abusive]

"...Give 'em hell, Richard..."

By: MoeLarryAndJesus

Your militant "Give 'em hell" implies that there is a "heaven" -- which implies there is a God or deity.

By: adr on October 23, 2006 at 11:44am

Flag: [abusive]

I think it has been proven beyond the shadow of a doubt that those who believe in an omnipotent being who presumably lives in outer space are usually the same people who find it utterly impossible to empathize with those of us on earth.

I'm also extremely tired of hearing that we must embrace "reasonable" Christians because we don't want to seem "condescending." This idea, which seems to say that religion can somehow be just a little bit true, is ridiculous on its face, as no aspect of religion can be proven nor disproven. There is nothing condescending about advocating verifiable science over religion. I think it's those who suggest otherwise who are truly condescending.

Religious people look upon non-believers with utter contempt, even if masked by a veil of patronizing benevolence. So why should atheists and agnostics NOT look upon those same people with at least the same level of contempt? An atheist's explanation for something will always be far more plausible than anything the religion-addled brain can come up with.

By: Veronica on October 23, 2006 at 11:47am

Flag: [abusive]

Gee....

I can't IMAGINE how the conservatives and Republicans get away with their "lie" that "Liberals hate God and hate religion and want to teach your kids to be atheists".

I'm an agnostic, but endless intellectuals writing articles decrying belief in God (and a fair amount of lib bloggers egging them on)....isn't the way to win back the religious vote (even the religious who are moderate or liberals).

And rather self-destructive given polls show 95% belief in God among Americans!

By: Skeleton on October 23, 2006 at 11:51am

Flag: [abusive]

Amen to that Richard. In a time when there are few real heroes, Dawkins and Harris inspire me to fight for what's right

By: Tomcat on October 23, 2006 at 11:52am

Flag: [abusive]

who or what set off the big bang?

By: okiemon on October 23, 2006 at 11:53am

Flag: [abusive]

Hypothesis. Clearly all scientific knowledge starts with a hypothesis that must be proven or disproven. But does today's current experimental environment enable us to test THE hypothesis: There is an intelligent all-powerful, all-knowing, all-benevolent being behind everything that happens?

What lab will handle that? What particle accelerator will you build to test..that?

Is it a question of "Is religion ready for science?" or is it a question of "Is science ready for religion?"

By: boooorns on October 23, 2006 at 11:55am

Flag: [abusive]

Thank God for Richard Dawkins, all we need is another 4 or 5 billion like minded individuals and maybe this planet wouldn't be such a dangerous and horrifying place to live.

By: frontones on October 23, 2006 at 12:09pm

Flag: [abusive]

Whoa,

Since when does the concept of hell automatically verify the concept of heaven?

The concept of the vernacular 'hell' means a gruesome and awful experience, i.e. "Going to the dentist is hell for me"

We atheists were given the same language by our parents and society, just as you fairy-believers were. This language is loaded with multiple meanings and inconsistencies, but we are stuck with it and need it to communicate with those of you with the voodoo beliefs. So, sorry it may sound like we are siding with you because we use our imperfect language, but there is no god and certainly no heaven. Trillions of stars rotating around billions of galaxies...but no pearly gated-community full of winged white folks.

By: mygodbeatsyourgod on October 23, 2006 at 12:10pm

Flag: [abusive]

Thank you for saving us all from believing in some higher "goodness". Now we can all bask in the glory that we will NOT be judged by our acts against any decreed standard! We can do just exactly whatever we choose to do and only have to answer to our peers who may find us objectionable!

There is no need or value in donating to the poor. No return on providing health care to those who do not have it. No benefit from stem-cell research except how it might benefit us individually (or someone in our family).

The single greatest fear we might have, is that some scientist will believe that there is no God but himself. That the scientist can use stem cells and public financing to turn himself/herself or their children into a "superman" with gene therapy! Someone who is more intelligent, stonger, less susceptible to disease and can live forever. Of course, we know that won't happen to a poor person.

Nope. With stem cell research we can produce a civilization of drones who are happy doing menial work and are physically endowed to do such work. The "elite" (scientists who can reason away the existence of a higher power) can become "beautiful", and rule with a firm but fair hand. They can enjoy art, travel, and excel at physical pursuits. Truly an enlightened future! All thanks to science and visionaries like yourself!

By: runnminute on October 23, 2006 at 12:10pm

Flag: [abusive]

Veronica

There is a great quote by nietzsche that sums it all up very well. For the life of me, I can;t remember it though.

Basicaly it was something along the lines of
Those looking to heaven end up ignoring earth

I wish I could remember it.

By: jimmyboyo on October 23, 2006 at 12:11pm

Flag: [abusive]

Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris....my heros!!!

Yes it is time for critical, intelligent , thinking. It is time to challenge our leaders to step up to the table of rational thought. I am no longer in the closet!!!!

By: TJFRMLA on October 23, 2006 at 12:12pm

Flag: [abusive]

Not quite sure why I read this tripe... there goes 5 minutes I'll never get back.

--Ignorant and absolutist attacks on stem cell research are just the tip of an iceberg-- The attacks on SCNT and cloning are anything but ignorant. The attacks exist to protect you nitwits from destroying humanity via "research at all costs"

--evolution consolidated itself from plausible theory in the nineteenth century to established fact today--

BULLOCKS! The only people trumpeting it as established fact are those who would necessitate changing their paradigm if it turned out to be false... you people give science a bad name.

By: Nester on October 23, 2006 at 12:13pm

Flag: [abusive]

Dawkins, I read your article very carefully, because if there almost certainly is no god, I want to know about it. Sadly, nothing I can comment will change your mind, or MoeLarry's. I am sorry you cannot recognize begging the question when it is you who is doing it. But let us suppose this "god", whatever it is, does not look like a big man in a white lab coat, and let us suppose that part of his purpose involves NOT being susceptible of "proof." I can think of a good reason for each of those to be true, but the one involves science beyond the level of your achievements, and the other involves issue outside of science entirely.

By: neejerk on October 23, 2006 at 12:14pm

Flag: [abusive]

The Jehovah's Witnesses came through our neighborhood yesterday. The pamphlet of the month was about the coming end of False Religion. I think they were referencing the upcoming election.

Anyway, later in the morning I noticed that the Darwin Fish on my car was now lying in the street. Coincidence? I think not. Seeing the admirable work of his acolytes, God had performed a minor miracle and caused the glue to fail as they walked by. Pretty impressive.

By: Argonaut on October 23, 2006 at 12:16pm

Flag: [abusive]

Frontones..."thank God..."

DuHHHH!!!! :-)

By: TJFRMLA on October 23, 2006 at 12:19pm

Flag: [abusive]

America's slide into a moral and intellectual hole accelerated when it elected a moronic fundamentalist from Texas who said his favorite political philosopher was Jesus Christ. [MoeLarryAndJesus]

But our own slide was inevitable. It seems to be a world phenomenon right now. Bush was the trigger, but it was a long time coming here and around the world. It's going to be a long time reversing it too. Measured in generations.

The first step is getting rid of this "administration". It seems like a very tiny step in the overall scheme, but it will be ever so satisfying if we wake up to a giant sucking noise on November 8th indicating the Republican Congress got flushed.

By: ericthered on October 23, 2006 at 12:20pm

Flag: [abusive]

The problem for the Winston Churchill school is that we atheists are a very tiny minority. If we isolate ourselves too much we could be crushed under the massive weight of supernaturalism and superstition in society.

One thing is for sure, though. This goes way beyond evolution versus ID and creationism. It's also snake oil salesmen like Deepak Chopra, global climate change denial, strange ideas about spreading a mystical democracy at gun point, a barrier of superstition that makes fundies attack embryonic stem cell research...

It's too much for any one group. So, a lot of different Neville Chamberlain 'appeasement' schools might have more success even if they can't reach the root of the problem.

By: normdoering on October 23, 2006 at 12:22pm

Flag: [abusive]

Thanks for yet another well written article Dr. Dawkins.

I have been reading your works since "The Selfish Gene" explained in such great detail that which I already knew, but could not begin to explain. For what it is worth, You have a friend in Kansas.

I am glad that the internet has brought much more attention to your work.

By: anothertom on October 23, 2006 at 12:22pm

Flag: [abusive]

I'm not sure Bush is as religious as he makes himself out to be. I believe it's a bit of an act. He certainly doesn't act like one if turning the other cheek or helping the poor actually is a measure of the Christian message. It helps him win (or steal) elections and it doesn't cost anything.

I suspect that religiosity and the susceptibility for an individual to be hypnotized go hand in hand. That's why the neo-con alternative reality is so easy to sell to 1/3 of the people who think you can just make your own truth. It

would be interesting to see if their DNA has anything in common.

Can't we just say that intelligence requires some kind of physical medium such as a brain or computer? -So intelligence could not have come first?

How can anyone look at a chimp or even a dog and not see consciousness, emotion and thought? It seems to me that to maintain that humans are fundamentally different from all other species is the epitome of arrogance.

Mr Dawkins, I didn't know who you were 6 years ago until I started running into the word "meme" and then searched it. I've since enjoyed reading your letters in the Guardian and quite a few of your books. I always thought the granting of knighthoods was very silly (Sir Elton John, what's with that???), but if anyone deserves one on your grey depressing island, it's you.

By: Expletivedeleted on October 23, 2006 at 12:22pm

Flag: [abusive]

Why take the time to write a book about someone or something you are so sure does not exist? It is easy to be an expert on something that can not be disproven.

By: kittycago on October 23, 2006 at 12:24pm

Flag: [abusive]

If anyone on Earth counts as my personal hero, it's Richard Dawkins. I wish everyone would be open-minded enough to read him and attempt to bring away some insight from him. I think a good first step is requiring a course in logic for all high school seniors or college freshmen. You simply cannot think correctly without an understanding of logic, though Dawkins's detractors certainly give it their best shot.

By: StephenDedalus82 on October 23, 2006 at 12:26pm

Flag: [abusive]

No sale, Dick. The fundamental fallacy in your rant is to insist that the question of the existence of God is a scientific question. I understand that you have to set this up to try to create a "scientific" argument for the non-existence of God. But your arguments and examples are all bogus. The prayer experiment was not science, double-blind or not, because it could never actually identify the process it was supposed to be measuring. It also did not account for variables like the entity being prayed to, the type of ritual being employed, the sincerity of the prayers, etc., all of which could conceivably be crucially important, or at least have been claimed to be important by practitioners in the past.

Your Jesus analogy is red herring. And, you seem awfully Christo-centric for an atheist -- would every professor of Muslim or Jewish or Buddhist philosophy in the land be trumpeting this proof of the divinity of Jesus? But if that did happen, so what? What light does this throw, one way or another, on the existence of God?

And what could be more ludicrous as argumentation than the statement: "A universe with a god would be a completely different kind of universe from one without, and it would be a scientific difference." This is classic

question-begging: it assumes what you are, evidently, trying to prove, that it's possible to tell scientifically whether God exists or not. I'd be grateful if you could develop this a bit: kindly explain what a universe in which a God existed would look like, and explain how you know this, or could know it.

By: Egyptsteve on October 23, 2006 at 12:29pm

Flag: [abusive]

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