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anyone losing faith"*

EMERGING
FROM
DISBELIEF

THE GOD CONCLUSION

WHY SMART PEOPLE STILL BELIEVE

I W B R O W N

THE

GOD

CONCLUSION

WHY SMART PEOPLE STILL BELIEVE

IW Brown

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THE GOD CONCLUSION

For my parents

Carleton Wade & Marian F. Brown

“A little philosophy inclineth a man’s mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion.”

—Sir Francis Bacon

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PROLOGUE

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WHILE I CONTEMPLATED WRITING THIS book I began to pose serious questions to my family and friends. My questions centered on their belief or disbelief in God. I wanted to know why they believed and in some cases, why not. I was eager to learn how they handled the primary arguments of modern atheism. Frankly some of them were a bit puzzled by my interest in such personal details.

Through my years of agnosticism and atheism I embraced some of these atheist arguments like, well, gospel truth. They directly shaped how I interpreted the God question. Only through coming to believe in God did I begin to see them in a more critical light. It turns out that they were not as advertised. Despite repeated claims to the contrary made in bestselling books and by zealous atheist foot soldiers online, no argument for atheism is what philosophers call a “knock-down argument,” an argument with a conclusion which clearly follows from sound and sufficient premises. None is even close. Upon careful and prolonged reconsideration, I found that many atheist arguments are less about truth and logic, and are more a reflection of the lens through which their proponents choose to see the world. More often than not, that lens is shaped and colored by profound emotions which typically go unrecognized. In time I realized that the only way for me to make sense of the arguments for and against God, was to first better understand my own lens—including the emotional baggage I never before thought I carried.

Here I intend to present reasonable and rational ways to reconcile competing claims of truth. In fact, I explain how theism is a sound inference to be drawn from what we know today. I look at the best and most common arguments for atheism and explain how, with a better understanding of one’s own lens of interpretation, they dissolve under scrutiny. In fact, some atheist arguments not only lose their force, but even transform into reasons to believe in God.

Many of the most common atheist claims simply do not withstand the scrutiny which these same cynics apply to faith and belief in the God of the Bible. Some of their claims can be technically accurate, but wildly misleading.

For example, is it true that the most intelligent people in the world are atheists? After all, leading atheists never seem to miss an opportunity to say so. If this is true, why? What does that mean? Ultimately shouldn't we just defer to the smartest and wisest among us? These are just a few of the claims and questions which have a substantial influence on those who think about the God question. They demand our attention. I intend to carefully examine each.

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My intended reader is someone who cares or who wonders about the God question. I write to those who struggle to express the reasoning for their belief. What's more I write to those in transition. Some once believed but, due in part to atheist arguments they find compelling, are gradually letting go of their faith. Conversely others may be gently nudged toward belief through life experience but are troubled by those very arguments. These people would believe were it not for this or that philosophical or scientific objection. I am convinced that all of them genuinely want to know the truth. There is just so much conflicting information to overwhelm and derail even the most sincere efforts.

If I am successful the readers I have described will have navigated through many of the arguments pro and con and will have discarded those without merit. They will be left with more sound reasoning. Naturally, the analysis and opinions are mine. But of course if they are sound, they will stand on their own.

In the chapters to come I explore what I believe are compelling answers to atheist challenges—answers and explanations I wish I had understood years ago. In short, I want to correct some of the false advertising that so confounded me. There are enough profound realities to consider that we have no need for the irrelevant and the misleading. With these things clarified, it is my hope that the genuine seeker of truth will be better equipped to find his way.

INTRODUCTION

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SOME QUESTIONS REFUSE TO GO AWAY. Chief among the most stubborn is the question of whether God exists. Certainly the urge to know is nothing new. It has been the focus of human contemplation for as long as there has been a mind capable of inquiry. Philosopher David Bentley Hart waxes poetic when describing this constant human compulsion in his latest book *The Experience of God*:

“The question of God never ceases to pose itself anew. And the longing to know about God, never wholly abates” (1)

Those of us who truly want to know, and it seems we are no small number, have been treated to passionate arguments from both sides. But far too often these seem more designed to score debate points rather than to provide the seeker of truth with genuinely helpful insights into the question. We find ourselves no closer to clarity, let alone certainty. We have listened as a friend or a family member has regurgitated the latest and greatest atheistic arguments available online and made clear how foolish it is to believe in God today in the age of science. Yet despite his or her protests and those of the most vocal atheists, polls continue to show that most of the country still believes in a higher power—and mostly the theist God. Even so, it seems many of the arguments pro and con are more technical and calculating than authentic attempts to find truth.

My personal library, digital and paper copy, overflows with titles from celebrity atheists like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Michael Shermer, Jerry Coyne, and the late Christopher Hitchens to much less notorious but no less strident advocates of atheism. Conversely, I also have the works of professional theist writers like William Lane Craig, David Bentley Hart, JP Moreland, and theist thinkers like Alvin Plantinga, Alan Sandage, and NT Wright. Delving deeper I read books by passionate theists from various traditions of monotheism,

including Catholics, Episcopalians, Orthodox Jews, Mormons, Baptists and other Protestants.

No doubt the authors listed above on both sides of the debate are highly intelligent and well-informed. They are really smart people! But that is not to say that all have a firm grip on the breadth of possible considerations. And yes, I have learned a great deal from them about the latest and greatest arguments for and against God. But painfully few of the volumes in print seem aimed at helping the reader better understand how to navigate the best atheist arguments and how to interpret those with merit. Again, much of their commentary seems more about winning an argument than elucidating truth. Put another way, at times we see a degree of gamesmanship in these bestsellers and only secondary attention to aiding those who sincerely seek the truth. This is troubling because there is indeed real truth to be found and worth finding. The means by which we work to find it are of utmost importance. It has been said that we can be continually learning but never manage to draw closer to the truth. Of course, I am paraphrasing Paul in the New Testament. He was right. In other words, there are bad ways to go about finding truth. Sifting through the evidence and arguments as if to prepare for a debate ourselves is one of those bad ways.

Like many who read books of this genre, I consider myself educated and reasonably well-read but I am not a trained logician, philosopher or a scientist like many of the authors above. But the clash and stark disagreement among these intelligent people with those very impressive Ph.Ds. is evidence that our pursuit of truth requires something more. It appears that advanced degrees alone do not lead to any greater clarity or certainty on the God question. In truth, some of the most sound and compelling reasons to believe or disbelieve are articulated by amateurs, arm-chair philosophers. For this reason I have gathered my thoughts and observations into book form. My hope is to provide the reader with new ways to think about atheist challenges to belief in God. My purpose is not to help the reader talk himself into belief or to justify flawed conclusions as some critics might presume. Instead, I present analyses to help us make better sense of the arguments. Be advised that I will argue that with that improved understanding of competing claims we are more likely to conclude that God exists.

With this disclosure of purpose and conclusions (as if the book title alone wasn't enough), still I encourage the reader to consider the analysis which follows with an open mind—admittedly a posture far easier claimed than

actually maintained. Naturally some points and arguments may be eye-opening, helpful, even compelling—others, not so much. One important question I do examine is why the majority of those who make a living studying and writing about the material world, scientists, do not believe in God. As we will see, we tend to misinterpret the ostensible linkage between intelligence and belief in God. My broader purpose is to encourage sincere reflection, even upon points once thought settled.

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A Note on Terminology: This is not technical volume. I do my best to use terms with which most of us are familiar. Of course, my primary goal is to be understood. So I have no interest in splitting hairs or belaboring the subtle nuance of words. For example, I speak of materialism and naturalism along with atheism. At times I may use one term as a proxy for the others. I do not devote much space to defining or attempting to exploit technical nuances to make my points. Instead I use all three terms to refer to the philosophy and the belief that there is no god, no guiding creative intelligence, no life after death, no soul independent of body, no mind independent of brain, and so on—that the only reality is the physical or material. Similarly, I sometimes use the words theist and believer interchangeably; by which I mean those who believe in a monotheistic, personal, creator God who is ultimately in control.

CHAPTER 1 - THE NATURAL PATH TO ATHEISM

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“The unexamined life is not worth living.”

“All men by nature desire to know.”

—Socrates

MY URGE TO FIND AND UNDERSTAND GOD, particularly over the last ten years, has compelled me to read thousands of pages arguing for God's existence. Genuinely wanting to understand both sides of the argument, I also read many thousands of pages arguing for atheism. Based upon the success of books on the subject, I can safely assume that I am not alone in my interest. A simple review of the New York Times Bestseller List indicates that a considerable number of high-volume titles are related to the God Question.

Many of the most recent books arguing against God's existence have taken up the cause of what has been called the “New Atheism.” We shouldn't be fooled by the “New” in the moniker. These atheists are not new in the sense that they have arrived on the scene with new arguments, previously unavailable or unknown, in support of atheism. Rather they are new in the simple sense of having come after those who preceded them. They are the latest to come around. Perhaps a more apt label would be the “Late Atheism.” Often calling something “new” has more to do with the person presenting it than it has to do with the thing itself. So when I write “New Atheism” I am referring to content and philosophy that has actually been around a long time but which is being advocated and encountered today by new populations. However, what is new about this iteration of atheism, meaning unlike that which preceded it, are its tone and objectives. The New Atheism is more militant and energetically determined to fundamentally reshape society.

Similarly many theist arguments have been around a very long time. Of

course to say that an argument has been around a long time is not to say that it isn't valid or compelling. Obviously there is no fixed shelf-life. This is true of persistent arguments both pro and con God. Yet at times the first rebuttal made to a particular theistic argument is that it is nothing new; but so what? The first mistake we can make is to accept this criticism as a legitimate argument, as though it demonstrates something.

My intent here is simply to warn the reader not to infer from the label "New Atheism" that ground-breaking discoveries have been made to advance the atheistic world view. Conversely, to say that a theist argument is nothing new is not to say that it is invalid. There have been no dispositive findings in the laboratories of science which disprove theism, despite the often explicit and highly public claims to the contrary. This hasn't happened. There most certainly has been a wave of energetic and vocal atheism in recent years. As we would expect, this wave has met fierce opposition from believers. Unfortunately the result has been a lot of friction and heat, and much less of the light needed for understanding.

Who am I to be writing a volume on something as weighty as God's existence? It's a good question and often my first when I encounter a new book on this subject. First, I do not claim to bring any new data or facts to the debate. As stated in the Introduction, I do believe that my journey from belief to agnosticism to atheism to belief has provided me some useful and helpful insights. I do believe that those who have transitioned from one side of the divide to the other may have some unique perspectives which can be instructive to others. Moreover, as stated above, I have discovered some of the most insightful questions and commentary, not from well-known authorities, but from unheralded and often anonymous internet message board amateurs. We should not expect to find comprehensive or sufficient arguments either way in cyberspace. But we can most certainly discover remarkably astute points not found in the popular books. In summary, I have come to see that useful arguments can come from nearly any source. I venture into the God question hoping to be one of those sources for my reader.

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A brief explanation of the type of atheism addressed in this book will be helpful. As a disclaimer, I must acknowledge that there are countless methods of

classification in circulation today. Multi-dimensional approaches to classification use terms like weak and strong, positive and negative, implicit and explicit, intellectual and practical, and more. When I use the terms atheist and atheism in these pages I have in mind a particular kind of non-believer which I believe encompasses the majority of self-described atheists. In general, the atheist to whom I refer here is well-informed and has concluded that the god of the Bible does not and/or cannot exist. Many may have come from homes rooted in belief. I am less concerned with degrees of activism than with the reasons for the atheistic worldview.

My purpose here is not merely to attempt to present evidence of God's existence. Instead I intend to argue that a rational, science-believing person should have no trouble believing in God. In fact, rational thinking can lead one to believe in God. But many of the books on offer today from the advocates of this New Atheism would have us believe that we must choose one or the other—either rationality or belief. Put another way, atheists routinely argue that reason and rationality can lead only to the rejection of the concept of god. This notion is a fundamental element of their philosophy. But it is demonstrably untrue.

This question of God's existence is the most important question we face. Those who have long ago dismissed it may tend to disagree. But honest contemplation of what is at stake leads us to accept the primacy of the God question. With that in mind I feel obligated to avoid some natural tendencies. I will not attempt to win debate points by clever maneuvering or appeals to technicalities. One practical reason for this is that I am not equipped to do so. I am not a debater. Like many readers, I have observed talented debaters on both sides. They may be effective at winning a debate, but I don't believe the methods they have mastered truly advance genuine contemplation of the real question. It deserves better. The God Question is far too important. It shapes the way we see the world, the way we see ourselves, and the way we choose to live.

As mentioned above, the wave of books in recent years on this very topic have served to popularize the most common arguments on both sides. I write these pages assuming that my reader has been exposed to some of the current arguments and rebuttals. So rather than regurgitate content, I will instead focus on what strikes me as less explored ground. Of course, I will need to summarize essential themes to frame what I have to say as I go. These summaries will be as concise as I am capable of making them. In other words, I attempt here to share new thoughts, at least thoughts that are for the most part new to me. I will not be

entirely successful simply because I haven't read everything written on the subject. Nor can I claim to clearly remember everything I have read. With this warning I will do my best to present what I believe are useful thoughts on the question of God.

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Atheists aim some of the sharpest points of their arguments against believers themselves. In this they are characteristically unapologetic and often heavy-handed. So believers are confronted by a two-pronged attack: 1. Critiques of the argument for God, and 2. Attacks on the rationality of their own thought process.

Before we consider some of the most common claims made in criticism of believers, I want to first confront perhaps the most common and persistent myth with which atheists like to frame the argument itself. There are of course many. I will address just the most prevalent here. We are told that believers are driven by emotion and wishful thinking. Belief in a higher power is conjured up only in a mind tortured by wishful thinking and childish imaginations—and it is only within this strained atmosphere that belief can be maintained over time. A related claim is that religious experiences are really only emotional or psychological “episodes.” As such a religious or spiritual experience is really just a cognitive breakdown. As such it is certainly not a source of reliable information; far from it. Conversely, we are told that in stark contrast to the believers, atheists are objective and even rational slaves to fact and the scientific method. Emmett F. Fields expressed this notion writing:

“Atheism is more than just the knowledge that gods do not exist, and that religion is either a mistake or a fraud. Atheism is an attitude, a frame of mind that looks at the world objectively, fearlessly, always trying to understand all things as a part of nature”
(2).

For one thing, Fields flatly acknowledges that atheism strives to see the world exclusively through a naturalistic framework, something we examine throughout this book. Fields' is but one of many voices assuring us that atheists are free from the emotional attachments and baggage which are so obvious in believers. In self-congratulatory terms they argue that a cold and brutal universe without a god is not a conclusion to which emotions or wishful thinking lead a person. In other words, the atheist conclusion is not one reached through emotionalism—how could such an unpleasant reality be something for which a person would wish? Thus we are told that those who conclude that there is no

god are not confused or misled by emotion. In fact, that they conclude there is no god while emotions would compel them to desire the opposite is in itself evidence that atheists have overcome emotion and wishful thinking. Put another way, atheists are more objective and clear-headed than are theists.

The notion that religion serves as an opiate to the masses continues to hold sway. In a cold harsh world, people need something to cling to, something to distract them from the drudgery and hopelessness of life. Serving that purpose, faith and religion are also said to be a crutch for the weak. The point of this imagery is that human beings, particularly the dull and feeble, are drawn to the promise of imaginary friends and a better world to come. They need to believe that their lot will improve and that justice will be served. Clearly this is not the case in the material world so many people need to believe that somehow life continues after death. Thus critics argue that religious conviction is largely an emotional contrivance. Or as former governor Jesse Ventura put it, "*Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers.*" I quote Ventura only because I think he is willing to express this sentiment more clearly and honestly than most.

What nearly all the critics of the alleged emotion of religious belief fail to acknowledge are the emotions and the attraction of the alternative philosophy, atheism. We need only turn our attention to the commentary of some outspoken atheists to better understand the emotional draw of atheism. The precise nature of that draw may be different, yet every bit as emotional as that manifested in believers. In fact many atheists are on record with confessions of ulterior and plainly non-intellectual motivations to believe that there is no god. For example, atheist philosopher Thomas Nagel confesses:

"I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that" (3).

Nagel is not the only atheist to expressly hope there is no god. A recent advertising campaign in Great Britain reflected similar desires. An atheist organization promoted their cause with billboards and bus signs which read, "*There Probably is no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.*" Independent of the case for or against God, this appeal reflects the very human desire to avoid worry and accountability when possible. Many who profess

disbelief do not want there to be a god. For one thing there seems to be far too much downside to the proposition. This leads to what is called motivated reasoning which cognitive scientists describe as emotion-based decision-making. Motivated reasoning causes us to dismiss or underestimate things we do not like.

In summary, as with any debate with much at stake, both sides are equally prone to losing objectivity and to drawing conclusions based upon more than just reason alone. There are powerful motivations to be found both to believe and to disbelieve. Desire and reason, heart and mind, often overlap and are confused in both camps. So I suggest that to argue about failed objectivity on either side simply does not help anyone. Moreover, at base even a perfect understanding of the role of emotions in belief still tells us nothing of God's existence. This is yet another distraction from the core question. Consequently, I lay aside claims and counter-claims of emotional bias as a net neutral. It does not confer advantage to either proposition. I make a more detailed case for this conclusion later in the book.

Finally, I want to write a few words on epistemology, or how we get and hold knowledge. I do not believe in an exclusive or singular method of gaining knowledge. Instead I believe that the scientific method, for example, is but one of a number of legitimate means by which we acquire knowledge. That said, an essential theme of this and other theistic books is that a rational individual can reason his way to a belief in God. Based upon my personal experience I have concluded the same.

As we would expect the claim above stands in stark contrast to the fundamental theme of New Atheism. This is a key point of disagreement between the two sides—the reasonability and rationality of belief in God. One version of the materialist atheist view was best articulated by one of atheism's most venerated spokesmen, the late philosopher Bertrand Russell. In 1961 Russell wrote:

“Whatever knowledge is attainable, must be attained by scientific methods; and what science cannot discover, mankind cannot know” (4).

One cannot be more materialist than that—at least on the surface. To begin with, it is striking that Russell unequivocally grants exclusive authority to scientists. On his theory scientists are the gatekeepers of the flow of knowledge, the definitive arbiters of truth. By definition, nothing can count as knowledge unless it passes through their hands. This philosophy is often called scientism, or

placing inordinate faith in science. Not only is the material world all that exists, there is but one means by which we are able to make sense of it. This is a startling claim which, as we will see, is simply untenable. Moreover, it is a declaration which fails to meet the very standard it pronounces. Put simply, Russell's is unequivocally a knowledge claim—a claim of fact. Yet the claim itself obviously cannot be verified through science, the only possible source of truth, we are told. Thus to accept and employ Russell's standard compels us to reject it outright. We rightly wonder, did Russell run this knowledge claim by scientists? What tests did they conduct to verify the claim?

Paradoxically implicit in Russell's statement is the ultimate value of nonscientific means of inquiry. That is, he clearly drew conclusions from his observations outside of the laboratory—after all; Russell himself was not a scientist. Yet somehow, even without the benefit of the scientific method which he claims is universally authoritative, he found a way to conclude certain facts about the universe. Setting aside for a moment the content of his proclamation, we can consider his methodology. We can clearly see that Russell placed definitive value in his own powers of logic and reason. To pronounce a declaration as absolute as his, he must have been supremely confident in his own intellect. Thus his overriding message, even if inadvertent and fundamentally contradictory, is that philosophy must necessarily shape our decisions about which tools of inquiry to employ in which circumstances. The scientific method alone is utterly insufficient. Thus despite the glaring contradiction, we can say that we agree with the broader gist of Russell's message—we must draw conclusions using logic and reason. We will continue to see that there is often far more to be learned from the proclamations of noted atheists than is captured directly in their chosen expressions. We can learn a great deal from their methodologies and what goes unsaid.

CHAPTER SUMMARY – THINGS TO CONSIDER

Merely the passage of time does not invalidate an argument. Many arguments are old precisely because they are compelling. It is a mistake to assume that emotions and irrationality lead to belief in God. Lack of rationality can lead a person to disbelief just as readily as belief. Science is but one means of acquiring knowledge. To claim otherwise is fundamentally contradictory. Logic and philosophy are necessary to make sense of what the scientific method

yields.

CHAPTER 2 - FRAMING THE ARGUMENT

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“Not everything that counts can be counted. Not everything that can be counted counts.”

—Albert Einstein

“All knowledge and understanding of the Universe was no more than playing with stones and shells on the seashore of the vast imponderable ocean of truth.”

—Isaac Newton

UNFORTUNATELY, THE MOST PROMINENT atheists have become professional debaters. Many are experts in the craft. In fact, debating God’s existence has become a sport—boasting what amounts to a roster of all-stars. So while their logic and analysis may have originated in all sincerity and through the greatest possible objectivity, they are now delivered with an eye toward winning an increasingly public debate. As a result, much of their content has been transformed and has lost the intellectual honesty which gave them voice. My purpose here is to briefly examine and correct some of the more confusing if not disingenuous formulations of atheist arguments with which most of us are familiar.

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A regrettably effective approach for some atheists is to commandeer central theist themes and terms and to transform them with new, more helpful definitions—that is, more helpful to the atheist narrative. Perhaps the most vivid example is provided by atheist professor and author, Peter Boghossian, Ed.D. His signature work, *A Manual for Creating Atheists*, takes this tactic to a whole new level. Boghossian based his book, related lectures, and articles on his unapologetic redefinition of the paramount term to all believers; *faith*. He appears to have taken a cue from Mark Twain who famously quipped that, *“Faith is to believe what you know ain’t so.”*

We can give Mr. Twain a pass because with the same pen he described himself as a humorist and satirist. That is, he admitted to taking cheap shots and making simplistic assertions in humor — tactics far less helpful in serious discourse. Meanwhile, Boghossian is a professor of philosophy with a substantial following who takes him quite seriously. He presents himself as a serious scholar and ambassador of reason. But most important, Boghossian undertakes a solemn campaign to rid the world of all faith and religion. He unabashedly recruits foot soldiers, whom he calls “street epistemologists,” to achieve that objective. The gravity of Boghossian’s mission warrants careful scrutiny of his methods. From Chapter 1:

“The goal of this book is to create a generation of Street Epistemologists; people equipped with an array of dialectical and clinical tools who go into the streets, the prisons, the bars, the churches, the schools, and the community — into any and every place the faithful reside — and help them abandon their faith and embrace reason”

“To help people overcome their faith and to create a better world — a world that uses intelligence, reason, rationality, thoughtfulness, ingenuity, sincerity, science, and kindness to build the future; not a world based on faith, delusion, pretending, religion, fear, pseudoscience, superstition or a certainty achieved by keeping people in a stupor that makes them pawns of unseen forces because they’re terrified” (5).

According to Boghossian there is intelligence, rationality, sincerity, ingenuity, kindness, and science on the one hand; then on the other hand there is faith. This stark dichotomy will come as a surprise to those who profess faith and simultaneously strive for these other virtues. His mission is driven by a full-throated indictment of faith and religion and everything related to them. It is clear that the stakes could not be higher. He aims to transform society by first ridding it of faith in God. Thus the definition and real meaning of faith is paramount.

Summarily discarding the admittedly numerous and sometimes contradictory definitions used by believers, Boghossian transmutes the word faith into “*pretending to know something you really don’t know*” (5). He unabashedly acknowledges that his is a redefinition of the term, one obviously not accepted by believers. The absence of nuance and flexibility in his custom formulation will come as a surprise to most believers, perhaps by design. More important, by fundamentally reframing the entire argument and hijacking the word faith, Boghossian has created for himself a no-lose debate. After all, if you are entitled to redefine your opponent and his primary argument to your advantage apparently in any way you choose, the debate is all but over. There is

no need to venture beyond the very first salvo. Your opponents pretend to know something they really don't know. It follows then that they are flatly wrong so nothing more to come out of their mouths or from their pens is worth consideration. Case closed.

Not so fast. Just imagine something comparable from the theist side of the debate. For example, if we could get away with it we might redefine the word atheist to “one who refuses to consider evidence he doesn't like” or “one who, no matter the merits, refuses to consider arguments or evidence for the supernatural.” It would follow naturally that atheists were more than likely wrong because they willfully lack adequate information to form reasonable beliefs. With this new and more helpful definition of my opponent's position, we would have no need to venture any further into the debate. Again, there is no point to any further discussion. After all, the atheist position is based upon the rejection of relevant data. Case closed. This is precisely the reason Boghossian hijacks the meaning of faith. Unfortunately, it amounts to calling his opponent a fool. Consequently, there is no reason to continue the dialogue.

The sincere seeker needs to beware of the tactics employed in *A Guide to Creating Atheists*. The book is a destructive misfire in the dialogue among atheists, agnostics, and theists, serving none in a meaningful way. In fact, it only creates more distrust, confusion, and alienation. We could expect nothing less from a cause driven by an a priori indictment of believers, their soundness of mind, and their sanity. A better approach would be accepting the definition of a word from those who actually use it directly, those who define themselves with it. That is, if we want to know what believers mean by the word “faith,” we should inquire of believers. Conversely, atheists sometimes offer distinctions on a range of classes of atheism—weak, strong, and classes in between. There will be more on this in subsequent chapters. For now, I accept their definitions because they are intended to describe the way atheists think, not the way those who disagree with atheists think of them. In short, we should get the definition from the source. A dialogue in which each side presumes to force definitions upon the opposition is not a dialogue worth having. It's no different that presuming to read the opponent's mind. Boghossian's novel definition of faith is an entirely self-serving contrivance.

The next cynical but occasionally effective tactic is revealed with clarity in much of the methodology of anti-Christian crusader Richard Carrier, Ph.D. This devious tactic is nowhere captured more clearly than in the conclusion of his book, *Why I am Not a Christian*. This is just one of his series of books targeting belief in God. Carrier systematically uses gratuitously bold, conclusive language to dismiss arguments from the opposition:

“As I have clearly shown, Christianity entails that God, like any other person, would say and do at least some things we would all observe. And we’d all agree on what they were. Any Christian God would make sure of that. Since we haven’t seen such things, none at all, the Christian theory of the world is falsified by the evidence, conclusively. Christianity also entails that God would have made the universe very differently than we observe it to be. It’s instead exactly as we would expect it to appear if there is no god at all. So again Christianity is falsified by the evidence, conclusively. A failed prediction means a failed theory, especially when these failures apply to the very nature and design of the universe itself. There is also insufficient evidence for any of the essential propositions of Christianity. The evidence offered doesn’t even come remotely close to what common sense requires and certainly nowhere near what you would accept to convince you to adopt any other religion. So the Christian hypothesis flatly contradicts a ton of evidence, makes numerous failed predictions, is not the best explanation of the universe we find ourselves in, and fails to find anywhere near sufficient evidence in its own support. That’s more than enough reason to reach my conclusion – Christianity is simply false” (6).

Naturally, we can assume that his arguments and conclusions make perfect sense to him. So his uses of words like *clearly* and *conclusively* seem warranted to him. But here is another source of disconnect. We can often mistake the author’s emphatic proclamations, particularly when repeated, for sound argumentation. In short, just because the critic of theism pounds the table with ultra-sharp conclusions does not mean that they are borne out by the evidence or arguments on display. In fact, experience teaches us that often the use of such absolute language actually betrays weaknesses in the claimant’s argument. In this way, Carrier’s work is similar to that of Boghossian described above—a misuse of language.

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Had we not read the pages which preceded this summation of his arguments, we would reasonably conclude that Carrier had set the final nails in the coffin of the God of Christianity. Once again, with all the pressing details so categorically decided we all might as well move on and find something else more interesting to debate. But fortunately, having considered the book in full, we still have a few

things to say about his methodology and conclusions. I present most of my criticism in later chapters but for now the important point is that when Carrier cites the Christian theory or Christian theories he is actually talking about his own unique formulation of them. His Christian theory is his very own, constituted in large part of the projection of his patently human inclinations, concerns, and constraints onto his straw-man god—his straw-god. For example, Carrier is quite naturally determined to accomplish all there is to accomplish in his anticipated 85 or so years of human existence. So naturally his god figure is likewise determined—he too is driven to accomplish his designs in similarly short order. His god's clock is ticking just as ominously as is his own. Moreover, given Carrier's understanding of the fleeting nature of mortality, he cannot tolerate the least degree of inequity or pain by any one for any reason. So of course his god is similarly intolerant of the same temporal inequities.

The list of human objectives, concerns, and preferences to which Carrier appeals go on and on, and all are presumed to be equally if not more binding upon or paramount to Carrier's straw-god. He seems painfully unaware of any risk of misattribution which could invalidate his arguments. So the end result is an unmistakably man-made god ready for public demolition.

With fatally flawed expectations of his straw-god in place, Carrier then devotes the bulk of his book to demonstrating how his straw-god fails to meet them. To establish the credibility of his ostensibly scientific approach to the question, Carrier carefully identifies particular predictions which a real god would fulfill. To no one's surprise the latter fails to fulfill them. In dramatic fashion Carrier concludes that his failed hypotheses demonstrate that the Christian god does not exist. But in reality all he has demonstrated, *conclusively*, is that the imaginary god who has the very same limits of understanding and perspective, and who has the same resulting priorities, does not and in fact cannot exist. Put another way, there is no god who thinks and feels about the world like Dr. Carrier. The logical construction of his argument is sound in a broad sense. But if he intends to rule out the Christian God, which he most certainly does intend to do, he omits an essential premise upon which his conclusion necessarily would rest.

With respect to this god created in Carrier's image, I cannot dispute his conclusions. In fact, I agree with him. I am equally certain that no god exists who shares my level of intellect, my perspective, and my limitations as well. All of this could have been stipulated by believers and nonbelievers from the get-go.

If we want to continue to contemplate the theist God we can confidently dismiss all notions of gods who think and behave like Carrier or me, or any other human being. Thus we remain interested in the possibility of a real God, not those contrived in mankind's image. There is much more to consider.

Finally, when Carrier writes that he has “clearly shown” something, the reality is that he has merely stated that thing before. He repeats a number of assertions against the Christian God and later refers back to those assertions as “clear demonstrations.” Moreover, when he writes that “The Christian Hypothesis” has made failed predictions, he would be more accurate to state that *his predictions of his Christian hypothesis* and of a Carrier-like god fail. These corrected statements would be true.

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History is replete with war and violence, and much of what we call evil. Beyond the evil perpetrated by human beings is the pain and suffering caused by nature and natural forces. In chapter 3 I examine the age-old Problem of Evil—that is, how can God exist when we see so much evil around us today and so much man-made evil throughout history? There are reasonable answers to these important questions which are worth understanding. But first and even more damning, many atheists attribute the vast bulk of man-made evil to the frenzy of religion. Admittedly they have a bounty of attractive targets, and not just the self-righteous believer who in secret cheats on his taxes—or on his wife. They cite the sweep of the Crusades, the Inquisition, the European Holy Wars, and most recently the Islamic Jihad as examples of the fruit, to borrow a concept from Christianity, of religion in practice. Unsurprisingly, many among the New Atheist ranks claim to have been energized and morally compelled into action by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

The late Christopher Hitchens penned a blockbuster book; *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, which is an all-out assault on organized religion and an unapologetic call for its relegation to the fringes of enlightened life. Of course, there was no way such an assault would go unanswered by offended apologists and agnostic friends of Christianity alike. Hitchens' book triggered a wave of books and articles published to rebut his indictment of religion and faith.

The truth is that religion along with every other human enterprise has

militated adherents to unspeakable actions. There is no way around this fact. Then during the 20th century new ideologies displaced religious belief as the primary form of the call to organize and tragically the call to commit atrocities. Various forms of collectivism, fascism, and other isms took the reins and delivered the most devastating fruit to date. We see that religious belief is one of many human urges through which cynical and evil tyrants can marshal forces and motivate the individual to commit acts he would otherwise never contemplate. At a minimum the theist must acknowledge that religious devotion can be commandeered much like so many other commitments to achieve evil ends. Importantly, however, we must remain vigilant not to confuse religion's susceptibility to manipulation with indicators of its veracity. Still it does not follow that these means of manipulation should be altogether eliminated—an alert is warranted, certainly. Similarly, a car is an instrument which was designed to be used for good but which can easily be used for bad. We work to ensure the good, and to prevent and mitigate the bad by proscribing speed limits, seat belts, driver proficiency, and the like. In the end it all depends on the intentions of the one who makes use of it. A car can get you from one point to another or it can snuff out life. Similarly, religion can draw the heart closer to its Creator or it can blind its adherents and drive them to do evil.

In contrast to the reproach heaped upon it by the New Atheists and in response to it, author Dinesh D'Souza has much to say about the net effect of religion in general and Christianity in particular on society. He is but one of many authors so inclined. His book *What's so Great About Christianity* rebuts many of the most prevalent criticisms of religion and explores how Christianity as a movement and Christian tenets together have shaped nearly all aspects of modern life, from science, to government, to philanthropy, and more (7). He makes a powerful case that, far from hampering progress as claimed by critics, Christianity actually has been the principal force behind many of the features of modern life we value the most. Admittedly D'Souza's book is not one of historical scholarship. As an author determined to defend institutions and religions from false claims, he is certainly not alone.

In *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization*, author Thomas E. Woods chronicles and documents the countless contributions the church and the broader faith have made over the years (8). Woods holds a Ph.D. from Columbia University and has produced a number of similar works written to defend the faith and its historical role in shaping the modern world. Unlike D'Souza,

Woods is one of many credentialed historians motivated to set the record straight. There are of course many other scholars and authors who help provide more context and perhaps greater balance to an increasingly hostile debate about faith in history. In short, there is a great deal of scholarship which debunks atheist allegations against organized religion and in fact recounts extensive benefits to society brought about by Christianity.

Theists correctly point out that the very notions of individual value and rights against which critics impugn Christianity in fact emerged as inviolable only within tenets of the faith itself. Put less charitably, the strident critics of Christianity would do well to first thank the institution for the basic concepts they hold dear—then feel free to indict adherents for their failures to abide by them.

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Next let's consider the influence of belief on altruism. While not perfect indicators, perhaps the two most meaningful measures are time and money. That is, do believers devote more or less time and money to charitable causes? If as the critics insist, nothing truly good comes from faith and religious belief, we should not observe any meaningful differences between believers and nonbelievers in the key metrics of what society deems moral or simply desirable behavior.

Yet we see that the common assumption that believers give away more of their income than do nonbelievers is absolutely correct — in a very big way. The following is from Arthur C. Brooks' article in *Policy Review*:

“The differences in charity between secular and religious people are dramatic. Religious people are 25 percentage points more likely than secularists to donate money (91 percent to 66 percent) and 23 points more likely to volunteer time (67 percent to 44 percent). And, consistent with the findings of other writers, these data show that practicing a religion is more important than the actual religion itself in predicting charitable behavior. For example, among those who attend worship services regularly, 92 percent of Protestants give charitably, compared with 91 percent of Catholics, 91 percent of Jews, and 89 percent from other religions” (9).

Again, this is not particularly surprising. Yes, believers are more likely to give and to sacrifice for others. In fact, they give a lot more than nonbelievers:

“The typical no-faith American donated just \$200 in 2006, which is more than seven times less than the amount contributed by the prototypical active-faith adult (\$1500). Even when church-based giving is subtracted from the equation, active-faith adults

donated twice as many dollars last year as did atheists and agnostics. In fact, while just 7% of active-faith adults failed to contribute any personal funds in 2006, that compares with 22% among the no-faith adults” (10).

These studies along with others find that the single most significant predictor of an individual’s likelihood to give is religious belief. Even when donations to church groups and organizations are excluded from the calculations, believers give more than nonbelievers. The data make abundantly clear that belief in God and the extra-natural has a powerful effect on how one treats the rest of humanity. Put succinctly, belief in God promotes charitable giving more than any other factor. Nothing else comes even close.

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Simplistic arguments circulate on both sides and not just among amateurs. Both sides have produced high-profile debaters who fail to resist the appeal of flat out vacuous and emotionally charged points. Sadly, in formal debates some are presented for the very purpose of invoking a knee-jerk reaction or to encourage applause. Of course, these are typically only a small part of the debate. But they tend to significantly shape the broader discourse. One purpose of this book is to separate emotional appeals from legitimate arguments.

It is striking to me that most atheists in debates are unable to acknowledge the merit of a single theist argument. My experience is that theists, for all their other faults, seem more willing to concede a point or two. Instead atheist debaters would have you believe that no point ever made by a theist has any validity whatsoever. To them, it is often “absolutely” clear or “obvious.” Their points are often “unassailable.” It is “an open and shut case.”

Atheist Peter Boghossian echoes a common assertion among militant atheists that every argument for God’s existence has been soundly refuted. He states flatly in his atheist tome, *A Manual for Creating Atheists*, that all theistic arguments have “absolutely failed” (5):

“In the last 2400 years of intellectual history, not a single argument for the existence of God has withstood scrutiny. Not one. Aquinas’s five proofs, fail. Pascal’s Wager, fail. Anselm’s ontological argument, fail. The fine-tuning argument, fail. The Kalam cosmological argument, fail. All refuted. All failures.”

And based upon these unequivocal conclusions we need never discuss any of these “failed” arguments again! Never mind that Boghossian doesn’t explain that many substantial defenses of each argument have been published as well.

He gives the impression that an impartial referee has raised the hand of the atheist and declared him the undisputed champion. I suppose he might declare with equal authority that science and reason have unequivocally established that pepperoni pizza is far superior to all others—or maybe meat-lovers. Case closed. His emphatically articulated pizza preference would be no less meaningful than his claim about the success or failure of theistic arguments.

In fairness, we hear some of the same language from defenders of belief. They too sometimes declare arguments won or lost in absolute terms. We will hear more from theist author Stephen Williams in Chapter 7. As a philosopher himself, he is convinced that some arguments for God have yet to be effectively challenged. In particular he cites the theist Argument from Contingency that something at all exists when it did not have to exist, as one theist argument which has never been defeated. So what are we to make of these conclusive claims from both sides? Who is to be believed?

Like beauty, it's clear that the success or failure of a philosophical argument is often in the eyes of the beholder. Unlike some purely scientific questions, we cannot conclude this debate with what philosophers call *knock-down* arguments and answers, what we lay people might call slam dunk arguments. The persistence of the debate around the God hypothesis throughout history is evidence that the debate has not been adjudged. The odds are that no single book can offer anything but a gentle nudge one direction or the other. The debate will continue to rage for as long as humankind is around to pose the question.

In sharp contrast to the professed confidence in the atheist dogma and the curt dismissals of every theist point, we often hear the theist acknowledge that one or more of his opponent's arguments has merit. Naturally many theists view some of their own arguments as conclusive or close to it. This is not to say they summarily dismiss every atheist criticism. Most do not. This willingness to acknowledge merit in some adverse arguments is to theism's credit. To exercise just a portion of the skepticism so often championed by atheists, we have cause to wonder whose mind is open and whose is closed. Admittedly believers can often be guilty of inflexibility. But why are atheists so fiercely opposed to even the possibility of merit in the opposition's claims? Why do they seem wholly unable to concede a single point? In Chapter 5 we consider some of the reasons why.

To provide some context on the issue of substance on both sides, the Hitchens brothers can be instructive. Of course, the late Christopher Hitchens was a deeply thoughtful and outspoken atheist. His book, *God is Not Great*, mentioned previously was more of an expose of the alleged faults and flaws of religion and religionists than a well-reasoned argument against the existence of God (11). In his writing Hitchens simply presupposes God's non-existence. Meanwhile his brother Peter Hitchens is an equally brilliant former atheist who reasoned his way into a strong theist belief. In short, both men were brilliant, came from the same home, received similar educations, and enjoyed the same socio-economic status but could not differ more dramatically on the God question.

They debated one another in Chicago in 2008 just after Christopher's book gained world-wide attention. They put on an entertaining display of sharp intellects challenging one another with sophisticated British accents which made the dialogue all the more impressive. Peter provides a behind the scenes account of the event in his 2010 book, *The Rage against God: How Atheism Led Me Back to Faith* (12).

My personal take-away from having watched the Hitchens v. Hitchens debate wasn't only that great minds can and do arrive at mutually exclusive conclusions. More interesting, it was evident that neither side is free from the impulse to some form of faith and even wishful thinking. Significantly, the atheist typically claims that no theist argument is worth taking seriously. This reveals far more about the atheist himself than the arguments he abruptly dismisses. If nothing else I would encourage the atheist-leaning reader, assuming he genuinely seeks the truth, to be open to substantial theist arguments. They do exist and they are persistent.

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One of the more condescending and frankly nonsensical claims made by atheists is that by some measure or another everyone is an atheist. It's not just condescending, it is plain ludicrous. What's more, it betrays a staggering failure to appreciate the nature of the theist God. It seems to indicate a fatal disconnect between opposing parties at the very point of departure. Richard Dawkins popularized this quip by reciting his list ancient regional gods and urging the theist to agree that with respect to each of these, he is also an atheist. He

concedes:

“I have found it an amusing strategy, when asked whether I am an atheist, to point out that the questioner is also an atheist when considering Zeus, Apollo, Amon Ra, Mithras, Baal, Thor, Wotan, the Golden Calf..I just go one god further” (13).

He’s not asking that much, just that his readers or listeners become atheists about the one god they still believe in. Again, this silliness says more about Dawkins’ thinking than it advances the atheist argument. More important, it is a dramatic example of confusing order with degree. As I warned earlier, some arguments are made only to win debate points and not to enlighten. This is certainly one of the former.

We can illustrate the inanity of Dawkins’ point by issuing a similar challenge to a married man. We could explain to him that he is already celibate with respect to every woman other than his wife. So why not just take the next step of ridding himself of his wife and become celibate with respect to her? It’s just that easy. He can simply direct that celibacy toward his wife too. By Dawkins’ thinking all monogamous spouses are actually celibate too. In fact, with respect to all the other possible partners on the planet, they are at least 99.9999999% celibate. Why not just close that 00.0000001% gap?

Dawkins wasn’t kidding when he said he likes to use the example of historical gods no longer seriously worshipped. He seems to use it at every opportunity. As smart as he is and as well as he must understand belief in the Christian God, he has to know that abandonment of just that “one last god” is not what he pretends it is. This is a clear example of clever but disingenuous argumentation and a disservice to a profoundly important debate.

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Critics of religion may acknowledge some of the more trivial benefits of religious belief but still insist that they do not outweigh the costs. Ultimately there is a much more simple, common sense approach to getting to the heart of the question. It is rather pedestrian but I cannot resist including it here because it cuts to the core of the debate. It is a simple thought experiment which leads us to the practical answer to the pressing question: Are faith and religion good or bad for society today? This is really what all the concern is about. It’s that simple. The answer to this simple question is genuinely enlightening because it strips away so much of what obfuscates the central matter today. It dissolves the biases

and prejudices rooted so deeply in both pro-religious and anti-religious sentiment. When the chips are down, what are our true and most fundamental instincts about the effect of religious belief upon the individual?

Consider the following scenario. Suppose for a moment you are walking alone down the proverbial dark alley in a big city unfamiliar to you. As you walk alone you are increasingly concerned for your safety. As you continue you hear voices and footsteps behind you, going your same direction. It seems that you are being followed, but you can't be sure. You increase your pace. From a few quick glances and hearing their voices you can tell that it is a group of 5-6 young men in their late teens or early twenties. Your heart rate increases and you wonder what will happen next and what you should do.

The question is quite simple, but instructive. It is: Would you or would you not be relieved to learn in that moment of growing fear that the young men taking the same path as you had left a Bible study group just minutes before? Any reasonable person will acknowledge that, yes; it would be a huge relief to learn that these young men were fresh from practicing their faith. Further, he would reliably assume that statistically the risk of these young men harming him in any way had diminished dramatically. Conversely, he could also reasonably assume that they would be highly likely to render assistance if he needed it. In short, he could know that they were much more likely to do good and less likely to do evil wholly because of their faith. Irrespective of how they could theoretically be manipulated by scheming politicians along with the masses, we can safely conclude that the Christian faith and its commitment to the theist God is a force for good in society.

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The thought experiment above and the statistics on altruism are no doubt encouraging — encouraging to those who believe in belief. Those with religious belief are far more generous with their resources and exhibit more civilized behavior than do those lacking the same belief. But the truth is the positive influence of faith on the individual and society in general is still not evidence of its veracity. Yes, it does show that theist belief does indeed cause people to behave better than otherwise. Unfortunately it is not evidence that there is a God any more than an adverse influence upon society would be evidence that there is no God. But it certainly can improve many aspects of life.

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Many atheists explain that they believe only in science because “it works.” They list some of its countless achievements and the many ways modern life has been improved as a result. True, science gets results and so it is worthy of belief. Interestingly, the same could be said of faith and genuine religion. Many quality of life measures indicate the positive effect of religious conviction. Longevity, speed of recovery from illness, trauma, rates of survival through major life trauma, and other important positive measures are all higher for people reporting religious devotion. Much like those who believe in science because it works, we could say that we believe in faith and religious conviction for precisely the same reason. In so many ways, they work.

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As stated earlier, the behavior of adherents has no bearing whatsoever on whether a belief system is valid. This is why good and bad behavior of believers should play no part in a debate of God’s existence. Atheist grumblings that faith and religiosity are deleterious are not only false in the main; they are irrelevant to our central question. In the end faith and religion are manifestations of the variety of human beliefs in a higher power, not evidence for or against God’s existence. Therefore we can dismiss it as an argument that God does not exist and move on to the more material arguments.

CHAPTER SUMMARY – THINGS TO CONSIDER

There are no slam-dunk arguments for atheism. Unfortunately the new atheists tend to shout the opposite. Just a cursory review of their claims reveals a number of misleading tactics at work. Typically the god they combat is only a straw god, not the theist God. Many of their most adamant claims turn out to be mere subjective preferences. Contrary to frequent claims that faith is deleterious to society, there is abundant evidence that religious devotion improves the lives of adherents and others around them. Finally, when the chips are down, when it really matters, believer and nonbeliever alike are relieved and comforted by religious adherence.

CHAPTER 3 - THE BURDEN OF PROOF

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“Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”

—Carl Sagan

“The prosecution presented the testimony of two witnesses who were at the scene and saw the defendant commit the crime. Unimpressed, the defense presented the testimony of two witnesses who were not at the scene and did not see the defendant commit the crime.”

—The Author

I STATED EARLIER that in this book I intend to address the best atheist arguments I know. So I will not resort to a common tactic among theists and simply assert that the burden of proof is born by the atheist. I will not retreat to the defense that atheists cannot disprove God. Of course this is true, but it is not remotely helpful. With one significant exception which I describe below, I agree with atheists that this attempt to shift the burden to them is inappropriate. I do agree that believers must do more than smugly challenge atheists to disprove their beliefs. Instead, believers do in fact carry a burden of proof and it is not necessary to pretend otherwise.

However atheists routinely overplay this hand. They often lurch from the acknowledgement that they cannot disprove God’s existence to unveiled mockery of the believer’s alleged gullibility. They add that they can no more disprove God than they can fully disprove the Tooth Fairy or Santa Claus. That is just the beginning. Atheists of late have made a sport of conjuring all sorts of ridiculous objects and beings which are, as they say, technically unfalsifiable. Some of the best known of these today are the classic from atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell’s Teapot which exists somewhere between Earth and the Moon, Dawkins’ Flying Spaghetti Monster, and Carl Sagan’s invisible pink dragon. The obvious benefit to atheists of articulating this kind of nonsense is the unmistakable implication that belief in a creator god is equally fanciful, bizarre and even “delusional.” Unfortunately atheists who pursue this line of

argument for this advantage either cynically or unwittingly make a fundamental category error. They suggest that all of the propositions above are of similar merit. Moreover, they once again signal their contempt for any and all theistic notions, a contempt which betrays a fatal failure to reasonably consider the best arguments from the opposing side. Atheists who resort to this kind of minimization and overt mockery are not serious students of the God Hypothesis. Sadly this is apparent all the way from the message board enthusiast taking pot shots in his pajamas to bestselling authors with devoted global followings.

As if these atheists didn't know it, the key distinction they neglect is explanatory power. None of the many whimsical objects on offer is genuinely posited as a rational explanation of any real question. They are not proposed by anyone anywhere as a possible explanation for any real phenomenon. It is possible that they could have been just that. Russell's Teapot could have been a theory to account for otherwise inexplicable appearances of tea floating in surrounding space. The Spaghetti Monster could have been a theory to account for random spaghetti noodles or traces of spaghetti sauce found in orbit, and so on. Of course these fictional phenomena are not imagined as an explanation of anything truly demanding an explanation. They are not proposed for that purpose. In other words, no alternative theory or explanation is required in their absence.

Next, each of the imaginative objects above is described as a phenomenon of the physical world. As such each would be subject to the three spatial dimensions and to time. Each would be within the reach of scientific inquiry. Conceivably, if any of these objects existed, science could help us locate it and acquire knowledge about it.

In stark contrast to these purely material phenomena is the creator God specifically postulated as a reasonable and rational theory to explain the existence of the universe, life, order, complexity, a near universal sense of divinity, and the apparent fine tuning of essential constants (more on these in later chapters). The theist God is an explanation of phenomena which demand an explanation. At this point it is not even necessary to establish the validity of the explanation. Atheists are busily pursuing materialistic explanations and to offer alternative theories for the same. But these alternative theories do not automatically make theistic theories ridiculous, irrational or unnecessary explanations. In short, unlike garden fairies and the rest, the God Hypothesis is beyond the reach of science. Equally important, it is posited as an explanation of

a reality which both theists and atheists agree exists.

To the broader point presumably intended by atheists but lost in their mockery, I agree that it makes no sense to demand that atheists disprove any and every claim made by believers. Theists' nonchalance and atheists' petulance combine to perpetuate the false notion that atheists must disprove all claims no matter how extravagant and ridiculous. But in perhaps the most important matter, atheists themselves are forced to draw one very important conclusion which unequivocally amounts to an affirmative claim. For that matter it is their most important claim and it demands justification.

In the same way they argue that extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence, atheists have some explaining to do. They need to produce evidence. Specifically, by their own standard they must provide compelling evidence that everything came to be from nothing without a cause. In this paramount respect, atheists cannot reasonably stand behind the shield of "non-belief"—the same kind of non-belief they cite about the existence of God. No, their position when applied to the origination of the universe becomes something much more. Somehow, all matter and energy, along with space and time came into existence as a result of the Big Bang. This both theists and atheists accept. In a dramatic departure from all human experience, however, atheists affirmatively claim that nothing and no one caused the Big Bang. Let's not forget that absolutely nothing else we know of behaves this way. Not a thing. Our atheist friends admit this, but then insist that is how everything behaved in the beginning. The origination of absolutely everything is said to be causeless. They state with unfaltering conviction that no god created the universe—no god was needed. So they must provide alternative explanations of how matter, energy, space, and time came into existence given what they dismiss with prejudice. The confidence that many atheists convey on the topic would seem to indicate they have it figured out—this profoundly counterintuitive and frankly incoherent explanation of everything. Is their confidence warranted? Do they have something up their sleeve? Their bold language would seem to say yes. We will explore this question in later pages.

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Atheists face an equally daunting challenge in explaining the origins of life. Much like the problem of everything coming into existence out of nothing by

way of the Big Bang, atheists have no way to account for the advent of life without an agent. The probabilities against the unguided emergence of life are so extreme we cannot begin to appreciate them. Dr. Hugh Ross examines some of the hurdles to the spontaneous generation of life:

“Why does the history of life appear the way it does? Naturalists, materialists, deists, and most theistic evolutionists would answer that the chemicals on early Earth spontaneously self-assembled into a simple cell that was able to reproduce. From there, the cell's daughters evolved to produce all the life-forms that have ever existed throughout the past 3.8 billion years. Such a history requires that life make at least 16 transitional steps in order to generate advanced life-forms” (14)

Ross lists each of the 16 steps, or essential transitions which by atheistic reckoning would have had to occur entirely by chance. The details of each step are not important to us here. The odds of them taking place in sequence are worth considering. They are staggering. According to physicists John Barrow and Frank Tipler, the probability of all 16 steps occurring is less than one chance in $10^{24,000,000}$, or ten followed by 24 million zeroes. Statisticians tell us that 1 in 10^{50} (one in ten followed by 50 zeroes) is the threshold of possibility. That is, a probability of 1 in 10^{50} or smaller is the same as impossibility. Thus our best science today informs us that the probability of intelligent life spontaneously arising out of inanimate elements is zero. Even with natural selection and evolution in operation no amount of time, billions or trillions of years, is sufficient to yield the results we see around us. There is a very simple way to express this conclusion. The materialist atheist account of the origins of life is statistically and scientifically impossible. We are fully justified to conclude that the atheist must believe that which science declares impossible.

With respect to the existence of life without a creator the burden of proof falls on the atheist. They simultaneously maintain that no god or agent of creation exists while acknowledging that, while scientifically impossible, life arose from non-life. This amounts to an affirmative position which demands an explanation. It is as they say an extraordinary claim for which there is no evidence, let alone extraordinary evidence.

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One of the driving themes of atheist criticism is the theist's willingness to believe allegedly crazy things — this despite what we just saw above. Atheism presupposes two impossible events. Yet the atheist critique is that believers are

patently irrational. They are, well, *believers*. We saw earlier that atheists routinely classify the creator God hypothesis with fairies, spaghetti monsters, invisible pink dragons, and other fanciful creatures to insinuate a kind of guilt by association. That is, the atheist will casually tick off a list of patently crazy notions and include the belief in God obviously to convey that each is equally irrational. Here you have a six-year-old who believes in garden fairies and Santa Claus and there you have a 60-year-old widely published professor of philosophy who believes in the theist God. Profound gullibility manifested in two different ways.

At this point the atheist invokes his particular brand of materialism or naturalism to define what standards must be met for any particular proposition to be believable. More precisely, we are told that to be rational is to limit one's belief to those things which can be wrestled to the ground using our physical senses. We cross into the realm of irrationality when we seriously consider beliefs which cannot be handled in such a way. Most often the scientific method is offered up as the primary tool through which these things can be ascertained. And there you have it, the atheist distinction between the rational and the irrational among us. In short, there is science and then there is the irrational.

Right away the atheist critique has crashed through the guardrail and over the cliff. Fortunately this has been thoroughly exposed by apologists of late. The atheistic assertion that we only have reason to believe things which lend themselves to the scientific method is itself a knowledge claim which cannot be established using the scientific method. Think about it. There will be more on this point later on.

So there is a fundamental and fatal flaw in atheist requirements of legitimate knowledge. In short, the atheist violates his own rules in the very breath through which he articulates them. One of their brightest lights, Bertrand Russell, provided a clear example in the Introduction. This contradiction is still embedded in atheist philosophy today. Those with a skeptical mind then should be forgiven if they are less inclined to accept subsequent absolute claims from atheism.

My point here is much more than just that the rules of knowledge proclaimed by atheists are untenable by their own standards. The fact is *both* theists and atheists believe things and think in ways which do not comply with the rules of materialism and naturalism. As we will see, there is not even a

noticeable difference in the mix of beliefs between the two worldviews. That is, there is no reason to conclude that theists' beliefs are more tilted toward the irrational, irrational even as defined by atheists, than those of atheists. It is likely that, applying the standards set forth by materialism, if theistic beliefs were to be calculated to be 80% grounded and 20% ungrounded, atheistic beliefs would come in at the same 80/20 mix. The primary difference, and most relevant to our purposes, is that theists tend to be honest about the nature of their thinking while atheists simply are not. The demands made by their formulation of truth will not permit it.

CHAPTER SUMMARY – THINGS TO CONSIDER

It is reasonable to demand reasons to believe from theists. For the same reason it is reasonable and warranted to demand an explanation from atheists of why there is something rather than nothing and why and how life emerged, among other things. Whether they recognize it, all people believe in concepts which cannot be scientifically established. Theists are no more irrational than atheists. Both are of equal parts rational and irrational. The comparison of the theist God to fanciful creatures misses the point and muddles the dialogue. Unlike the latter, God is an entirely rational explanation of what demands an explanation—all existence. Moreover, while teapots and spaghetti monsters would be subject to physical laws and therefore accessible to science, God is neither.

CHAPTER 4 - THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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“[I]f God both can and wants to abolish evil, then how comes evil in the world?”

—Epicurus, *Philosopher*

“Wisdom comes alone through suffering.”

—Aeschylus, *Playwright*

“All the diversity, all the charm, and all the beauty of life are made up of light and shade.”

—Leo Tolstoy

THE MOST SUBSTANTIVE ARGUMENT advanced by atheists is known as the Problem of Evil. Consequently, we will devote a substantial number of pages to considering how it shapes belief and how we might better understand the simultaneous existence of God and evil. We will see that the Problem of Evil is closely related to the Moral Argument for God even if not intended so by atheists. The fact that versions of this argument date back millennia does not serve to blunt it. It remains a legitimate atheistic complaint which demands serious consideration of any thoughtful believer. As we have seen sometimes atheists dismiss a theistic argument seemingly solely because it's an old one. Yet often and quite understandably an argument has been around a long time precisely because it has merit! This is true of the Problem of Evil as an important challenge to belief in God. This is not to say that there are not robust theistic defenses. There are. Great thinkers have worked extensively to reconcile evil with the theist God in a theological discipline call Theodicy. There is also reasoning which is readily understood by the non-theologist. Both lines of defense make way for an entirely rational belief in God even in the face of abundant evil in the world.

The Problem of Evil is employed to argue that if the Judeo-Christian God

really existed and really possessed the qualities attributed to Him, there could be no evil in the world. Thus the fact that there most certainly is evil in the world, and we all recognize it, is proof positive that there is no such god. The Problem of Evil assumes that the two are fundamentally incompatible.

The primary three qualities attributed to God which give form to the dispute are Omniscience, Omnipotence, and perfect goodness. The God of the theists knows all things, everything there is to know, through all time, and across all space. He has all power and can do anything that is logically possible. Forget about the nonsensical and unhelpful hypotheticals like creating a rock so massive that he himself cannot lift it. I will set these hypotheticals aside because they are logically impossible. Meanwhile I will identify other logical impossibilities at the root of a number of arguments against God's existence. They generally go unrecognized and therefore untreated.

Perhaps the most succinct way to express the Problem of Evil is as follows. *"If there is a loving god, why does he allow so much evil in the world"* (15). This is a brief expression of a powerful sentiment which comes in various forms. The first step is to recognize it even when it is camouflaged in an abundance of words. This question has been asked for as long as humankind has wondered about God, and for good reason. The God we have described here is perfectly capable of doing away with everything bad to leave only good things in their place. Is He not? It follows then that one of the three key features of God must be untrue. Either he doesn't know everything, or he is incapable of preventing evil. Or maybe there is an all-knowing, all-powerful god who doesn't care enough about humanity to prevent evil. Maybe he doesn't care at all. Again, this is an important and worthy challenge which must be addressed.

Atheists often cite a reason for their disbelief without recognizing that it is a facet of the Problem of Evil. In fact, it is often disguised within many if not most of their arguments. Typical is a prolific YouTube-based atheist activist who in one video purports to itemize *22 Reasons Why to Stop Believing in God* (16). It turns out that at least 14 of the 22 in this video were simply aspects of the Problem of Evil. That is, 14 were at base manifestations of evil in the world which troubled this particular atheist the most. A survey of the many other atheist voices in cyberspace reveals the same theme and tendency to count various forms of evil as separate arguments for atheism. Naturally they have no difficulty identifying countless varieties of evil in the world so each is presented

as a reason not to believe. It is understandable that evil in all its manifestations troubles many who are driven to debate the God Hypothesis. On the bright side, however, were we to successfully reconcile the existence of God with the occurrence of evil in the world, many objections would have to disappear. To do so is a tall task indeed. My hope is to provide a framework of thought in which evil may occur in a world governed by an all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving God. Thus understanding the nature of evil is paramount.

There are compelling reasons to believe that evil is a necessary element or feature of our world, as necessary as each of the three spatial dimensions. It's worth noting that those who dispute God's existence based upon the problem of evil generally overlook one critical assumption in their argument. They presume that a perfectly good, loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful God could not have any reason to permit evil. This is typically called a *morally sufficient* reason to allow evil. While most people may initially agree that this is a reasonable assumption, that God could not possibly have morally sufficient reasons for permitting evil, it is not axiomatic. The atheist should first make the case for this assumption. But as I stated earlier, we are not preparing for a debate. We genuinely want to come to a better understanding of evil, its nature, and if it ultimately does have purpose. So I will assume the burden of demonstrating not only that the Creator God has morally sufficient reason to permit it, but that it is an essential feature of this world.

At this point some atheist readers might be inclined to groan...here we go with the "God works in mysterious ways" routine. But it's not necessary. This is not my argument. Mysterious ways may be part of His plan from our vantage. It is also true that God works in logical ways. In short, there are practical and logical reasons why evil abounds.

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A common rebuttal made by theists argues that he who cites evil as evidence against God is sawing off the very branch upon which his argument hangs. If there is no God, how can we say that anything is evil or wrong? We cannot. If there is no God, we can speak of how things are and how we would like them to be, but we cannot advance any arguments about evil as we traditionally understand it. In other words, we might have plenty to say about preferences, but they are only preferences. Evil by its nature demands an

opposite. There can be no evil if there is no good, more on this later in this chapter. For example, imagine an individual who presumes to define *up* while not accepting the notion of an actual *down*. It is as if we are floating in spacesuits in outer space without any point of reference. It would be wholly arbitrary for one of us to claim that there is an up or a down or any direction whatsoever. The direction “up” to me could be “left” to you and “down” to a third person, and so on. What’s more these relative directions would also be constantly changing. We see that there can be no real direction without appealing to some absolute point of reference. So it is with evil—it simply has no real meaning if there is no God to provide contrast.

Celebrated author, atheist turned Christian apologist, CS Lewis, explained the necessity of such an absolute standard. He famously explained, for example, that we cannot know that we have drawn a crooked line unless we have some concept of a perfectly straight line. More precisely:

“My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?” (17).

We notice right away that the quote above was published in a CS Lewis book all the way back in 1952. In fact, he had originally made the argument and many others in a series of regular radio appearances which began in 1943, at the height of World War II. His commentary on the reality of pain and suffering would have been particularly poignant given all that the people of Great Britain were suffering at the time. German aircraft were raining bombs down on the cities relentlessly, leaving the citizenry in a perpetual state of agitation and grief. He certainly cannot be accused of lecturing in a vacuum or enjoying some kind of immunity from his subject matter. To the contrary, he and his audience were immersed in it.

Despite having been uttered many decades ago, his words continue to hold great explanatory power. The upshot is that Lewis realized that he could not cogently use evil as an argument against God because there can be no concept of evil without God as the standard, or establishing the standard of good. Language permits us only to describe something by describing how it deviates from the ideal or the standard.

It follows that atheists cannot argue for any kind of absolute notion of good or evil. They enjoy no such absolute frame of reference. There are a few well-known atheists who argue that even in the absence of God absolute morality does exist. These are a tiny minority of atheist thinkers so I will proceed with the kind of atheist in mind who acknowledges the necessity of a god for absolute morality. Now certainly there are preferences which are shared even by vast majorities, sometimes approaching unanimity. No matter how powerfully felt or universally embraced, however, they remain nothing more than preferences. Prohibitions against murder and rape, for example, enjoy broad and all but universal support. I say all but universal, which applies to the western world – for there are regions of the world in which some forms of what we in the West clearly see as rape are simply considered a man’s or a husband’s prerogative. By the way, this illustrates one problem with the ordering of society without a shared concept of absolute good and evil.

We see that without God as the ultimate source of good and by contrast deriving the definition of evil, these prohibitions reflect at best only widely shared preferences, nothing more. The atheist cannot resist these facts – to deny God is to deny both absolute good and absolute evil. Nearly all atheistic philosophers accept this. The absurdity of this position is revealed by a survey of increasingly heinous acts. At some point the theist working to make this point mentions torture or other horrible acts committed against babies solely for amusement. This naturally triggers a visceral response in any thinking and feeling human being. In our gut, in the same way we know we are conscious, we distinctly know that these acts are utterly and objectively evil. There is no question about it. In response the intellectually consistent atheist will cite the feeling human being as merely conditioned over a lifetime to react with horror to the acts in question. The sensations of revulsion all healthy human beings experience at the worst evils are only the product of chemistry which has been shaped only by biology and socialization. Perhaps. Perhaps the same could be said of our inclination to believe that we truly do exist in a material world and are not brains in a vat, remotely experiencing what seems to be the physical world. This sense of reality we all experience is no more verifiable than is our apparent sense of absolute good and evil. Again we see that susceptibility to the scientific method is not a necessary property of reality.

I had intended at this point to leave the topic of subjective morality to avoid belaboring it here. But my ongoing reading of atheistic tracts compels me to additional attention. As I read Yuval Noah Harari's *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, I am struck yet again by the dismal state of the atheistic moral framework. While not necessarily an atheist tract, Harari's work unequivocally presupposes a materialistic universe. Faithful to that framework, he staunchly refuses to express any kind of moral judgment on any form of behavior, no matter how distasteful to western sensibilities. To his credit, however, he is fully aware of this limitation as an inevitable product of the materialist-atheist worldview. Describing some of the sacrifices necessary of foraging societies even today he writes:

"Modern foragers occasionally abandon or even kill old or disabled people who cannot keep up with the band. Unwanted babies and children may be slain. And there are even cases of religiously inspired human sacrifice" (18).

Bummer, nothing more.

Harari continues his account of the less desirable aspects of foraging societies (at least less desirable by Judeo-Christian standards):

"The Aché people, hunter-gatherers who lived in the jungles of Paraguay until the 1960s, offer a glimpse into the darker side of foraging. When a valued band member died, the Aché customarily killed a little girl and buried the two together. Anthropologists who interviewed the Aché recorded a case in which a band abandoned a middle-aged man who fell sick and was unable to keep up with the others. He was left under a tree; vultures perched above him, expecting a hearty meal. But the man recuperated and, walking briskly, he managed to rejoin the band. His body was covered with the birds' feces so he was henceforth nicknamed "Vulture Droppings." When an old Aché woman became a burden to the rest of the band one of the younger men would sneak behind her and kill her with an axe blow to the head. An Aché man told the inquisitive anthropologists stories of his prime years in the jungle. 'I customarily killed old women. I used to kill my aunts. The women were afraid of me. Now here with the whites I have become weak.' Babies born without hair which were considered underdeveloped were killed immediately. One woman recalled that her first baby girl was killed because the men in the band did not want another girl. On another occasion a man killed a small boy because he was in a bad mood and the child was crying. Another child was buried alive because it was funny looking and the other children laughed at it."

Harari warns us not to apply a western standard, or really any standard to this behavior:

"We should be careful though not to judge the Aché too quickly. Anthropologists who lived with them for years report that violence between adults was very rare. Both men

and women were free to change partners at will. They smiled and laughed constantly, had no leadership hierarchy, and generally shunned domineering people. They were extremely generous with their few possessions and were not obsessed with success or wealth. The things they valued most in life were good social interactions and high-quality friendships. They viewed the killing of sick people, children, and the elderly as many people today view abortion and euthanasia” (18).

Concluding his remarks about the Aché people, Harari cautions:

“The truth is the Aché society, like every human society, was very complex. We should beware of demonizing or idealizing it on the basis of superficial acquaintance. The Aché were neither angels nor fiends, they were humans.”

Unless I am reading him incorrectly and I don't think I am, Harari seems to be saying that although the Aché did brutally kill the weakest among them and those who didn't look quite right, they were otherwise good-hearted, cheerful, weren't hung up on material things—we might say they were not materialistic (note the irony here), weren't hamstrung by monogamous commitments, and they enjoyed good conversation too. So on balance, we cannot say that their society was any better or any worse than ours. It was certainly different—that much we can say. Moreover, we shouldn't worry too much about being a victim of violence among them—provided we aren't too young, too old, ugly, unhealthy, or of the wrong sex. The murder of an older woman was not evil, we are told. It was just a facet of a complex society. In the end no one can really say what is good or bad—because that would imply that such standards existed.

Here we see why some are concerned about where a purely materialistic worldview can lead. In this case, the materialist author who brings us these disturbing details is blissfully unaware of the merits of such a concern. Infanticide on the one hand is apparently less regrettable given other practices the author appears to admire: absence of sexual prohibitions, eschewal of hierarchy, limited capitalism, and the like. In the very real sense established by the author himself, Harari's account of the development of mankind and society is merely an account of change not of advancement. Obviously there can be no advancement when no practice or tradition is superior to any other. Again, in this philosophical lens morality by necessity is only about preferences, never about getting closer to or further from any kind of absolute standard.

At this point of the discussion we need to remind ourselves of a critical condition of our demands of God. Specifically, we cannot expect Him to do that which is logically impossible, *i.e.* creating a square circle. Philosophers of all stripes, theist, atheist, and agnostic alike stipulate that expectations of a proposed deity must not be logically impossible. There is nothing to be gained by framing expectations which violate this principle. Yet upon careful examination we find that the argument of the Problem of Evil does precisely that. While perhaps not recognized as such by the atheists who advance the argument, at its core it demands the logically impossible of God.

Let's consider something more tangible to help us understand the problem. Let's equate the good versus evil dimension to physical heights versus depths. That is, in topographical terms, high elevation corresponds to great good and low elevations correspond to great evil. Well-known atheist and author Sam Harris proposes a similar model in his book, *The Moral Landscape* (19). Now as would-be creators we take upon ourselves the task of creating a world in which we seek to realize great heights and to maximize the same. So with this seemingly straight-forward objective in mind we begin the work of creating a new planet.

Yet soon we realize that our task will require trial and error, or stages. This planet creation business is not quite as simple as we had anticipated. This difficulty isn't due to some fundamental necessity in our methodology. With the right plan we could actually just snap our fingers and, voilà, there it is. There are no shortages of materials and we are perfectly capable of organizing them as we like. Instead, it is a problem of design. Stages emerge as we recognize that our first attempt to create great mountain peaks to maximize our desired outcome, elevation, has yielded abundant commensurate points of low elevations in the form of gorges, ravines, and valleys. But our primary objective demands that these gorges, ravines, and valleys are to be avoided at all costs. Again, they are the equivalent of great evil and they must be eliminated.

So we take our next step to correct the error. With a snap of our omnipotent fingers we raise the valleys to eliminate low elevations. We do so until they reach the elevation of the highest peak we created in stage one. That correction made, we congratulate ourselves for a job well done until we realize the obvious. There are no longer any great mountains or peaks—the very purpose of the entire undertaking. Step two has increased the circumference and mass of our new planet. The elimination of all the valleys has simultaneously eliminated all the mountains. It could not be otherwise. We are left with a perfectly smooth

surface, permitting no increased elevation whatsoever. We could resume the effort, like a dog chasing his tail, and attempt to create mountain ranges and peaks again. Of course we would find that every foot of elevation created a corresponding foot of depth. We are forced back to the drawing board. Like two sides of the same coin, height is inextricably connected to depth. We quickly realize that it is physically impossible to create a world with towering heights without simultaneously creating a world with enormous depths.

In the very same way to create a world which permits great good is to create a world which unavoidably permits great evil. So when our atheist friends argue that God cannot exist because there is evil in the world, they are demanding the creation of something impossible. They are demanding a square circle or a one-sided coin. They are demanding that God do the logically impossible.

With this illustration and practical understanding of the necessary relationship between peaks and valleys, we are better equipped to reconsider criticism of the coexistence of good and evil. So when Richard Carrier explains how, if he were God, he would make certain that only good events take place, we know that he hasn't considered all the facts. He hasn't considered all the moving parts and necessary relationships. We know that he hasn't thought through the metaphysics of creating a world with the objective of providing space for true good.

More parallels are available to help illustrate the point. I invite you to think of your own. How would you create a world with only ups and no downs? How would you create a world with only lefts and no rights, only hot but no colds, and so on? Our world is one of contrast. Opposites, inverses, and counters are necessary elements without which logically we could not exist.

So it is with the existence of evil. Alternatively we might compare God's goodness to light from the Sun. Or we can imagine light as the representation of goodness itself. As the light rays reach the Earth shadows are cast away from the Sun. In fact, the shadows themselves are evidence of the light and, ultimately, evidence of the Sun's existence. Both the light and a form of darkness, shadows, are evidence of the Sun. We might say that shadows are the price we pay for the light we receive. Significantly, shadows do not form unless there is light. Thus they are direct evidence of light. Now incorporating the concept illustrated by the quest for great elevations, shadows are a necessary element of a world with any perceivable texture, a world of shape and form. Once again we see that to

eliminate the shadows would require removing all texture. In summary, in much the same way, to accommodate texture on an otherwise smooth globe is to permit the formation of shadows (darkness). And we recognize the cold and darkness of shadows *only* because of our experience of the warmth and the light of the Sun's rays. Likewise to endow a planet and its inhabitants with true freedom and moral agency is to allow the undesirable use of the same.

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Prominent new atheists have dedicated considerable ink to chronicling many of the forms and varieties of evil around the world through the ages. Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens, Shermer, along with some of the lesser known activists seem to think that the size of the list of bad is a cumulative case against God. Having most recently read Carrier's work, I think of the large number of examples he provides. For contrast, he also explains precisely what he would do if he were God. For example, he writes that he would immediately transform the bullets fired from the gun of a madman bent on mass murder into "popcorn falling harmlessly to the ground." With the omnipotence which theists attribute to God, Carrier would turn all bad things into good things without delay. The world governed by Carrier as god would be free from evil—no exceptions. He is adamant about this. And at first glance, no thoughtful or feeling person could disagree. Even with every form of evil banished forever, is Carrier's world worth creating in the first place? If we can manage to set aside, just for a moment, our profound emotional revulsion at the mass murder described above, we will understand the error in the atheist's argument.

By the way, the atheist is typically the proud proponent of stripping ourselves of blinding emotion in order to think clearly—a key to rationality. After all, they tell us that in any rational pursuit of truth emotions like these are our enemy. In this context emotions never serve to clarify, they only muddy the water. Yet as we have seen, more often than not the atheist presents the Problem of Evil more as an emotional appeal rather than one of pure reason. It is inarguably designed to incite emotions, not to guide us through reason. The irony here is palpable.

Let's return to the challenge of the bullets turning into popcorn. Carrier's colorful details of how as god he would prevent every instance of bad in his creation is precisely equivalent to an explanation of how he would fill in every

ravine and valley to the mountain tops. He fails to understand that what appears to him to be acts of singular virtue would simultaneously eliminate good of any kind in his world. His world, void of texture, seems not worth creating in the first place. In fact, we will see below that this kind of world is indeed not worth creating.

But first, this brings us to an important element of the definition of good—it must be voluntary. It cannot be the product of coercion. Great thinkers have explored this topic at length so I won't explore it much here. And the one admittedly insufficient condition set forth above rings true to us without much elaboration. In short, if I force you at gun-point to give to the poor, you haven't acted charitably. You have been forced to part with your belongings, nothing more. If I forcibly prevent you from acting in anger, you haven't exercised restraint. You have been subdued. In this model, the guiding hand is the only form of good to be found. Similarly, in Carrier's world he as god prevents all evil and protects all good, Carrier himself is the only good. None of his creations would be capable of doing good or permitted to do the same. Their creation would be pointless.

This is what Carrier proposes in his hypothetical world. His effort to eliminate and better yet prevent all evil by necessity eliminates any possibility of good. Thus if our purposes include promoting the flourishing of good beyond ourselves, we will have no interest in organizing the world proposed by Carrier. By contrast, if our sole purpose is avoidance of any and all evil at all cost, I suppose his world model fits the bill. But then again, avoidance of evil is nicely accomplished by not creating a world in the first place. What's more this latter strategy is more consistent with one of Carrier's other top creative priorities, efficiency. Going to the trouble of creating a world in which then effort must be exerted to prevent evil would be wildly inefficient. There you have it, by choosing not to create a world in the first place both perfect avoidance of evil and perfect efficiency are achieved. The objectives set forth by Carrier are met with precision. Of course the unfortunate consequence of executing his plan does not yield incremental good of any kind. But more importantly we are interested here in the world and universe we know have been created—ours.

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As we will see, another common argument made by atheists blindly makes

the same kind of metaphysically impossible demands of God in the creation of the universe. I will address this error in a later chapter.

As I wrestled with my belief in God, I too struggled to reconcile God's goodness with the sheer volume of suffering in the world. This is understandably the single greatest source of doubt related to God's existence. Philosophers and thinkers as well as most of the "common folks" like me all struggle to understand the implications of such ubiquitous evil and pain. It requires more than just casual thought and the entertainment of knee-jerk reactions to sort out the coexistence of evil with the God of the theist. Naturally we are particularly befuddled when pain and suffering touch us directly or those we love. Hence we understand the efficacy of the atheist's recital of various forms of evil to discourage belief in God.

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The atheist will counter still that ultimately if God's creation yields bad things then God is accountable for them and is therefore not pure good himself. All that which emerges from God's setting the universe in motion would necessarily accrue both to his credit and to his fault. This kind of flawed reasoning can be found in other debates centering on personal agency. In the United States, for example, we value freedom of speech as a fundamental right precisely because we believe it to be a fundamental good and a necessary condition of good. Opponents of freedom of speech could just as likely argue that its proponents are necessarily proponents of every possible use of that freedom. They argue in effect that if we support a particular freedom then we unavoidably support any and all products of that freedom. Obviously one who supports freedom of speech does not necessarily support its misuse. Defenders of free speech may be and most often are fiercely opposed to profanity, slurs, and epithets. Instead those who support the freedom of speech recognize and value a greater objective only it makes possible. They do not endorse profanity, slurs, epithets or any kind of abusive language. Nor is it fair to argue that their support of the freedom of speech creates its misuse; far from it. While abhorring its misuse, they nonetheless understand it as a necessary byproduct of a freedom they cherish. In the end, the value made possible exceeds the cost or evil of bad speech. Moreover, they cherish the freedom of speech as a means by which great things are made possible. To cite the misuse and abuse of moral choice as evidence that a good god cannot exist is to commit the same attribution error. To

support moral agency is to support moral choice, not to support possible and even seemingly inevitable evil choices.

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I know that this next explanation will prove irritating to the atheist mind. I know because I found it highly irritating as an atheist myself. Certainly the irritation it may cause does not undermine the rationality of the argument. In any case, with that warning issued let's consider an interesting irony. Richard Dawkins has opined that a good god would never permit suffering as a means to growth or development. He firmly believes that if there was a god, he simply would have no place or purpose for any form of evil or any form of pain. Yet in the very same book, *The God Delusion*, he actually encourages a version of the same thing. Briefly, Dawkins urges readers who struggle when contemplating the cost of coming out atheist to their family and friends. They fear and often do experience great heartache and displacement in the process. Yet he insists that the rewards attendant to the freedom and peace they will enjoy as open atheists far outweigh the downside. Peter Boghossian's *A Manual for Creating Atheists*, already cited, argues passionately that believers must be separated from the "Faith Virus" which infects them (5). Incidentally, he calls approaching believers with his tactics "intervention" and "treatments." He writes about "diagnosis" and "recovery" from religious belief. To him the believer is a patient infected by a virus who desperately needs the treatment he prescribes. At least he is honest about what he thinks. Boghossian acknowledges that his treatment of infected believers can often be an extended and painful process. At the same time he has no doubt that the process is well worth it. Really? We may have heard these assurances before in another context. In fact, we have.

To summarize, prominent evangelists of atheism promote a strikingly familiar message. They reach out in great earnestness to believers everywhere to trust them. They assure the reluctant prospective atheist that, even though it may not be clear how or why or when, enduring the pain and displacement of their prescribed path to truth will provide them great fulfillment in the end. To prove the point they cite either personal experience or that of other former believers who have taken the same leap of...or, better yet let's say taken their advice. They don't exactly say it will be easy, but they do promise it will be worth it. I am certain neither uses the word faith, but they could have. In fact, faith would be the perfect word to describe what they encourage. In other words, there are

times when a measure of pain (one of the forms of evil) is warranted. There are times when pain/evil serves a greater purpose—a purpose not necessarily apparent to the sufferer in the time of suffering. The parallel here is abundantly obvious.

I do not use the example above merely to illustrate hypocrisy for debate points. Again, that simply is not helpful to those who truly want to gain insight. Instead, I use it to identify one of the ways in which atheists fail to see in their own arguments the very flaws they vigorously assail in theistic thinking. More accurately, they often claim that a particular feature of theism is intrinsically flawed while failing to recognize the very same feature in their own philosophy. The fact is, that feature is not at all flawed and can be reasonably incorporated into either theory—reasonably incorporated, but not necessarily accurate. Specifically, most atheists can't resist rolling their eyes when theists assert that God just may have purposes in permitting evil in the world. But at the very same time the atheist asks the believer to consider the possibility that the latter, due to imperfect or incomplete perspective, may not have all the information necessary to make a sound judgment. This is precisely the concession the atheist refuses to grant when it comes to proposed divine purpose. This refusal is especially irrational when we recognize the astronomical scale of what they stubbornly ignore. They are painfully unwilling or genuinely unable to fathom the possibility that an all-knowing, all-powerful creator god may possess reasons and purposes currently inaccessible to mankind.

Put another way, with our inevitably limited perspective as human beings, it's sometimes impossible to fully apprehend the purpose and value of some of life's more unpleasant experiences. I think of my son at age four when his mother was pregnant with his baby brother. What if he had no concept of pregnancy (which he didn't at first)? What if all he knew was what he observed directly, perhaps unwilling to believe anything offered as an explanation? He sees his mother in constant discomfort, often nauseated and vomiting, growing larger and more uncomfortable by the day. Then he sees her in labor and delivery. He sees a large needle driven into her spine, a smaller one in her wrist, and perhaps an incision by the doctor. He witnesses her horrible pain and discomfort through hours which to him seem like a lifetime. What would that four-year-old think of it all if he had no idea that in the end all of this suffering would result in the delivery of a new life, his baby sister? He would be in no position to understand or to judge the purpose or value of all the unpleasant

things which were necessary to realize the end result.

I understand that this analogy might strike some as patronizing. I would hope not, but it will. I include myself as that four-year-old when I attempt to more fully understand what I see around me. A natural response would be to assume that it can all be accurately adjudicated with only the information I have and the wisdom I possess. I could insist that no amount of additional information could possibly alter my conclusions. But there is a more rational approach. This alternative entails recognizing that my limited facts and limited intelligence can only produce for me a limited understanding.

As mentioned previously, there are some atheists who observe what they don't like about the world around them and conclude in consequence that no god exists. They say that God would not or could not tolerate all the undesirable realities of this planet. I return to professional anti-Christian author Richard Carrier. He boldly concludes that evil, pain, and suffering together are proof positive that the Christian God does not exist. Moreover he asserts that "excuses" like we cannot know all God's reasons "just won't do." Ignoring for a moment the intense emotional charge of Carrier's declarations, I would want to appeal to the scientist in him. I would want to suggest that he reconsider some of the unknowns in his thinking and that of likeminded atheists on the subject. How can he possibly presume to draw absolute conclusions with such limited information? It would seem that he believes he has all the information required to support his conclusion. Is this reasonable? I think not.

Suppose you were asked to review a thousand-word essay. Now suppose, for whatever reason, you were unable to see and read the entire essay. Suppose you could see only a small portion of it. Finally, let's suppose that rather than seeing and reading the entire essay, you had a glimpse of only one character, one letter, the letter n. Now finally, imagine further that the essay is written in a language you know nothing about. There you go — so what do you think of the essay?

Any reasonable person would confess immediately that with only a small fraction of the information in hand, he would be unable to draw any conclusions or offer any meaningful criticism of the essay. At the other extreme, however, is the prospective reviewer who not only claims to be able to give a review, but insists further that either there is nothing more to the essay or that if there is more to the essay it doesn't matter to his conclusion. Somehow he is perfectly

certain that none of the information outside of his grasp could alter his conclusions. The same challenge could be made of a review of a 2-hour movie. With access to only seconds of one scene, the movie critic would obviously be prevented from providing a meaningful critique.

When it comes to contemplation of our universe, and the supposed God's purpose for it and humanity, why do atheists claim such great confidence in their conclusions? The cautious cynic must be aware of the limitations of the information available to him. Of all there could be to know about the universe we inhabit, even the most presumptuous cynic would acknowledge his access to only a miniscule fraction. We can confidently draw this conclusion based upon that which we know we cannot access. Then there is that which we simply do not know what we do not know, and thus is not accessible to us. The proportion of information on which he presumes to draw existential conclusions most likely amounts to far less than the equivalent of a single character drawn from an epic novel — and still we would underestimate the sheer volume of what remains unknown to him—and to all of us. Perhaps a more accurate representation would be to compare a single grain of sand to an entire planet. Imagine presuming to comprehend all there is to comprehend of earth while having access to only a single grain of sand. Yet we would have still probably underestimated the degree of our ignorance. Renowned philosopher of science Karl Popper made the same point succinctly, writing “*Our knowledge can only be finite, while our ignorance must necessarily be infinite*” (20). So in reality the degree of our ignorance is beyond any possible calculation. Moreover, on a practical level and by definition we can never know what we don't know that we don't know.

Even while acknowledging these staggering limitations, most atheists are more than willing to disqualify any claim that there just may be a sound explanation for evil, beyond the metaphysical necessity as described through geological elevation discussed above. What's more, the elevation explanation is just one of countless potential elements of metaphysical necessity, known and unknown. In truth, however, this is not something that the atheist or anyone for that matter can possibly know. So to cite evil as proof positive that no god exists is wildly indefensible. Evil ultimately does not constitute evidence against God's existence.

The example above, the impossibility of drawing conclusions without more complete information, is only a micro chasm of the universal question. Let's talk about the universe. Let's talk about our current grasp of the infinite.

Materialists rightly point to the evolution of our understanding of the universe. For example, first we were certain that the earth was firm and immovable and the center of the universe. Then we learned that our planet was only one of many which orbited the sun. Then we learned that our solar system, the sun with its planets, swirled around with other systems within our galaxy. Ours, again, was only one of hundreds of billions of galaxies swirling and racing away from each other at unfathomable speeds. Think of how little we could know when we saw the earth as the center of that relatively tiny universe! We face no less significant limits on our grasp of existence and reality today.

The shocking truth is that science, for all its achievements and drastically improved grasp of the structure and workings of the universe, still can tell us virtually nothing about most of the content of the universe. Specifically, Dark Matter and Dark Energy remain profound mysteries. Yet scientists have concluded that this dark stuff constitutes more than 96% (Dark Matter represents 23% and Dark Energy represents 73%) of what exists in the universe (21). It can't be seen, touched, measured, or observed in any kind of direct way. Scientists were literally at a loss for words and therefore used 'Dark' as a sort of confession of ignorance. In short, we know that we know nothing about most of the actual content of our universe. If we were wise enough to learn from our historical misjudgments and overestimates of our control of the facts, we would avoid absolute claims about what might still be beyond our limited view.

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The word "view" brings me to another example of how what we think we know today can be dwarfed and even invalidated by revelations to come tomorrow. At one point our understanding of light was wholly limited by our ability to see. Light was, as a matter of fact, defined by what could be seen by the human eye and nothing more. If it couldn't be seen, it wasn't light. Even more, if it couldn't be seen, it didn't exist.

Not until the emergence of technologies to detect non-visible light waves did we understand that we had previously understood only a tiny fraction of the full spectrum of light rays. Before those technologies could be contemplated, however, someone had to first possess the imagination to wonder if perhaps there might be something more than meets the eye—literally. Enter the brilliant polymath Sir Isaac Newton. As happened so often over the course of scientific

history, a great mind appeared on the scene not just to bring new understanding, but to convince the world that it was missing something right under its collective nose. In other words, Newton introduced questions nobody had ever before asked about a reality nobody knew could exist. Newton's first astounding revelation was that sun light or white light was ponderously more than it seemed. With ingenious experimentation which included a glass prism he did what man had never before done—he stripped white light down to its constituent parts, the many colors of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. Act two was to reverse the procedure and cause the once free individual colors to recombine to reproduce the original white light. Newton was the first to consider and to demonstrate that there was far more to white light than anyone had ever assumed. Significantly, it had always been right there in plain sight.

Undoubtedly the prism was the key instrument in the experiment, but it was Newton's relentless curiosity and his presumption that there must have been something more which made this discovery possible. Fortunately if Newton did face a naysayer, scoffing at the notion of a reality beyond what he already saw and understood, he ignored him. Incidentally, Newton's relentless passion to discover nature and God's secrets, as he described his mission, drove him to extraordinary lengths and methods. He wrote of plunging a bobbin (think of a crochet needle) into his eye socket near the bridge of his nose. He carefully recorded the effects that twisting and rotating the bobbin had on his sight. He was one of those relentless explorers who was willing to literally risk life and limb (and his vision) to better understand the world. It's safe to say that Newton was one of the more devoted men of science.

So Newton's work with natural light served as the catalyst to a subsequent wealth of discoveries about the mind-boggling volume, complexity, and the beauty of light in all its forms; visible and invisible. Within a relatively short period of time we had a fantastically enhanced appreciation of what previously been simply sunlight. A vastly broader and deeper understanding of light rays and spectra was revolutionary. As a direct result of men like Newton who dared to imagine dimensions and realities which were not part of the orthodoxy of their times, today we enjoy knowledge which previously we literally could not have known that we did not know. Thank you Sir Isaac Newton, and that's just for your contributions on light.

In the three and a half centuries since Newton's work many individuals have contributed to our ever-evolving understanding of the nature of light. The best estimates today place the portion of all light visible to the human eye at approximately 0.0035%, a tiny fraction indeed. The remaining portion of light, the 99.9965%, is invisible to us because its wave lengths are either too short or too long. This light is transmitted in a form, or is itself a form, which simply does not interact with our eyes. It happens to radiate in a material form which does not register to our material equipment. In fact, some of these forms even pass through our walls and our bodies completely unnoticed. We are continuously immersed in them independent of whether we know they exist.

Let's put this into context. Imagine a town called Lightville with a population of around 28,500 residents. Now imagine you have met only one of those Lightville residents. You are now in a position to claim you know the same percentage of Lightville residents as the percentage of light you perceive. With Lightville in mind we can begin to appreciate the limitations of one essential piece of equipment upon which we depend to perceive fundamental features of the universe. For all we have learned through science, experts today must still acknowledge that they simply do not understand light. The state of our understanding is nicely captured with a single question and answer. Question: Is light a wave or a particle? Answer: Absolutely.

Again prior to the arrival of just the right combination of imagination and instrumentation, if someone were to talk of radio waves, ultraviolet, infrared, x-rays, gamma rays and so on he would be deemed a lunatic. In fact, anyone talking of light beyond the visible would be seen as similarly deranged. Yet critics of theism would push the debate in that very direction. They seem not to have learned the lesson represented by the discoveries of light. Atheist materialists who cite science as the ultimate guide to truth will steadfastly maintain that there is no reality beyond what science can grasp.

It seems that the more science discovers and adds to our collective repository of knowledge, the more we realize how little we actually do know and how little we understand about our universe. We mentioned Dark Matter and Dark Energy previously. It wasn't until the 1970s when cosmologists determined that the motion of galaxies and clusters of galaxies were violating laws of gravity as they understood them—unless there was more mass out there not visible to them. Through deductive reasoning Dark Matter was born. More correctly, mankind was introduced to a phenomenon which had always existed

but had never been detected. Subsequently in the 1990s cosmologists determined that the universe was expanding at an ever-increasing rate of speed. Again, through additional scientific work Dark Energy was introduced as the explanation for this phenomenon.

Once again, a reality which had been unknown and was fundamentally unlike anything human beings had ever experienced “came” into existence. Imagine that. On day one we had absolutely no knowledge of Dark Energy and Dark Matter. On day two we understand that they both exist. Again, we are talking about stuff that makes up 96% of the universe. Thus through the process just described the volume of what mankind knew to exist expanded 25 fold! It is profoundly instructive that this incremental knowledge had to do with an entirely novel dimension of existence. The reasonable skeptic, open to learning from our experience of just the last few decades, should be open to more revolutionary discoveries to come, material and otherwise. Moreover it has never been wise to reject the possibility of a reality which we cannot, at the moment, apprehend with our natural senses.

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Many atheists insist that we cannot claim to know of a phenomenon which we cannot describe with precision. Former Muslim turned atheist activist and founder of the nonprofit organization the *Atheist Republic*, Armin Navabi, makes this point in his book *Why There is no God*. He argues, “*If you cannot comprehend or describe something, you can’t possibly have a rational justification for believing in it*” (22). Obviously he directs this complaint to those who would believe in a God or a supernatural reality which they cannot clearly explain. He continues by using a hypothetical discovery of a new kind of pottery — an archeological discovery. Navabi posits what seems at first to be a perfectly reasonable condition that if you were unable to clearly describe the pottery’s color or any other of its fundamental properties, then you would have no credibility on the subject. Does this ostensibly sensible criterion for claims about one particular component of the physical world make sense when we consider claims made about a nonphysical reality? As we have seen with 96% of the universe, no. Moreover, Dark Matter and Dark Energy are not the only broadly accepted scientific findings which do not meet this standard.

The latest widely accepted theory of the fundamental makeup of matter and

energy is widely known as String Theory—M Theory is the current leading synthesis among several contenders. Experts in the field acknowledge that M Theory is still incomplete. But it represents what many believe, or at least hope, will ultimately be the vaunted “Theory of Everything.” In brief, this theory holds that everything is ultimately made up of unimaginably tiny “strings” which vibrate in ways which form the various next levels of particles which make up matter and energy—the entire universe. Scientists continue to search for a more comprehensive grand theory which integrates, or as they say unifies, all other known theories and physical laws. Many are optimistic that String Theory is a rough draft of that final *theory* (23). The relevant point here is the peculiarity of some of String Theory’s features. The most common versions postulate a fundamental framework of eleven dimensions; 10 spatial dimensions or vectors and time as the eleventh dimension. Proponents explicitly acknowledge that the human mind cannot fathom let alone comprehend ten space dimensions. This inability does not deter them. They do not seem to count incomprehensibility as evidence that the theory is false. This is an important point. The inability of the best minds in science to comprehend the phenomenon is not used as evidence that the phenomenon does not exist.

We can understand the three dimensions of our daily experience. Add another seven, and you lose me, you lose everyone I suspect—at least in terms of visualizing them. Certainly they would argue that our inability to fully comprehend the theory is not evidence that it is false. More broadly our inability to understand a phenomenon, whether due to exotic dimensions or novel fundamental structure or any other feature, has no bearing on whether it exists. This principle applies to other proposed realities which we not only cannot observe directly, but sometimes cannot even visualize.

Frankly, atheists who argue that science somehow disproves God, and there are many, have a lot of explaining to do. As we have seen, when placed in proper context the most recent findings provided by science seem to undermine any such claims. In fact, scientific consensus is that 1. The vast bulk of the contents and mass of the universe is beyond the traditional grasp of science—inaccessible to its tools and instruments, and 2. The latest theory of the fundamental building blocks of reality is beyond mankind’s ability to comprehend. I have yet to hear a logical explanation of how these facts demonstrate that no God exists. How could they? Thus, far from compelling us to disbelieve in God, modern science should instead open our minds to the

possibility if not the inevitability of dimensions and realities beyond our current reach. These would include the realm of the theist God.

Theists are fond of quoting one scientist's awe of the mysteries of the universe—and for good reason. J.B.S. Haldane was a British geneticist and evolutionary biologist, essentially the same area of science occupied by Dr. Dawkins. Haldane is said to have mused:

“I have no doubt that in reality the future will be vastly more surprising than anything I can imagine. Now my own suspicion is that the Universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose” (24)

Versions of this quote have alternatively been attributed to Cambridge astrophysicist Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington. While there remains some debate about the precise wording used in the expression and by whom, the sentiment is shared by many leading scientists today. You would think that people who expect to discover lots of weirdness in and about the universe would be open to the possibility of God. In any case, these expectations certainly do not reflect the sense that science has somehow proved that God does not exist.

Obviously, acknowledgements from scientists of the strangeness of reality are not evidence of God. Traditionally claims that God exists in some otherworldly realm or unseen reality have been met by non-believers with derision. I have already shown how comparisons to fairies, unicorns, and Santa Claus are still used to mock belief in a supernatural God. In defining reality true materialists would go so far as to say that if they can't see it, feel it, or somehow measure it, it doesn't exist. Modern science however, has demonstrated that such an approach ignores *most* of reality. Theists often make an analogy of the drunk looking for his car keys. It is especially illustrative of this problem as more and more of what scientists call reality is utterly inaccessible to our senses. The drunk refuses to look anywhere other than where the streetlights cast light. He will only look in well-lit areas no matter where his keys might have been lost. The drunk might say that he is only willing to search for his keys where there is light because he is either unwilling or unequipped to look in the dark. If he were to follow the example of many atheists, however, he would go one further and insist that because he cannot see in the dark there must not be anything in it. In other words, stuff only exists where he is capable of seeing. It's one thing to refuse to consider possibilities which one cannot see or comprehend clearly. It's quite another to assume a posture that nothing exists beyond what one can see and comprehend.

As we have seen, English physicist John Polkinghorne has described this world view as the handicap of one-eyed vision—woefully incomplete. Polkinghorne was a professor of physics at Cambridge University and esteemed for his expertise in the study of quarks, gluons and other highly esoteric particles of the invisible world. What's more, he was a member of the Royal Society of Scientists, a major honor in the world of physicists. But he not only valued the knowledge gained through the scientific enterprise, he also valued the knowledge to be explored through faith and yes, even religion. In short, Polkinghorne insists that science and faith are complimentary and are essential to any consequential study of our world.

Finally, another analogy helps explain the fundamental flaw in the materialist's methodology which convinces him there is no God; the man with the metal detector on the beach. We would not be impressed with his claims that there is no plastic or wood hidden within the sand because he searched every square inch with his metal detector and found none. Based upon this experience he also concludes that there are no such things as plastic or wood. We would be amused to see a portion of his metal detector is made of plastic. Credit belongs to Dr. Edward Feser of Pasadena City College for the example of the metal detector. It nicely illustrates the folly of the misuse of otherwise powerful instruments.

CHAPTER SUMMARY – THINGS TO CONSIDER

It is not logically tenable to argue that the presence of evil in the world is evidence that no God exists. Evil can only exist and be identified by virtue of how it deviates from its opposite, good. We cannot claim a line is crooked without an appreciation of what a straight line is. Moreover, the possibility of evil is a logical necessity in a world of free agency and texture. It is as essential in our world as each of the three spatial dimensions. To demand otherwise is to insist upon a one-sided coin or soaring mountain tops without downward slopes. It is logically impossible. Most important, if God is to create a world in which good can flourish there must be the possibility of the opposite, evil—for good that is compelled is not good at all. It is compulsion. The cynic who would demand that God do away with all forms of evil, demands that there be no world at all. Finally, we know enough to understand that we know only an infinitesimally tiny fraction of the nature of the universe. Rather than narrowing

the gaps of the unknown, each new revelation of science seems to shrink the relative portion we know even further. We would be prudent to acknowledge that we simply possess far too little information and context to rule out possible purposes of nature.

CHAPTER 5 - NO EVIDENCE FOR GOD?

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“God used beautiful mathematics in creating the world.”

—Paul Dirac, *Theoretical Physicist*

“Would you not say to yourself, “Some super-calculating intellect must have designed the properties of the carbon atom, otherwise the chance of my finding such an atom through the blind forces of nature would be utterly miniscule. A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a superintellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature. The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question.”

—Sir Fred Hoyle, *Astronomer*

“The answer is evolution by natural selection! Now what is the question?”

—Richard Dawkins, *Probably*

I KNOW OF AN AMATEUR Latin American archeologist. His fascination with Aztec and Mayan cultures has led him to explore well-known and some lesser-known ruins in Central America. His travels included forays off the beaten path. He recounts the story of a visit to a modest on-site museum at one remote location. There he saw a large, round, flat rock with a hole precisely in the middle. Curiously, the edges of the rock had the appearance of wear. So naturally he told the guide that the rock looked like a wheel. The guide politely explained that the rock’s appearance had misled him as it had misled others. He reassured this layman that the rock was not and could not be an ancient wheel quite simply because archeologists already knew that the Mayans did not have wheels (25).

I share this story not to argue that the Mayans did have wheels. I have no idea. Instead I recount this story as one of many examples of how as human beings the experts in any field can fall victim to the errors of confirmation bias. What is known today tends to have an inordinate influence on the way new data is processed and in some case, rejected altogether. You can be certain that the object on display is not a wheel because it is already universally known that

wheels did not exist there at that time. Now move along. We are left to wonder, in Central America at least, would it even be possible to find an ancient wheel and to have the experts recognize it as such?

In science atheists who are experts in their respective fields declare emphatically that there are no miracles, only events for which we don't have all the facts, and people naïve enough to be fooled by them. If we had all the facts, they say, we would be able to explain any event referring only scientific principles and natural laws. Thus a "miracle" is just a strange event we don't know enough about. This certainly sounds reasonable.

As self-proclaimed slaves to exclusively material evidence and pure reason, atheists repeat a well-worn mantra defending their disbelief from challenge. They state unequivocally that there simply is no evidence whatsoever of God. Of course, this is an entirely subjective claim which tends to be self-fulfilling. Much like the wheel-like object in Central America which is not a wheel *because* the ancient inhabitants did not have wheels, it often seems that anything offered up as evidence for God is dismissed *because* there is no evidence for God. For example, college students in the physical sciences are often forewarned on day one not to be deceived by any appearances of design *because* there is no intentional design to be found in either physical or biological systems. We are not just talking about a nominal or a general appearance of design. In a 2008 interview with theoretical physicist and Nobel Laureate Dr. Steve Weinberg, Dawkins himself referred to the, "*stunning illusion of design that life projects*" (26)—hence the cautionary instruction given to the uninitiated.

These warnings reflect the well-established materialist theme articulated by Dawkins in *The Blind Watchmaker*, "*Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose*" (27). That is, the very definition of a field of scientific inquiry expressly asserts in advance that there is no designer, no creator, and therefore no god. This is established *before* any inquiry is done. So has science demonstrated there is no god, as proclaimed by so many atheists, or does science presume there is no god? Co-discoverer of the structure of DNA, Dr. Francis Crick, urged the same caution to anyone who might infer design from all the trappings of design:

"Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved" (28).

We are reminded again of the wheel-like object in Central America. Now

imagine that archeologists were to continually discover wheel-like objects which caused authorities in the field to regularly issue similar advisories: *remember, there are no wheels to be found, only wheel-like objects*. This leads us to wonder, what would be accepted, even tentatively, as evidence of design to a skeptical atheist mind? After all, it's clear that *appearance* of design is an automatic disqualifier. This is a strange perversion of a maxim—if it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and looks like a duck; we must conclude that it is *not* a duck. The only defense of this conclusion is simply the assertion that there are no ducks. Thus it is not a stretch to conclude that the philosophy and methods of the modern life sciences expressly foreclose even the possibility of actual design ever being detected in the natural world. In this sense it really doesn't matter if there is design in nature. Much the same can be said of the broader sciences and the possibility of evidence for God in general. In this context, it really does not matter if God exists. The materialist experts in science could never know.

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Scientists are not the only class of thinkers to face fundamental impediments to fair consideration of the God question. The lay person faces similar obstacles. I know from experience that the decision to fully embrace atheism often comes only after profound intellectual and emotional struggle. It can be a gradual, cumulative process through which one feels inevitably compelled to accept the conclusions of atheism even when there might be less than desirable consequences, social and otherwise. The decision can be tortuous. Ultimately the transition can be much like finally deciding to don a particular coat after having inspected it at length. But in this case it's much more than just a coat. It's more like a Kevlar vest one puts on never to remove, ever. It is permanent and impermeable. Prior to that moment there is a willingness to consider all the options and possibilities. Once donned, however, there seems to be a visceral aversion to reconsideration of any kind and to any degree. In short, it becomes an all-or-nothing proposition. There is no way to remove even a small part of the bullet-proof vest because it is designed to be worn in its entirety or not all. Likewise the newly transformed atheist seems wholly unable to divest himself of any portion of his new dogma. As part of his new world view he seems absolutely determined not to risk dropping any of its tenets.

This rigid posture is manifested in the atheist's inability to consider the possibility of evidence, no matter how tentative, for the existence of God.

Epistemologists, those who study how we gain knowledge, call this doxastic closure. Naturally, the term is used primarily by atheists to describe theists who are presumably unwilling or unable to reconsider their position. But the term is also useful to describe a broader posture taken by the non-believer. After all, theists are willing and able to consider the possibilities of both a material reality and an extra-material or nonmaterial reality. In this very significant way, they are not locked into an a priori position. Events and phenomena can be either material or nonmaterial in nature. In contrast, atheist materialists, by definition, are locked into a mindset which cannot permit the possibility of a reality outside of the material. Thus it is reasonable to argue that doxastic closure is much more descriptive of materialistic thinking.

Now we return to the newly minted atheist who has just strapped on his new bullet-proof vest. Because of his fresh commitment to atheism, which sadly sometimes has come at a substantial personal cost, the atheist simply is not willing to entertain the possibilities of truth within the thinking he has just abandoned. Nor is he willing to consider the defects of his new philosophy. In this way, he has crossed the point of no return. Now some might argue that the opposite is more likely. They might say that the newly formed atheist would, ignoring intellectual integrity, be more tempted than ever to retreat from such a painful transition. My point, however, is that he has already made the journey. He has already run through the fire to reach the exit. He will often be that much more averse to covering the same ground in reverse because of the painful cost of passage. For these reasons to embrace atheism and the associated tenets is often also to don an intellectual bullet-proof vest, impermeable to all arguments which might support the God hypothesis. Again, at no point do I argue that the believer is immune from this kind of intellectual friction and propensity to cling to convictions. In fact, I assume quite the opposite. The loss of intellectual receptivity after a monumental transition of worldview should not surprise us at all. This particular form of intractability is what I call intellectual friction.

My personal experience is consistent with what I have argued above. Once I had staked my claim and declared my disbelief, I was powerfully disinclined to backtrack. The last thing I wanted was to acknowledge an oversight or even a reconsideration of any single facet of belief. I confess that I couldn't stand the thought of long-time believers patting me on the head and assuring me that they knew I would someday come to my senses. In fact for a time after returning to belief I was sometimes slow to tell people—to avoid giving them the

satisfaction! In short, there were times when I had a vested interest in not considering the evidence objectively.

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Intellectual friction is a widespread obstacle to objective analysis throughout the God debate. For example, anti-Christian skeptic Dr. Carrier provides a troubling example of rejecting evidence while demanding it. He asserts that if there was really a God, He without a doubt would communicate with us his children and send us some kind of universal message. We will ignore just for the moment the flawed basis of his assumptions. More important now is his subsequent systematic rejection of any potential evidence that God does communicate in some way to humanity. In virtually the very same breath in which Carrier demands that the Christian God communicate with his children, he dismisses the potential evidence of that very communication. Specifically, in *Why I am Not a Christian* he flatly rejects what would seem to be ideal evidence of precisely the communication he demands.

Philosophers, sociologists, historians, anthropologists, theologians, and other professionals widely acknowledge the phenomenon known as *sensus deitatis* or *sensus divinitatis*. These are Latin terms for the apparent innate sense of the existence of a higher power which has been observed in virtually every culture in every age. The reality of the phenomenon is not controversial—seen as almost as universal as other innate human impulses. But its origins and meaning most certainly are. Sadly, precisely *because* there is no evidence for God, Carrier explains that this ostensive message from God in every psychologically healthy human being cannot be evidence of the universal message he demands. Instead, Carrier and other materialists argue that the *sensus deitatis* is only a meaningless echo from, you guessed it, evolution through natural selection. It is only a vestigial impulse. Remember, it is assumed that there must be materialistic explanations for all things so by force, the *sensus deitatis* cannot be a form of divine communication because there is no such thing. Materialists already know that. What many of us might interpret as the very message skeptics demand of God, atheists attribute exclusively to an outdated product of ubiquitous evolution.

This is an extremely important point. Atheists like Carrier acknowledge that this phenomenon exists in every culture, but it is not evidence of God because

there is no evidence for God. It must by force have a materialistic explanation. Although it certainly doesn't serve us well today, say atheists, this sense of the divine was created in us through wholly natural and blind forces. They provide speculation on how this *sensus deitatis* came to operate in nearly all human beings—speculation of how it could have been transmitted through the generations. There is no doubt that materialists begin by presuming that because there is no god, evolution must have been the source of the *sensus deitatis*. Thus their analysis has a much narrower focus than that of theists. The materialist analysis seeks only to explain how evolution produced it. They are then free to back in to an evolutionary model. It is significant, however, that their explanation is only speculation which cannot be verified through the scientific method.

Anyone open to the possibility, even if remote, of evidence of a message from God will also permit that the evidence of the nonmaterial can itself be nonmaterial in nature. That is, the *sensus deitatis*. Meanwhile the materialist remains handicapped by doxastic closure. Thus again we encounter the showstopper of *defining* a particular phenomenon out of existence. In this case there is no evidence of the nonmaterial because the proposed evidence for the nonmaterial is itself nonmaterial. They know this because their materialistic tools and methodology reveal it. We are reminded of the misuse of the metal detector in the last chapter. Here again we find metal detector operators drawing conclusions about non-metal phenomena.

In fairness, the primary reason Carrier gives for rejecting the *sensus deitatis* as a message from God is its lack of specificity and uniformity. Carrier's standard for a message from the theist God entails that it be perfectly clear, perfectly precise, and perfectly uniform among all individuals, throughout all societies, across all generations. He argues that this is obviously not the case as the tenets and doctrines of organized religions differ so dramatically around the world. So his expectation of God is a message with a great deal of detail which never degrades in any way. We might say that this amounts to a perfect message. The *sensus deitatis* is not good enough to pass his test. In short, the only way the theist God could exist according to Carrier is if everyone on the planet agreed with precision as to the nature of existence, God, and exactly what God expects of each individual. Any disagreement means no god. Is this a reasonable expectation on his part or just a firmly held preference? I suspect the latter. Carrier quite simply does not possess the information necessary to formulate this

rigorous standard and then to reject the possibility of a god who fails to meet it. Moreover, Carrier is palpably irked by the lack of clarity in the world so he concludes that it is not an acceptable property of a world God would order. His passionate views on the subject may be understandable. We might even sympathize with him. But they are not reliable as the foundation of his proposed scientific proof of the nonexistence of God.

Once again the atheist has failed to account for a practical element of the alleged communication from God. Its very purpose demands that it is received, interpreted, processed, and articulated by human beings. That which originates from perfection and ultimately meets Dr. Carrier's scrutiny must first be utterly reconstituted through human senses and all the associated imperfections. Anyone who has played the telephone game understands that faulty human tools can transform a perfectly clear message into incoherent jabbering. In truth the only way Carrier could ever hope to encounter the perfect message he demands would be if it were delivered by a person who can receive, interpret, process, and articulate it perfectly. In other words, it would take a perfect human being.

Significantly, a single perfect human being delivering a perfect, unadulterated message would still not pass Carrier's test—and it's not even close. His test demands that all human beings, numbering in the billions, deliver the same message, not just one. Thus to Carrier the God Hypothesis fails unless and until all human beings arrive at precisely the same message, which is to say that it fails unless and until all human beings become perfect conduits and interpreters. Incidentally Christian theology holds that one perfect being did in fact manage to deliver the perfect message from God to humankind. And as required, this person was indeed said to be perfect. Yet as we would have predicted, Carrier is unmoved. Moreover we have observed that even if this being's message was perfect, the imperfections of those who subsequently relayed it tended to degrade and alter it as we would have predicted. Thus we need not look far to see why his demand for uniformity is not a reasonable test of God's existence.

There are substantial reasons why Carrier's expectations and demands of God simply are not tenable. At best we can say that they might be desirable and we cannot fault him for wishing and wanting a particular communication as evidence of God's existence. Again, in no way do his preferences amount to an objective or reliable test. Consequently, the results of the test are not remotely dispositive.

For others who have not yet donned the atheist’s evidence-proof vest, it’s worthwhile to examine the largest possible piece of evidence for God. With the undecided in mind, let’s consider the universe itself as potential evidence. For starters, why is there something rather than nothing? This is the simplest form of the question addressed by what is known as the Cosmological Argument. We are all familiar with the principle of cause and effect. These are the basic elements of the argument. We begin by stating that anything that begins to exist must have a cause — it must have a beginner. The current scientific consensus is that the universe has not always existed. It did not always exist. Prior to the formulation of modern Big Bang-related cosmology, the nearly universal conception of the universe was that it was instead eternal. Now our best estimates place the age of the universe at roughly 13.8 billion years. At that point, space, matter, energy, and time itself came into existence. Before we get too comfortable, there is a caveat. To use the expression, “prior to the Big Bang,” actually makes no sense. For if time began with the Big Bang in no comprehensible way was there a prior or earlier period. In summary, the best information we have today is that the universe had a beginning, a point zero.

Theists are quick to point out that the account of creation given in the Bible declares clearly that the universe in fact originated at a specific point in time. There was a “beginning.” And in that beginning, everything was created from no thing. Moreover, there was an intelligent agent who made it all happen. This declaration stood in stark contrast to human understanding, including that of the greatest thinkers prior to and during the scientific revolution, then all the way up until the 20th century. Only then did secular knowledge come to agree with Judeo-Christian assumptions on the subject. Score one for the Old Testament.

More important, the theist finds compelling the notion that stuff was created by someone because it conforms nicely to our daily experience in the physical world. The atheist’s take on the formation of the universe itself seems a strange and unnecessary departure from the way human beings look at everything else in our experience—both in and out of the laboratory. Even more, for good reason we all presuppose that things which have a beginning are brought about by something or someone. One thing leads to another. Causes lead to effects. The latter does not occur without the former. Where there is smoke, there is fire. No great revelation here, we would think. These are truisms. So as it relates to the

universe, there could have been no Big Bang unless there had been something to cause it to “bang.” Yet for some reason, again unlike literally any other scientific consideration, the atheist is determined to find a plausible means by which everything was created without a creator—how everything was caused without a cause. As I write these words there are many on the cutting edge of research working to demonstrate that the universe came into being without a cause. It is reasonable and rational for us to question why they are so driven. Why look to complicate things unnecessarily?

A common retail rhetorical question posed by theists is: Which claim makes more sense—that something or someone made everything out of nothing, or that nothing made everything out of nothing. This doesn’t even seem like a necessary question. What is striking is that a straight-forward method of analysis used in seemingly every other area of intellectual pursuit, effects signal causes, is flagged as inoperable when talking about the origins of the universe. A tool which has proven effective in the analysis of nearly all of its component parts is disqualified for analysis of the assemblage of all parts. It would seem that in order to “keep the divine foot out of the door,” conventional logic and reasoning, including the conventional logic and reasoning throughout every field in science, is verboten.

Atheists posit a number of alternatives to the “creation requires a creator” narrative offered by theists. To most of us, perhaps mainly theists acquainted with the logic of every-day life, these dogged pursuits of alternatives seem almost like desperation to avoid the more obvious hypothesis of a creator God. Philosopher William Lane Craig insists that this notion is even more fantastical than magic. The magician appears to pull a live rabbit from a hat. Yet in the materialist narrative of the appearance of the universe, there’s no hat, and there’s no magician. Voilà—here’s a rabbit. Don’t bother asking about a magician, or even a hat.

As stated above, while atheists posture as though a universe from nothing is an entirely reasonable conclusion, cosmologists continue to work toward alternative theories. We will address two recent substitute theories advanced by materialists. Again, each is offered as a possible alternative to creation by some intelligence. The first is the Multiverse Theory.

I cannot reiterate too often that no one claims to have found any evidence whatsoever for the idea, but some scientists now suggest that an infinite number of universes are springing up without end in a continuous flow of new universes (29). It follows then that all universes, most importantly ours, came from some kind of universe manufacturing process. As stated previously, Richard Dawkins quickly became so enamored with this theory as an alternative to God that he super-imposed his always-applicable, ever-ready natural selection philosophy over it to postulate a system which propagates the fittest universes through natural selection. Yet unfortunately for Dawkins and his allies who are determined to avoid God at all cost, the very latest research shows that even a multiverse model would also require an absolute beginning. In other words, positing this or any other multiverse system does not resolve the quandary. It does not answer the question of creation. So while the multiverse model served as a temporary bridge for atheist scientists, it just as quickly disappointed. They are back at square one searching for any possible explanation of creation, other than a creator. Dawkins and some of his colleagues seem unaware of this latest problem with the theory. They continue to cite the multiverse as a viable alternative to a starting point or a beginning for the universe even though it does not answer the original question.

As stated above, there is absolutely no evidence that any multiverse generation system exists—none whatsoever. Nor is there evidence of any universe other than this one. Nor can we ever hope to know such a thing. By its very definition it would exist outside of our universe and thus forever remain beyond the reach of scientific inquiry. You could also say then that it is inaccessible to our methods of discovery and study. In this respect, stubborn inaccessibility, the multiverse is strikingly similar to the God Hypothesis. Yet a large number of prominent atheists seem more than willing to adopt the theory as a viable alternative to God—at least as a place holder. This amounts to a materialism of the gaps. How then, particularly to those materialists who insist that the notion of God is either meaningless or a copout because it is unknowable, is there such a willingness in the largely atheistic scientific community to embrace such a patently contrived explanation? Why such tolerance for this particular brand of unfalsifiable and unknowable propositions from those staunchly opposed to any kind of supernatural intelligence? After all, the primary reason expressed for dismissing a creator god rings quite familiar here— it cannot be evaluated by science.

Undeterred by the weakness of these alternatives to God, some atheist scientists hold out hopes for the proposition that nothing and nobody caused everything to spring out of nothing. Everything in our universe, space, matter, energy, and time, all came into existence from nothing without a cause. Put succinctly, no creative cause was necessary to the formation of the universe. One of the boldest among them is Professor Lawrence Krauss of Arizona State University. In his book, *A Universe from Nothing*, he makes the case that, given the properties observed by scientists, a universe is actually likely to pop into existence out of nothing (30). Yes, you read that last sentence correctly. Stuff is likely to appear out of nowhere and from nothing.

To the scientific community's credit, Krauss' erstwhile grand reputation did nothing to prevent pointed criticism of his book and the principal argument it makes. In short, critics shredded much of the book as nonsense and slight-of-hand. The most common criticism was that Krauss plays games with the notion of nothingness. In fact, by his own admission his theory presupposes a nothing full of stuff from which the Big Bang arose. So the book's title is undeniably a bait-and-switch. There should have been a "just kidding" confession somewhere but I didn't find it. In summary, even if we accept every one of Krauss' suppositions and speculations, we cannot justify the claim on the book's cover. In that case he would succeed only in showing that everything came from something but the cause would still be a mystery.

A book review by Columbia University Physicist and philosopher David Albert provides an authoritative critique of Krauss' work. Weighing in on the charge that Krauss plays games with the definition of "nothing," Albert states clearly that, "...Krauss is dead wrong and his religious and philosophical critics are absolutely right" (31) With that assessment about the book in hand, we are left to wonder what purpose *A Universe from Nothing* serves. Why in the world did Krauss write the book? He is a brilliant man who should have known that the core thesis would not go unchallenged. I submit that the most important message to be drawn from the book was not one intended by the author. The most salient message is that some atheist scientists will go to almost any lengths, perform any contortion, and ignore otherwise compelling facts, all to avoid any form of god hypothesis, nothing more. Put another way, Krauss makes it quite clear that an absolute commitment to atheistic philosophy directs the efforts of many atheist scientists. Meanwhile he provides no viable materialistic theory of how the

universe came to be. The current position remains, we have no idea how the universe was created — none. But materialists are perfectly certain that it was not created by a supernatural intelligence.

Krauss' book was positioned as the latest and greatest scientific response to Gottfried Leibniz's centuries old challenge: *Why is there something rather than nothing?* Leibniz was one of those extraordinary minds which permanently altered the landscape of more than just one intellectual discipline. One of his myriad achievements was to simultaneously but independently develop Calculus along with genius Isaac Newton. His query about why a single atom let alone the entire universe came into existence in the first place still challenges us today. By assuming the prior existence of quite a few things from which the Big Bang may have emerged, Krauss comes nowhere near a sensible response to Leibniz.

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As a layman with genuine hopes of understanding Krauss' theory, I nevertheless came to a conclusion about the book similar to that cited above. What I read were a series of "ifs" and "perhaps" strung together with gratuitous references to established mathematical and scientific concepts drawn together to assert the book's title, "*A Universe from Nothing.*" Even as a nonscientist I understood that the chain of his argument was only as good as the weakest link. To wit I saw that many links weren't just weak, they were nonexistent. Because he did cite accepted scientific and mathematical principles he felt entitled to present his speculation as "scientifically" and "mathematically" based.

By following Krauss' methodology I believe I can make a mathematical argument that God created the universe, so long as I included numbers and perhaps some simple arithmetic. Here it goes. God existed before He created the universe. He formed the Earth 4.6 billion years ago. He formed the universe 13.8 billion years ago. So He formed the universe approximately 9.2 billion years before He formed the Earth. So there you have it; a mathematically based argument that God created the universe.

A half a dozen years before he wrote *A Universe From Nothing*, Krauss wrote a review of a book authored by another physicist, Frank Tipler. We met Tipler in Chapter 2 as the co-author of a study which explored the staggering improbability of life self-assembling. In 2006 he wrote *The Physics of Christianity* which was the subject of Krauss' book review. I am less interested

here in the arguments of the book than I am in the primary point Krauss made in his review. In a scathing critique he wrote:

“As a collection of half-truths and exaggerations, I am tempted to describe Tipler’s new book as nonsense—but that would be unfair to the concept of nonsense. It is far more dangerous than mere nonsense, because Tipler’s reasonable descriptions of various aspects of modern physics combined with his respectable research pedigree, give the persuasive illusion that he is describing what the laws of physics imply. He is not.

The book provides an object lesson in the dangers of pushing science beyond its domain of validity and using scientific approximations as if they are completely valid in all contexts (32)”

Significantly, Krauss’ review above was penned several years before he enlisted in militant atheism—at least before his activism was as overt and prominent as it is today. It is difficult not to conclude that his increasingly militant atheism has not influenced his scholarship. After all, the stinging rebuke he directed at Tipler seems to apply to his latest work. His book *A Universe From Nothing*, “provides an *object lesson in the dangers of pushing science beyond its domain of validity and using scientific approximations as if they are completely valid in all contexts.*” In it he draws conclusions which are far beyond the confines of his expertise.

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Frankly, I struggled mightily to find a way to articulate my criticism of Krauss’ theory without resorting to sarcasm. I recognize that I have failed. Better to defer to mathematician John Lennox’s criticism of the nonsense attributed to world-renowned physicist Steven Hawking. Dismissing Hawking’s similarly unsupported proclamation that God was not necessary to the creation of the universe, Lennox cautioned that, nonsense, even when spoken by a world-class scientist, “*is still just nonsense.*” Even the greatest scientist can prove spectacularly wrong, especially when he ventures outside his field. As we have seen, the misapplication of expertise can lead to hideously flawed conclusions. What’s more, we must be ever vigilant to all forms of argument from authority.

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Recently, beginning with Dawkins, atheists have begun to disqualify the God-as-creator hypothesis for another reason not previously applied to hypotheses in other areas of study. Once again, a unique standard is thrown in

the path of arguments for God. Specifically, they insist that any explanation of creation which itself doesn't come equipped with a full explanation, is of no use. That is, without a full explanation of how God came to be, God as the cause of creation is unacceptable. In fact, Dawkins argues that the creator-God proposition raises more questions than it answers so it must not be entertained. The fallacy of presuming that every answer must have a full explanation of its origin is rebutted by William Lane Craig (33).

William Lane Craig, PhD is professor of philosophy at Biola University. In fact, he holds two Ph.D.s; one in Philosophy and one in Theology. He is better known as perhaps the preeminent Christian apologist in the world today. He has written scores of articles and books making the case for rational belief in God. He is a fierce proponent of the compatibility of science and religion. He has also been a favorite theist participant in high-profile debates on God's existence and the rationality of faith. In fact, he is also hailed in apologetic circles as the debate opponent Richard Dawkins steadfastly refuses to face. Both men have debated essentially all the most prominent voices of the opposing side, but for understandable reasons Dawkins will not engage Craig in a one-on-one debate. Obviously regardless of his impressive resume, Craig's arguments must stand on their own merits. He has used his philosophical training to demolish Dawkins' claim that God is an inadequate explanation wholly because there is no explanation of God. The following is variation of the analogy given by Dr. Craig to illustrate the absurdity of this atheistic claim.

You're exploring the outdoors with Dr. Dawkins. You come across an uncharted cave and together you decide to explore it. To your surprise you find cave drawings depicting animal life. You tell Dr. Dawkins that someone must have created the art. In response, he demands or he asks you who was that person and how did they come to be here. You respond of course you don't know. With that Mr. Dawkins informs you that your conclusion about the cause of the drawings is unjustified and unacceptable. He continues to explain that unless you can give him a complete and satisfactory answer to this question that he simply cannot accept your claim about the source of the cave art. After all, your explanation only pushes the question back one stage, as Dawkins often complains. We must assume nothing of the sort unless and until we have a detailed account of the origins of any individuals who may have created the art. Until then, no one and nothing created it.

Here in a nutshell is very common defense to the prime mover argument

made by atheists. This defense was popularized most recently by Richard Dawkins. Because he is the leading light of the movement, innumerable atheists have taken up and made use of the same defense. In short, quite simply even if it were to appear that some kind of intelligence created the universe that assumption would not be acceptable unless and until a complete and satisfying explanation of that intelligence was available. And then in one stroke Dawkins destroys the whole scientific enterprise. To be serious, atheists apply this standard only to the question of God. For clearly were they to apply it to other scientific questions they would bring all inquiry to a screeching halt.

It's at this point that the atheist accuses the theist of lacking curiosity. In other words, to propose a reasonable explanation of any phenomenon based upon the best information available that happens to take critics to conceptual terrain in which they are unable to employ their preferred forms of analysis, is to lack curiosity. Of course, absence of curiosity has nothing to do with it. This conclusion offered by the thoughtful theist is an effort to arrive at a reasonable explanation given the facts apparent to us. This leads me to my next thought. That is, I am astonished by what seems to me a profound lack of curiosity on the part of scientists, particularly biologists who are also atheists.

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By now most of us have heard about what is called the Fine Tuning of the universe. That is, cosmologists and physicists have found that the universe we find ourselves in is contingent upon a wide array of measures, forces, and constants being precisely what they are. The universe could not exist were it not for a number of terrifically precise measures. In his book, *Just Six Numbers – The Deep Forces That Shape the Universe*, physicist Martin Rees, identifies what he believes are the most significant (34). Rees is no ordinary physicist. He is Sir Martin Rees, Royal Society Research Professor at Cambridge University and Astronomer Royal in Great Britain. His work is but one of many by scientists who are stunned by what appears to be a convergence of the fundamental forces of nature in precisely the way which leads to the creation of life. Please refer to the Appendix for a detailed list of fine-tuned measures compiled by Dr. Hugh Ross.

One example will help illustrate the concept. The Big Bang dispersed matter and energy at a rate which continues to define the expansion of the universe

today. If that rate had been just infinitesimally smaller, the universe would have reached a certain expansion limit then reversed course, ultimately ending in a Big Crunch. This is much like throwing a ball in the air only to watch it return back to the ground. Matter would have essentially failed to reach escape velocity. Alternatively, had the rate of expansion been infinitesimally greater, matter would not have accreted into the star systems necessary for the fusion of all essential elements. No essential elements means, again, no life—and not just no life; but no chemistry or space. The upshot for the layman like me is that even infinitesimal adjustments to any of these measures would make the universe's existence impossible. Again, there are many more than Rees' six constants, all of which seem to hold the universe on the razor's edge of possibility. Each of these inconceivably improbable facts is an extreme probability in and of itself. The cynic will rightly explain that each had to end up at a certain number anyway. This is true of any one measure: much like how there is sometimes necessarily the winner of a lottery, only divide the probability of winning the lottery by millions. Some have compared the vanishingly tiny probability as similar to that of firing a bullet into space and then firing a second bullet into a random location in space which then somehow collides with the first bullet.

What boggles the mind even more is the assembly of numerous uniquely necessary outcomes, all converging together to make life, and intelligent life possible. Any statistician will tell you that the odds of say 50 of these measures falling on the necessary point can be calculated by multiplying the 50 probabilities together. But for our purposes it makes no sense to go beyond the multiplication of the first two probabilities. The result is essentially one in a zillion (insert your favorite made-up number here). Any subsequent multiplications would yield one in a zillion times a zillion. The initial probability is so very infinitesimal that we cannot even grasp the improbabilities produced by a full calculation. Let's just say that, if it is just a matter of random chance which some atheists suggest, the odds of all these fundamental constants aligning as they have is essentially zero. In other words, it's impossible. Yet this is the kind of impossibility which the atheist must defend to embrace the notion of creation without a creator. He finds himself defending the occurrence of a series of events far less likely than one person winning daily lotteries ad infinitum.

Physicist P.C.W. Davies has found that the probability of what he calls the initial conditions permitting the formation of stars (an absolute necessity for the

subsequent formation of a planet which would then support life) is so small that one cannot express it as a decimal on the page (35). If we were to try, we would have to print a trillion billion zeroes before we would get to the one at the end of the decimal. In other words, we could not even write all the zeros in a lifetime, or many lifetimes. I, for one, cannot grasp such a number. Suffice it to say that it is beyond improbable for such conditions to occur randomly.

Gerald L. Schroeder is another leading physicist who marvels at the staggering findings of cosmology over the last half-century. In *The Science of God* he explains how the essential elements of life were first formed:

“All this occurred during the first three minutes following the big bang. But none of it would have, had it not been for the extraordinary balance of power played out among the strong nuclear force, the weak nuclear force, and the electromagnetic force. These meshed in just correct proportions so that protons and neutrons drew together and bonded, thus forming the nuclei of atoms” (36).

Again, what we have seen here are but a few of the dozens of constants and quantities which must fall into line in such a propitious way to make it all possible—to make it possible for me to write these words — and for you to read them. If we ask typical atheists to explain how all this could possibly be, they will tell us that we are just lucky. We are the lucky beneficiaries of dozens of inconceivably improbable (read impossible) arrangements, combining to yield a universe which supports our existence. And even less helpful, they tell us that of course we would only expect to find ourselves in an environment which was conducive to our existence. There’s nothing more to see here—now move along. And the atheist accuses the theist of lacking curiosity! This is one of the reasons you may have heard an apologist quip, “I don’t have enough faith to be an atheist.” In fact, Christian apologists Frank Turek and Norman Geisler authored a book of the same title; *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* (37).

The reasoning reflected in some atheists’ dismissals of fine tuning reminds me of a bumper sticker belonging to someone we can reasonably assume was an avid meat-eater. Using the same kind of logic as the materialists it read, “*If we are not supposed to eat animals, why are they made out of meat?*” The materialist explanation of Fine Tuning is no less inane than the meat-eater’s bumper-sticker. Both explanations fail to advance the argument. Rather they merely restate a prejudice baked into their philosophy and illustrate the inability consider one’s own position on an issue.

Meanwhile some of the more tenacious atheists will refer us back to the

theory of the multiverse. They will argue that with an infinite number of universes coming into existence, sooner or later we are bound to end up with a universe in which these fundamental constants and measures are aligned to permit intelligent life—our universe. This is another colossal stretch of the imagination and more importantly, it simply doesn't follow. It represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of infinity. In fact, there is no reason to believe that any system which produces an infinite number of universes will necessarily generate a universe capable of supporting life, a universe capable of supporting intelligent life—our universe, or any other pre-specified universe. In other words, we are not “bound to end up with” any particular universe.

To explain, let's consider an infinite set of even numbers. There is no end to the numbers—they are infinite. Next we need to ask ourselves if that infinite set will necessarily produce a specified number. More precisely, we can ask if that infinite set of numbers will produce the number seven. Here we realize that while there are an infinite number of numbers, there also remains an infinite number of numbers not included in the set. For the same reason we have no reason to believe that the atheists' imaginary system which generates an infinite number of universes will ever yield any particular pre-specified universe. Even an infinite number of universes does not guarantee the existence of a universe like ours—the only universe capable of yielding intelligent life like us. In the very way the number seven is not to be found in the infinite set of even numbers, we have no reason to presuppose that our kind of universe will be generated in the theoretical infinite universe system. It could just as well be contained in the infinite set of universes *not* birthed in the multiverse model.

Thus the speculation of a multiverse system does not and cannot explain away the wonder of a universe organized with the irreplaceable constants we observe in ours. The multiverse theory takes us no further toward a rational explanation of the creation of our universe without a creator. The multiverse theory simply is not helpful here. That is not to say that cosmologists, astrophysicists and amateur atheist bloggers don't make extensive use of it, as if it did resolve the wonder of Fine Tuning. So there we have it. The preferred atheistic alternative to the creator God is groundless speculation of an infinite number of theoretical universes, theoretically produced by chance within a hypothetical multiverse system dreamed up for the express purpose of defending the assertion that our universe formed without a creator. No wonder the

multiverse theory as an explanation of Fine Tuning was dead on arrival. Have I mentioned that there is absolutely no evidence for the multiverse theory?

But for argument's sake let's take the leap across the impossible odds, both known and unknown, upon which the multiverse theory rests. Let's assume that ours is indeed one of the infinite number of universes birthed in a multiverse system. Then we face the big question all over again. The multiverse theory is not particularly helpful because, by the atheist's own rationale, it still requires a theory of its own creation. As with so many atheistic alternative theories to God, the notion of a multiverse only serves to push the ultimate question back one step. We are left with the very same question unresolved—how was the multiverse generation system created? All talk of a multiverse, while perhaps interesting and amusing, doesn't advance any argument that no god exists.

As we have seen, one of theism's more powerful arguments is based largely on scientific discoveries and new understanding of the last half-century. It is known broadly as the anthropic principle or the anthropic argument for God. Philosopher William Lane Craig is likely the most influential Christian Apologist today. Beyond apologetics writing, Craig is a leading theist debater, travelling the world to debate the finest atheist opponents and to give lectures to present his case for the existence of God. His description of the Anthropic Argument is compelling:

“In recent years, however, the scientific community has been stunned by its discovery of how complex and sensitive a nexus of conditions must be given in order for the universe to permit the origin and evolution of intelligent life on Earth. The universe appears, in fact, to have been incredibly fine-tuned from the moment of its inception for the production of intelligent life on Earth at this point in cosmic history. In the various fields of physics and astrophysics, classical cosmology, quantum mechanics, and biochemistry, various discoveries have repeatedly disclosed that the existence of intelligent carbon-based life on Earth at this time depends upon a delicate balance of physical and cosmological quantities, such that were any one of these quantities to be slightly altered, the balance would be destroyed and life would not exist” (33).

Atheists have offered a number of rebuttals to the Anthropic Principle including the multiverse theory discussed above. Frankly, these rebuttals are not remotely compelling, at least not to me. I concede that to others they might seem to fully neutralize this theistic argument. We have acknowledged that the power of these arguments is in the eye of the beholder. So I leave it to the reader to judge.

Still other atheists claim that the Fine Tuning argument fails because it is a

form of the Texas Sharpshooter Fallacy. That is, you fire your rifle at the side of a barn and then draw a target around the bullet hole in the wall! In other words, the timing of the identification of the target takes the mystery out of it. Atheist Michael Shermer explains the problem clearly by analogy. He says, “Isn’t it amazing how so many rivers in the United States follow state borders?” The animated TV classic “The Simpsons” provides another perfect example of the fallacy. I offer this example knowing I risk losing credibility among the more sophisticated readers. It is a useful illustration nonetheless. In one scene a character observes deer crossing the road right in view of a Deer Crossing sign. He is amazed that the deer somehow know precisely where they are supposed to cross the road—maybe they can read! One final example is captured in the expression, “Isn’t it amazing that your legs are just long enough to reach the ground?”

The Sharpshooter Fallacy can be a very real hazard to our understanding of cause and effect and the sequence of things. How does the Texas Sharpshooter Fallacy apply to a bullet-size point on that barn wall through which 20-30 bullets pass with perfect accuracy? It does not. In this case we are justified to draw a target around that point even after the fact. In a sense, the phenomenon is equally astonishing whether the circle is drawn before the bullets are fired or afterwards. Reason and rationality will lead us inexorably to conclude at minimum that something is going on here. We know that it is extraordinary to find 30 purportedly random bullets arriving at precisely the same point, no matter their trajectory or point of origin. In other words, the convergence of multiple incidents of perfect accuracy around that one single point simply cannot reasonably be attributed to chance alone. Not only is taking notice reasonable and rational, it is demanded.

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This Fine Tuning argument has been compelling to some rigorous thinkers—some in unexpected places. Lifelong atheist philosopher Antony Flew was sufficiently impressed by it to shift from his atheistic worldview to a form of Deism, embracing the concept of a creator God. We will consider Dr. Flew’s transition in detail in Chapter 11. Our atheist friends simply cannot mount an argument to fully dismiss the unimaginably precise measures and constants which were necessary for the formation of life, or even the formation of matter and space. More than a few life-long atheist scientists have admitted

astonishment. Yet it has not caused the majority to change their minds about the theist God. We can at least say that it is entirely reasonable to deduce the existence of an intelligent creator from this evident tuning.

As we saw earlier, a few atheists have a simple if unsatisfying explanation for how this could be. Dr. Krauss comments that we shouldn't be surprised to find ourselves only in a universe capable of sustaining us. What? His point is that, these measures are what they are, but just because each is nearly impossible given a random throw of the dice, it doesn't amount to divine tinkering with the universe. There are exceptions among atheist physicists, including Fred Hoyle. Hoyle exclaimed that the universe seems to be a put up job. While Hoyle is not willing to conclude that God is the cause he readily expressed astonishment at abundant fine tuning.

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In a 2008 presentation Richard Dawkins illustrated the materialist's irrational opposition to the God Hypothesis quite vividly. Dawkins presented his take on the extraordinary fine tuning of the universe which makes existence possible. He set forth what he calls explanation one. He says:

"Theists say that God did it, that God twiddled the knobs. That of course is no explanation at all because it leaves unexplained the tuner. It's just pushing the problem back one step. So we can instantly discount explanation number one" (38).

That is, according to Dawkins God could not have done it because we don't know enough about Him—nor can we learn anything about Him through the scientific method. Alternatively, we don't know enough about God therefore he could not be the creator of the universe. Of course that is an obvious non sequitur. It simply doesn't follow. Imagine we see first-hand a man commit a crime, but we know nothing about him. By Dawkins' logic, we would dismiss him as the culprit and seek out other possibilities *because* we know nothing about him. We immediately think of the drunk we met in Chapter 4, willing only to look for his car keys where light shone—nowhere else. He will only investigate in an area comfortable to him.

Here Dawkins reveals one of scientism's profound flaws. He appears to value the comfort of his preferred methodology more than the discovery of truth. It is worth reminding ourselves that Dawkins is one of the revered authorities in science to whom some would encourage us to defer on questions of reality and

truth. We are told that he is one of the smart and sophisticated people who will lead us to the truth. He has sold millions of copies of his books encouraging his readers to take it from him; God is nothing but a delusion. A key chapter in his best-selling book, *The God Delusion*, is entitled “*Why There Almost Certainly Is No God.*” With Dawkins’ status and influence in mind his profoundly flawed logic is especially sobering. It is also deeply troubling. A claim so important which Dawkins declares with so much certainty demands careful scrutiny. And right away we see a fundamental mistake of logic which would be obvious to any middle school student. Consequently it is certainly fair to ask what other mistakes Dawkins is making.

Next he presented his explanation number two; that just maybe one day physicists will discover a hidden theory which makes fine tuning not so remarkable. Dawkins acknowledged that he does not have much to say on this possibility. He rightly confesses that today there is no way to know. This might be called scientism of the gaps. In essence, his second explanation is pure speculation, nothing more.

Finally, he described the multiverse theory about which, as we have seen, science can tell us nothing because it is entirely beyond its reach. This handicap sounds familiar. In fact, it sounds a lot like Dawkins’ objection to explanation number one. Just like explanation number one we cannot hope to know anything about explanation number three through scientific inquiry. Yet despite this familiar scientific dead-end, Dawkins explained that he believes that the multiverse theory is “*rather an elegant proposition*” and that it is “*probably true.*” But in almost the previous breath he assured us that God could not have created the universe *because* science cannot tell us more about Him—the very same difficulty which doesn’t seem to bother him about the multiverse theory. This is truly strange coming from a man of science.

Imagine that at the same conference Dawkins is offered three menu options for lunch; 1. Beef Tacos, 2. Sushi, and 3. Beef Enchiladas. After some thought he explains that he doesn’t want option 1 because he is a vegetarian and furthermore he hates Mexican food. He doesn’t want option 2 because he has never had Sushi and doesn’t know enough about it. Maybe someday in the future he’ll consider Sushi. Then he enthusiastically orders option 3, explaining how he absolutely loves enchiladas, especially beef enchiladas. No doubt we would wonder about the truthfulness of his rationale for rejecting menu option number 1. We have to wonder about the reasons Dawkins gave for “*instantly*

discount[ing]” God as the source of fine tuning and thus as the creator of the universe. We know that his opposition to explanation one cannot be that it is inaccessible to science. So what then is Dawkins’ real reason for rejecting it?

His reasoning gets stranger still. Dawkins indicates that he believes that a multiverse system somehow is responsible for creating the universe so we can assume he places the probability of a multiverse system at more than 50%. Meanwhile in his book *The God Delusion* cited earlier he allows only a 2% probability that there is a God, or then that God is the cause of the universe.

What is going on here? Why would Dawkins assign a 25-fold larger probability to one explanation when both present essentially the same characteristics by which he as a scientist claims to scrutinize theories? Why the knee-jerk opposition to explanation number one but not to explanation number three? Why the enthusiastic embrace of an explanation with precisely the same scientific handicaps? These are extremely important points when we are working to understand the motivations and guiding principles which shape practitioners of science—particularly those in a position to directly shape public discourse. Again, we are routinely expected to take the word of scientists on the God Question because of their expertise in questions of the material world. The theist can be excused for thinking that maybe Dawkins and those like him are not as perfectly rational and devoted to the scientific method as they claim to be. We can reasonably conclude that more than just cold, hard reason shapes their conclusions. It becomes abundantly clear that materialist scientists who demand to be heard on the God question have not given it a fair shake. They rule out God as a possibility first *then* they conduct their science, which is fine. The problem starts when they or other materialists claim that science itself has disproved or negated the need for God.

By contrast the theist is justified in placing a higher probability on the God Hypothesis than on the multiverse as the cause of our universe—all things being equal by the measures of science. To be clear on this point, neither proposition is *directly* supported by science because neither is susceptible to the scientific method. Dawkins and other materialist atheists declare openly that they rely only on the five senses and the scientific method to discern truth. Thus their methodology would necessarily assign the same probability to God and the Multiverse. Meanwhile the theist professes that knowledge and understanding have sources beyond the material world which lead them to embrace the God Hypothesis.

Note that Dawkins appreciated the elegance of the Multiverse theory. While certainly in the eye of the beholder, elegance can be found in explanation number one as well. It is arguably elegant to assume that a creation has a creator and painfully inelegant to assume the opposite. No matter the dismissals of atheists, at least the theist lays claim to means and methods which render belief in God entirely rational.

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Many believers find accounts of near death experiences compelling. Atheists are quick to provide scientific explanations for NDEs in general. They point to brain chemistry during trauma and culturally-based imagery of religious figures often allegedly encountered in NDEs. Skeptics suggest that physiological trauma induces all sorts of chaotic brain activity, the release of hormones and other chemicals, and other natural events which the patient's brain somehow weaves into a narrative that makes sense to her. In other words, NDEs are not manifestations of out-of-body experiences or the transcendence of the soul; they are merely the product of a fantastically complex brain working over-time to survive a trauma. Certainly in some cases the NDE can be shown to have a materialistic cause. There are many others with no apparent material explanation.

Consider the case of Neurosurgeon Eben Alexander. In his best-selling book about life after death, Dr. Alexander recounts his experience in a coma while his body battled a severe infection, spinal meningitis. Alexander is a brain surgeon with extensive training in the function of the various parts of the human brain—a grasp of the latest understanding of localized brain function. His case is not as easily dismissed. After his experience he carefully ran down the list of all the materialistic explanations he anticipated from his colleagues—none withstood scrutiny. You see, his out-of-body experience came while scans of his brain showed absolutely no activity in all the areas allegedly associated with NDEs. Specifically, the chemicals released in the brain during this kind of trauma during the ravages of an explosive infection need a framework for operation—the neocortex. During Alexander's coma, however, his neocortex was inoperative. Alexander continues to carefully rebut all the typical physical explanations offered by materialist atheists. He describes his conclusions in his best-selling book, *Evidence of Heaven*. He writes:

“There was quite simply no way that my experiences, with their intensely sophisticated

visual and oral levels, and their high degree of perceived meaning, were the product of the reptilian portion of my brain. Was it a distorted recall of memories of deeper parts of my limbic system, the part of the brain that fuels emotional perception? Again, no. Without a functioning neocortex the limbic system could not produce visions with the clarity and logic I had experienced” (39).

Significantly, prior to his dramatic personal experience he routinely dismissed all similar claims as purely the product of a brain struggling to survive or easing the animal toward its end, just like nearly every other physician in his position. Again, the common materialistic explanation of all near death experiences attributes them to a flood of neurochemical activity trying to make sense of trauma. But as Alexander makes clear, no such activity took place in his brain. Thus the materialistic theory of NDEs is not equipped to make sense of his experience. Clearly this is not absolute proof, but it does illustrate a fundamental problem with the knee-jerk dismissal of all supposed miracles. It is telling that not even accounts from one of their erstwhile own, a materialist atheist scientist, can cause atheists to consider the possibility of a reality beyond the natural world—the environment in which they claim expertise.

Materialists’ systematic rejection of all NDEs leads me to the next subject. The processes by which atheists examine and inevitably dismiss all claims of miracles make them impossible — by definition. To atheists, there are only two categories of explanation for extraordinary claims: 1. the materialistic explanation, and 2. Materialistic explanations which are not yet available. In other words, experience has taught the cynic to conclude in advance that all miracles are really events for which a materialistic explanation is not yet available. Moreover, alleged instances of the extra-natural are by definition anecdotal and anecdotal occurrences are by definition nonscientific. And, as we have seen, most atheists expressly reject any claims which are nonscientific. So Eben Alexander’s NDE is not evidence of the supernatural because supernatural events do not happen. Unfortunately, the current materialist methodology literally makes miracles impossible not because they cannot happen in reality, but because they cannot be classified as such. In summary, the materialist atheist has a priori defined all nonphysical events or realities out of existence. Thus their materialistic conclusions are exclusively a product of their terminology and methodology, not an objective consideration of fact. When they say that miracles are impossible, in a sense, they are absolutely correct.

To most theists, the powerful sense of right and wrong in essentially every healthy person is an important clue that God exists. They see this intangible, seemingly independent, and absolute morality as possible only if there is a God. One form of the atheist's opposition to moral argument is simply either misdirected or disingenuous. It typically comes as a counter to the theist's belief that the existence of objective morality—some things are flat out wrong and everyone knows it—is only possible if God exists. How can there be any transcendent moral law if there is no transcendent moral law-giver.

In response atheists argue that non-believers are every bit as moral as believers. Morality does not come from the Bible or religion in general. So to them this is proof that there is no god. They insist, correctly I believe, that an individual can be moral without believing in God. Conversely, a believer can be horribly immoral. Sadly in a terrible waste of time, paper, ink, and every other medium, they provide example after example of bad believers and good atheists to make their point. Were they simply to ask theists to stipulate the point, they could invariably move on to something more interesting. No reasonable theist can argue otherwise.

This line of rebuttal betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the moral argument. For one thing it assumes that the *belief* in God is the driver of morality. It is as though none of us would know murder was immoral had we not discovered its prohibition in the Ten Commandments. The atheist who counters with this claim seems to confuse effect for cause. Belief or disbelief has absolutely no bearing on this argument for God. Instead it is the virtually universal call to good behavior even without access to the Ten Commandments or any other biblical proscriptions. Put plainly, belief itself is not needed to make this argument. Let's look at an example to better illustrate my point.

Let us replace the invisible pull toward a moral order with the invisible pull toward magnetic north. Belief in magnetic north plays no part in the pull it exerts universally around the earth. Assume for a moment that every person on the earth owns a compass. Let's say we are all given one as a gift at birth. Except for a small percentage of faulty or broken compasses, the metal arrow in all of them faithfully points north. Now assume that ten percent of the population does not believe there is a magnetic north. They acknowledge that all compasses point north. There is no consensus within this 10% on an alternative theory. Some might say that something in the manufacturing of the compass causes it to point north. That is, there is no external cause, only internal causes. Some argue that

there is ultimately no cause, nothing pulling the arrows north. These maintain that there really is no north and that the uniformity came only through a trick in the manufacturing of the compasses.

Meanwhile the other 90% believe that magnetic north does exist. In fact these latter attribute the uniformity of arrow behavior to the pull exerted by a very real magnetic north. They argue that the agreement of nearly all the compasses on the earth, no matter who possesses them, is evidence of an invisible pull which is only possible if there is a magnetic north. In fact, these believers would likely be perplexed at the non-believers' aversion to the possibility of a magnetic north. To them the conclusion would be obvious, even natural.

They would not be compelled by arguments against the existence of magnetic north which cited as proof the consensus of compasses in spite of disagreement over the existence of magnetic north and the actual cause of the uniformity among arrows. They would reject any such arguments as illogical. They would be right to do so. What's more, they would be correct to cite this consensus as positive evidence for this invisible attractive force and its cause, magnetic north.

So it is with the moral argument for God. Theists and atheists alike for the most part recognize a universal sense of moral order. In fact, even among atheists there is no consensus about the possibility of an objective morality. Meanwhile theists identify this universal tug on the hearts and consciences of human beings as an invisible but undeniable endowment from God. It's like a program pre-installed on His creations. Some have called this programming the "Moral Compass."

Again atheists would have you believe that the moral argument for God has failed, that atheist thinkers have done away with it. Don't be fooled. They haven't resolved it using naturalistic, or any other explanations. They present the ever-ready explanation "of the gaps" of natural selection as the cause of what we all see as clear moral law. We are told that our moral sense is simply a product of the tendency of humans to adopt practices which promote the survival of the species (*Dawkins and other evolutionary biologists argue more precisely that it is the gene which is effectively promoting itself; see Dawkins' book The Selfish Gene*). As such, that nagging feeling we often get which urges us to do the one thing, the good thing, and not the other thing, the bad thing, is not based on any

absolute morality. No, that near constant compulsion is nothing more than a byproduct of natural selection within our species—another random peculiarity.

According to the noted late scientist Steven Jay Gould, if we were to rewind biological progress back to the beginning and press play again, the natural forces credited with generating the diversity of life we observe today would have sprung into action again but would produce a completely different result (40). Similarly, the intangible instincts acquired through the same process would be just as unpredictable. Thus we would end up with a completely different moral framework—entirely unpredictable rules and regulations directing our instincts. Gould's proposition thus leaves us without any absolute frame of reference, yielding by necessity merely preferences as stated previously. None of the infinite number of moral frameworks which could have been generated through random mutation and natural selection over the last few million years can be any better or worse than any other. For example, had we evolved within a framework in which cannibalism was universally esteemed, it would not be inferior in any real way to the framework within which we operate today. Thus all we can say for the infinite spectrum of possible moral frameworks, including the one we experience now, is that they are only different. Every moral standard of every kind, even those deemed most noble, is nothing more than the product of wholly random forces. For atheists this should ring true. It is unavoidable. In reality however there are many atheists who find this hard to swallow—although they typically cannot explain why.

As we saw in Chapter 3, when confronted with the broad array of deeply ingrained impulses which not only do not promote but actually thwart the survival of the species (the automatic impulse to risk one's own life to save another from a fire would be one of numerous clear examples), this is chalked up as simply a misfire. So the naturalistic explanation of the existence of moral law is both the success and the failure of natural selection. It wouldn't be cynical to wonder if, possessing such bilateral resiliency, this extension of the theory of evolution is effectively unfalsifiable. I for one cannot think of a finding along these lines which would diminish some advocates' confidence in the theory as the source of morality.

So again we return to doxastic closure, the inability to consider any countervailing evidence, on the part of militant atheists. Lawrence Krauss and Peter Boghossian both provide an example of evidence they would consider interesting but still not conclusive. To quote Boghossian who credits Krauss with

the original formulation:

“If I walked outside at night and all of the stars were organized to read, ‘I am God communicating with you. Believe in me.’ And every human being worldwide witnessed this in their native language this would be suggestive but far from conclusive as it is a perception and could be a delusion” (5).

The rearrangement of the stars to form a specific message plain to everyone on the planet would not be conclusive? It would only be suggestive because it is apprehended through perception? No wonder the many subtle forms of evidence for a higher power consistently fail to move them. Precisely what kind of evidence bypasses human perception and thereby qualifies as conclusive? We have here encountered an entirely new standard—a standard which by its very definition is unachievable. And thus no conclusions of any kind are possible through any kind of methodology because we have nothing but our perceptions through which it can be processed. So Boghossian et al once again tell us nothing of the merits of the evidence but instead reiterate their a priori dismissal of all evidence in support of God. Far better to establish reasonable criteria, in contrast to those employed by the atheists above, which permit at least the possibility of compelling evidence for God. As we have seen in abundance, for these atheists at least, no god is possible *because* no god is possible.

While we're on the subject, it is puzzling that the atheistic world view systematically rejects all claims of the supernatural. By supernatural we mean anything, cause, force, existence, reality, beyond the natural world—or beyond the natural universe. But this systemic rejection of all but the natural is elective. Consider that all that is natural of necessity presumes a supernatural cause. Based upon their own designations, atheists must and for the most part do acknowledge that abiogenesis, the origination of life from nonlife, was a supernatural event. They know it occurred. They know that life does not come from nonlife in the natural world. Yet somehow it did — at least once by their reckoning. Somehow at a distinct point in time a number of inorganic molecules inexplicably acquired the urge to combine in a way never before done, to form life. This simply does not occur in nature. It cannot be observed. It cannot be replicated. For that matter the claim cannot be falsified. Try as we might we cannot get these same inorganic materials to leap into action like they did billions of years ago. We know that no amount of time can possibly cause inorganic molecules to come to life. By all definitions, this was not only a supernatural event, it was a miracle.

Of course no less confounding was the origination of matter, energy, space, and time. Again our atheist friends must and for the most part do acknowledge that the Big Bang amounted to the formation of everything there is out of nothing. We have already seen how attempts to argue that this is somehow to be expected, that we should expect stuff to create itself out of nothing, or that the Big Bang is naturalistic—these attempts have failed. Once again we have a key event, the paramount event, which can only be described as supernatural and miraculous. Thus the two foundational events at the base of all nature were themselves supernatural. Yet science does not deal in the supernatural.

This is not a word game or an attempt to make a technical point. It is not an insignificant nuance—far from it. This is commentary on the essential characteristics of the naturalistic atheistic worldview. By necessity it embraces the reality of supernatural forces. So does theism. Thus theism accepts rational claims of both the natural and the supernatural and admits that it does. Meanwhile atheism, for all its haranguing against the notion of the supernatural, accepts the reality of the natural and, when compelled, it also accepts the supernatural. The difference is that theism is unafraid to do so. We might say that with theism there is no fear of the supernatural. But again, what are we to make of an enterprise that disqualifies possible causes wholly on the grounds they do not lend themselves to preferred means of examination? At a minimum we must reject claims that the enterprise has “disproved” those possible causes. We can be assured that it has done no such thing.

CHAPTER SUMMARY – THINGS TO CONSIDER

If we do not rule them out or disqualify them right out of the gate, we will find a number of evidences which indicate that the theist God exists. Unfortunately, however, many cynics insist there is no evidence for God literally because there is no evidence for God. That is, all possibilities of evidence tend to be dismissed because of preconceived notions. The fact that the universe came into existence, the inconceivably precise fine tuning of countless forces and constants to make the universe and life possible, the universal sense of God across all civilizations, the miracle of the origin of life accepted by atheist and theist alike, and the inexplicable moral impulse toward altruism are just some of the numerous compelling reasons to conclude God exists.

CHAPTER 6 - SO MUCH SPACE, SO LITTLE LIFE

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“When dealing with critics always remember this: Critics judge things based on what is outside of their content of understanding.”

—Shannon L. Alder, *Author*

“The wonderful arrangement and harmony of the cosmos would only originate in the plan of an almighty omniscient being. This is and remains my greatest comprehension.”

—Isaac Newton

THEISTS AND ATHEISTS ALIKE marvel at the number of extremely precise natural laws and forces which have conspired (atheists would prefer the term combined) to make human life possible on planet Earth. They point to the sheer improbability of these necessary conditions if left only to chance. As we have seen, the formation of the universe was entirely dependent upon several dozen forces, quantities and constants being precisely what they are. By precisely, we mean tolerances in some cases equivalent to the number one divided by a number larger than the number of atoms in the universe. Change one of these measures by a fraction that small, and stars do not form, heavier elements do not fuse, chemistry does not emerge, light and life are made impossible. There are only two explanations on offer for this extraordinary condition. Either it is the result of fantastically good fortune, or to paraphrase some imminent physicists, some super intellect must have tweaked the numbers.

Atheists make a cosmological argument against belief in a Creator based upon an infinitesimal fraction themselves. They remind us of the infinitesimal portion of the universe conducive to human life. Put numerically, this is the ratio of the area of the Earth’s habitable zone divided by the size of the universe. That equates to something like the area of the habitable zone/infinity. They are right to point this out. Think of the tiniest fraction you can, then divide it by the biggest number you can think of. Well, the fraction you’re left with is still far larger than the fraction of the universe which is habitable to us.

It is true that for those of us on the relatively tiny planet earth, the cosmos is almost entirely uninhabitable. If God created life and humanity, why is there so much waste and inefficiency? As far as cosmologists can see into the universe, they find no evidence of extra-terrestrial life, let alone intelligent life. The truth is, outside of our planet it appears that the universe is entirely hostile and deadly to human life. We occupy only a vanishingly minute portion of an otherwise inhospitable universe. No wonder Carl Sagan poetically referred to earth as a pale blue dot. Yet even his expression doesn't quite capture the relative insignificance of our precious real estate.

So the atheist concludes that the vast expanse incapable of supporting life of any kind is evidence that no god exists. It is an enormous waste of space. He argues that an all-knowing, all-powerful god would clearly be capable of making better use of all the space that surrounds us, labelling the vast expanse "wasted." Richard Carrier feels strongly that "...*God would never create a universe like the one we find ourselves in. He would create something much smaller*" (6).

Carrier is not alone. This is an increasingly common theme among atheists—criticism of what theists claim is the creation of an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving God. Atheist author J.D. Brucker agrees:

"The universe is vast, seemingly timeless, dangerous, unrelenting, and uncaring; if god created all of that with us in mind, he must be just as unreasonable, and uncaring as the nature of space" (41).

Materialist-atheists are not at all reluctant to pronounce with extraordinary specificity how an infinite God would and would not design His creations. Moreover, without justification they assume a god whose creations necessarily embody his characteristics. We will see that these complaints are not only off the mark, but reflect a failure to carefully think through the alternatives. To put it less charitably, they are incoherent.

Admittedly at first glance, the broader atheist claim makes some sense. There is a whole lot of space out there— more than we can possibly comprehend. It all can seem a bit of a waste. Consider modern engineering. What human engineer would claim success with similar results? Of course none would. But once again imbedded within these criticisms are a number of unjustified and even unrecognized assumptions. We will see that this atheist objection like so many others collapses under the weight of even a brief examination

Atheists don't just complain about the volume of uninhabitable space. They also complain about the unfathomable amount of time needed to bring about life. Like other atheists, Carrier insists that God would not wait billions of years to slowly form galaxies, our solar system, and then create the Earth. Nor would God wait additional billions of more years for life to develop into its current state. No all-powerful god would *need* that kind of time to accomplish his purposes. He could do it all in an instant.

It seems he might have a point, but only at first glance. Here again we see the atheist projecting wholly human concerns and constraints onto Deity. To a human being who might hope to live 85 years, this seems unthinkable. We might call this the creation a straw-god after one's own likeness and image. I would agree that, if I could avoid it, I would want to speed things up a bit to avoid having to wait so long for things to get moving. This is precisely how Carrier frames the argument. As I read his criticism I couldn't help but picture the typical caricature of God. I picture him twiddling his fingers or running them through his white beard in boredom, waiting for things to get interesting and finally permit him to create mankind. That's the straw-god Carrier seems to be writing about; only a caricature of the real thing. He seems unwilling or unable to keep in mind that, standing outside of time, God is not subject to it. It is subject to him. Prior to the Big Bang there was no time. In fact, there was no "prior." Physicists use a helpful analogy. There was no "before" the Big Bang like there is no going south of the South Pole.

Thus remaining outside of His creation, through the 13.8 billion years since the Big Bang, through the 4.6 billion years since the earth was formed and through the 3.5 billion years since the emergence of the first unicellular life forms on earth, God continues free from any limitations to time. He is timeless and all time is present before Him. So as difficult as it is for to us to even partially comprehend, the Big Bang is as "present" and accessible to God as the moment I write this sentence or the moment you read it. There was, is, or will be no waiting. The inefficient use of time argument advanced by so many atheists is purely a projection of the human experience onto an infinite God and therefore fails for this very reason.

So yes, to grant Carrier one conditional point, billions of years are along time to wait — if God had to wait through them. Again if God thought, planned, and needed to conserve resources like Carrier, He may have created the universe prescribed by Carrier. Thus I agree with Dr. Carrier—there is no evidence of a

god who thinks like a man and is constrained by a man's limitations. Too often this form of god is typically the god with which the militant atheists do battle. It does nothing to advance our apprehension of the theist God. Thus it leaves Him untouched and undisturbed.

Next, we find critics of the nature and composition of creation that appear to conflate God with His creations. Brucker suggested that all the diverse properties of the universe would necessarily mirror the properties of the creator God of theism. Apparently, if space is cold and dark, so is the theist God. This assumption is flawed for a number of reasons.

The first error in conflating God with creation is rather practical. A creator is free to create that which differs from him. I may create a table with sharp corners, a flat top, and four legs. But it does not follow then that I personally have sharp corners, a flat top, and four legs. One key is the possible purpose and objective of creation which we will discuss below. Incidentally, biblical scholars speak of the use of "beget" and "create" in the Bible. The consensus is that God begets that which is a reflection of Himself—to beget is to propagate Himself. Meanwhile He can create essentially anything else. He creates a planet and plant life, for example. These creations are not Him any more than the table I make is me.

Brucker's analysis of the severe properties of the universe also fails to account for the necessity of contrast we explored in Chapter 3. There we saw that to create a world of majestic mountain peaks, for example, is to accommodate a world of plunging depths. To create light in a universe of texture is to permit the existence of shadows and darkness. Put succinctly, in no sense can there be light if there is no darkness. There can be no darkness if there is no light. They are as inextricably connected as the two sides of a coin. To expect otherwise is to demand the logically impossible of God. So any expectation that demands such cannot logically accrue toward an argument against His existence. The severe properties of the universe do not logically disprove the existence of God.

Even more significantly, the atheist complaint over the cold, dark, and uncaring nature of the universe is a categorical acknowledgement of the reality of the opposite. That is, the critic is only aware of these undesirable features of the universe because he has enjoyed precisely the opposite here on planet earth! He is in a position to bemoan the bitter cold and darkness of space only because

he has experienced the comforting warmth and light of the sun. He has come to apprehend his world by and through his experience of contrast. Were there no contrast he could never know such things. Presumably these same critics appreciate the beauty of a sunset or a mountain lake. To some these may shape the standard of desirability. Yet to complain that the sun doesn't continuously set 24 hours a day or that the entire earth is not covered by a mountain lake would be no less incoherent. We appreciate and value these things *because* they are finite. Were they infinite we would not, we could not appreciate them because they would go unrecognized.

Thus it is senseless to fault the Creator God for where creations of beauty and majesty do not exist. Cynics and critics of the God Hypothesis would always have fodder for complaint unless and until all space is filled with only the beautiful—which as we have seen, is logically and metaphysically impossible. Equally significant, we have absolutely no reason to believe that the ratio of convivial beauty to the absence thereof in our universe is anything but ideal. In fact, in an infinite universe such an analysis is impossible because the denominator of infinity renders any calculation meaningless. There are only two possibilities. Either the entire universe is all beautiful—which we could never recognize. Or, even with a great volume of beauty, there will also be a seemingly infinite volume of the opposite.



Theists and atheists alike mistakenly project human characteristics and limitations on the God of theism. Some of the most profound mistakes in atheist thought are a consequence of this kind of unrecognized projection. Yet at the risk of making the very same mistake myself, I must write a word in God's defense (not that a defense from me is needed). I cannot think of a better proof of the age-old complaint that no good deed goes unpunished. Were God to think like us, he might be bothered by some of these complaints. "Gee God, thanks for all the trees, but there are places where you didn't put them." We have a tendency to focus on where good things end and where they don't exist, failing to understand the necessity of contrast and variety discussed above. "Gee God, thanks for the earth, but what about all that space out there that isn't also earth?" It seems that with respect to the God of creation, no good cosmological deed goes unpunished—or at least no good cosmological good deed goes uncondemned. Again we are compelled to wonder what would constitute an

acceptable universe by atheists' standards. In the end I suspect that the approbation of the critic, like the creation of a square circle, is but one more of the metaphysical impossibilities we considered earlier. It simply is not attainable in this or any other universe.

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This brings us to the alleged sheer waste of the incomprehensibly vast unpopulated regions of space—or almost all of it. Any engineer worth his salt would agree with Carrier and his confederates that the universe as presently constituted is a monumentally inefficient use of matter and energy—by human standards. His conclusion rests upon two important assumptions. First, it assumes a certain limited purpose for all creation—to provide a location within which humans could directly abide. It assumes that the end purpose of the universe was only to provide a habitable piece of real estate for us humans, nothing more. But what if the habitation of real estate alone was not the sole purpose of all the matter, energy, and space in the universe? What if the universe served other purposes? Carrier's argument, like those of other materialist critics, plainly does not entertain this possibility. We need only consider simple alternatives to understand why this failure invalidates his argument.

One of my favorite movies from the 1990's was *The Truman Show*. I suspect most readers will remember it. The film depicted what was at the time a fresh and completely new concept in television. The show within the film may have been one of the first reality TV shows before we had a name for them. As strange as it might seem, a review of the movie can help illustrate the errors made by critics of the size and the age of the universe. Stay with me — we will make sense of this. I promise.

To be brief, in the film a television production company creates an artificial world in which they place a newborn boy to live his entire life. His home, his family, his friends, and everything about his hometown are a setup. The people in his life, even those closest to him, are all paid actors. All the homes and buildings are simply part of a very large set. Innumerable cameras throughout the town capture Truman's every move. This is the point of the production—to enable the viewers in their real homes to watch Truman live his life and to be entertained by it. His life is streamed to a widely committed viewership all day every day. Of course, Truman is not in on the arrangement. He assumes he is just

like everyone else. One thing he knows for certain is that he is nothing special.

Naturally constrained by a limited budget, limited resources, and a finite window of time, The Truman Show producers could only create a finite space, or a finite universe, for Truman. At some point in every direction, the set had to come to an end. Part of the tension in the film is generated by Truman's attempts to go beyond his typical daily routine and daily travels, and the production staff's efforts to prevent him from coming into contact with the ends of his man-made universe. Even though the producers had succeeded in creating a seemingly real world for Truman, they were forced to find ways of creating termination points at which Truman's world ended and the real world began. What's more, they had to make these points appear to be natural. A major transition in the movie occurs when Truman can no longer live within the confines of his artificial world. After he is prevented from leaving his hometown by car, he decides to go by boat across what appears to be a vast body of water. But after traveling only a short distance his sail boat crashes into a set wall which from a distance had given the appearance of an indefinite horizon. He explores the set wall and realizes the nature of what had been his world. It turns out that his passion to reach, grow, and explore could never be accommodated in a finite space. His spirit could not be contained.

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I must admit that the first time I heard someone articulate the "wasted space" complaint, it got me thinking. It wasn't clear to me that the point was invalid. I wasn't sure what to think but at another level it didn't seem right and I knew it was missing something. As time passed and I reflected on it, I began to consider the alternative to our seemingly infinite universe. If not the infinite universe disqualified in atheistic reasoning, then what kind of universe would the all-powerful God of the God Hypothesis create? Alternatively, what kind of universe would have satisfied skeptics and atheists that it was created by a god? What would a less wasteful universe look like? I say seemingly infinite because scientists don't necessarily believe that the universe goes on forever. Rather, the understanding is that it has no ends because it somehow bends back upon itself. Most of us have heard it said that if we could travel fast enough and far enough we would end up back at our starting point. Yes, this notion is a brain twister.

Just a brief analysis of the Truman Show reveals the fatal flaw in the atheist

argument against God based upon seemingly wasted space. It is an entirely practical challenge which demands an equally practical answer. The film helped me envision the ‘what ifs’ of the alternatives to our infinite universe. Plainly God could have identified how many human beings he wanted to create and then calculated a generous amount of living space for the total number. But then what? Would he establish an end boundary in every direction just beyond the necessary living space? Would all the termination points be walled off? If so, then what would be on the other side? Maybe after thinking this through, God would elect to provide humanity a little more space if for nothing more than preventing chronic claustrophobia. But then He wouldn’t have to stop there either. He might want to push it even further. But of course none of this makes any sense. First, unlike the human engineer the God of theism is not constrained by lack of any kind—lack of matter or energy or time. In fact, He could just as easily create our entire universe as he could create the miniaturized universe proposed by Carrier—a larger-scale Truman set.

Coming at no additional cost to God as it would, God would be perfectly free to create this entire universe for purposes beyond just direct and immediate habitation. Accepting the model proposed by Carrier and other atheist critics, God could have created each human within a very small pod or ecosphere equipped with everything each would need.

With the above in mind let’s accept the atheists’ challenge and ask which type of universe would an infinitely powerful, infinitely resourceful god create for mankind? We can agree that a 500-foot diameter bio-dome wouldn’t be great. Would this infinite god create a universe with limited dimensions of any kind which hemmed in his creations? If so, would he create one which ended a thousand miles beyond the surface of the earth? Then how would he enclose it? With what? Then why not a million miles? Why not a million light years? Well then, why not *seemingly* infinite dimensions.

We can also pursue this question in another direction. Let’s carefully consider Carrier’s assertion that the universe, if it were really the creation of God, should be just a fraction of its current size. To say that it should be $\frac{1}{2}$ the size, or $\frac{1}{10}$ the size, or even $\frac{1}{1,000,000}$ its current size does not help. We know that any fraction of infinity is still infinity. So we can safely conclude that a universe created by God could either be infinite or finite in size. There is nothing in-between. Thus the atheist demand that a created universe would be smaller is to say that it would be finite — and intelligent life within it would know it. We

have also encountered the conundrum of a universe created by God with finite boundaries; the puzzle of what exactly constitutes these ends and what is on the other side (42). Carrier's proposed universe quickly begins to make less sense. Doing my best to avoid cynicism myself, I must say that it is not difficult to imagine a finite universe in which critics speculate that there is no god because a real god would have created an infinite universe.

In the end we should ask ourselves one question—what kind of universe would an infinitely powerful god with infinite resources create? A reasonable answer is an infinite universe. In fact, it is not just a reasonable answer; it is the best answer—far better than the only alternative. Ours is the kind of universe the theist's God would create. We can be highly confident that Carrier's criticism of the universe as the product of God is flatly incorrect.

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Before closing this topic I want to address an equally fatal flaw in the atheist argument of Wasted Space. It presumes without support that the purpose of physical creation is only to provide a space for humanity to live, again, that minimum necessary piece of real estate. We have already shown that this could have been accomplished in minimal space, with all basic necessities fully provided. But the notion of finite boundaries is intellectually unappealing and inelegant. What if God's plan and purpose for creation was to facilitate more than just existence? What if the master plan promoted not just consciousness of intelligent beings, but an environment conducive to ever-expanding consciousness? What if the plan envisioned limitless opportunities to grow, expand, learn, explore, and ponder everything including creation itself? The atheist argument here fails because it falsely assumes a one-dimensional purpose for creation. It completely fails to contemplate some of the most satisfying possibilities which typically atheists themselves genuinely appreciate—discovery and the acquisition of knowledge. It turns out that our universe provides for these possibilities and perhaps reflects some of the purposes of the theist God.

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I add one interesting fact which admittedly proves nothing but fits nicely within our expectations of the theist God. We have posited that the God of

theism had more than just biological habitation in mind when He created the universe. It is reasonable to assume another purpose was an environment in which humanity, a life form with great intellectual potential, could explore, advance, discover, and otherwise expand its horizons. The sun is approximately 93 million miles from us. Meanwhile the moon hovers around 240,000 miles from us. The sun is nearly a million times the mass of the Earth. The moon is just a fraction of the Earth's size. Using round numbers, the sun is about 400 times larger than the moon but it is 400 times further from the earth. Low and behold, both spheres appear to us as the same size from our vantage (43). According to the Universe Today, this is another "amazing coincidence" (44). Despite Richard Dawkins avowed disgust with why questions, one seems particularly relevant here. Why do the two largest spheres visible in our sky, with enormously different sizes (the Sun is 27 million times more massive than the Moon) and at fantastically different distances from earth, ever present the same size of circle both aligned to us at our vantage? Was it dumb luck? I suppose it could be.

But consider for a moment that an essential test of Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity could only be completed with the aid of a near perfect solar eclipse which occurs nowhere else but from our vantage on earth. It turns out that after the end of World War One, on May 29, 1919, not long after Einstein had proposed the theory and other scientists had opportunity to formulate empirical tests for it, just such an eclipse occurred.

With great anticipation scientists from around the globe travelled thousands of miles to find ideal observation points, all in the southern hemisphere. European countries were only just beginning to emerge from the devastation caused by the war so most observers struggled to get to their intended destinations. Finally in position, with the cooperation of the sun and the moon, sufficiently clear skies for stellar observation, and the "random" respective masses and the random respective distances from Earth, scientists were able to perform the precise astronomical measurements necessary to establish the validity of key elements of Einstein's theory (45). Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington, whom we cited in Chapter 3 on the unfathomability of the universe (it is not only stranger than we imagine, it is stranger than we *can* imagine), gained world-wide acclaim not to mention knighthood from the British Crown for his crucial role in the enterprise. None of this could have happened had both measures of mass, both measures of distance from our terrestrial vantage point, and both the

bodies' movements not combined in such a fortuitous way.

In 1919 the ostensibly random cooperation of a half-dozen cosmic variables enabled mankind to dramatically advance understanding of the essence of the universe. To atheists this is, yet again, all just happy coincidence. They could be right. It is possible. Or just maybe the universe and the Earth were created with us in mind. Perhaps matter and energy were arranged in a way which would permit and even encourage intelligent life to expand its understanding. This is also possible. Authors Guillermo Gonzales and Jay Richards chronicle many other benefits we enjoy due to the location and nature of the earth. In *The Privileged Planet* they make the case that science could not have achieved all it has were it not for this extraordinarily good fortune (46). They examine the fine tuning which makes not only life possible, but also an environment in which intelligent life can explore and conduct science:

“We now know that a rare and finely tuned array of factors makes Earth suitable for complex life. We depend on our planet's oxygen-rich atmosphere, its large moon, its planetary neighbors, and its precise location within the solar system and Milky Way galaxy. But the story does not end here. For, the same factors that make a planet like Earth hospitable to life also provide the best conditions for scientific discovery” (46).

Of course all of this could merely be wondrous luck. Much like the extraordinary elements of fine tuning we examined in the last chapter, the “fine tuning” of the observability of the universe could similarly be attributed to good fortune. No atheist is necessarily compelled by logic to conclude along with famed astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle, cited earlier who exclaimed that the abundance of cooperation of forces and objects is somehow “a put up job.” Consider this remarkable cosmological coincidence against the atheist's complaint about wasted space in the universe. It is not unreasonable to posit that just maybe the universe was created by God and was created with more than humankind's mere tenancy in mind. If so, if we were placed in an environment conducive to science, then those additional objectives appear to have been achieved nicely.

CHAPTER SUMMARY – THINGS TO CONSIDER

There is absolutely no mathematical or other scientific measure by which anyone can argue that the universe is too big or too small or that there is not enough habitable space. Atheists who argue that the universe is too sparse or inhospitable make assumptions they cannot defend. Thus atheist criticisms of the

nature of the universe are merely subjective and arbitrary. They wrongly assume that God waited billions of years before introducing human life. What's more their complaints with about the composition of the universe reflect only their misconceptions of the nature of the theist God. They wrongly presuppose that an infinite God shares their concerns about efficient use of resources. Finally, if part of God's purpose for creation was to provide mankind room to explore and discover both the nature of the universe and our view within it seem to have been carefully considered.

CHAPTER 7 - WITH INTELLIGENCE COMES ATHEISM?

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“All thinking men are atheists”

—Ernest Hemingway

“All thinking men are atheists. Just ask an atheist.”

—The Author

“The first gulp from the glass of natural sciences will turn you into an atheist, but at the bottom of the glass God is waiting for you.”

—Werner Heisenberg, *Theoretical Physicist*

SIR FRANCIS BACON FAMOUSLY NOTED that, “A *little philosophy inclineth a man’s mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion*” (47). As we saw in the opening quote above, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Werner Heisenberg echoed the sentiment more than three centuries later. I intend to show that this principle is still valid today and is manifested in modern pursuits of knowledge. In some circumstances nothing is quite as blinding as the successful apprehension of a novel, valid scientific model or principle. Albert Einstein also cautioned that “the man of science is a poor philosopher.” With Einstein’s warning in mind, I will examine how great expertise within a particular intellectual discipline shapes how an individual approaches and interprets all others. In short, we will see that, despite the profound importance and utility of science, the notion that its practitioners are somehow better positioned to make sense of the God Question is false. There is no reason to believe that their expertise endows them with special insights into existential questions of this kind. Put simply, even the most accomplished scientist has no advantage over you or me.

Salon magazine, no fan of faith in general, ran an article entitled “*Religion’s smart-people problem: The shaky intellectual foundations of absolute faith*” (48). It made dire pronouncements for those who would hope to maintain traditional belief in God while simultaneously expanding knowledge in

the secular world. The article accurately captures much of the substance and the implications of the faith vs. science debate raging in popular culture today. Paraphrasing virtually every advocate of atheism, the author intones that most smart people, scientists and philosophers at the top of his list, no longer believe in God. Then in what is becoming an obligatory consolation to believers he allows that “...*nothing definitely follows about the truth of a belief from what the majority of philosophers or scientists think.*” But he correctly observes that, “*such facts might cause believers discomfort.*” But is that discomfort warranted?

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So it comes as no surprise that in debates with believers, nonbelievers will almost always cite statistics which seem to demonstrate that the smartest among us, presumably like them, do not believe in God. Understandably, sharing this world view with great minds seems to provide them great comfort. For that reason they will often cite the alleged intelligence/atheism correlation within their first few breaths. After all, who doesn't want to be on the side of an argument occupied by the smartest people around? With that alleged fact established, the dialogue which follows inevitably takes a certain shape. The theist faces an uphill battle.

This is an unveiled appeal to the aspiring intellectual in all of us. For example, it's easy to understand the satisfaction of membership in Mensa—even more satisfying when people know it! In a debate forum it's a direct appeal to the audience to take notice. The audience is alerted that the geniuses of the world already agree with the atheist. Since a formal debate is a contest of intellects and arguments, what better forum to boast of one's intellectual standing or at least assume a posture to benefit from association. But this posturing fails for a number of reasons

First, it is entirely an argument from authority, a readily recognized and discredited debate maneuver. Were it otherwise, we could end debate at once. We could simply get the answer from the individual with the highest recorded IQ (whom we will meet at the end of the chapter) and save a lot of time. On any other topic the atheist would be quick and right to say that just because so and so agrees does not make the argument valid. No matter who agrees, an argument can be dead-wrong. This has been borne out all through history. By definition, the best informed among humanity together concurred with prevailing wisdom

of the times until something and typically someone corrected it. People believed the earth was the center of the universe until men discovered it wasn't.

Until Nicolaus Copernicus, the best and the brightest insisted that the orbits of the planets around the Sun were perfect circles—they had to be. The circle represented a perfect geometry according to which God would have ordered the solar system. It just made sense. No less authority than the great Galileo Galilei defended this doctrine of the circle. Of course in time Copernicus was vindicated and first the learned, then the general population, came to know that the planets traveled in elliptical orbits. For all his wisdom and accomplishments, Galileo turned out to be dead-wrong about a fundamental feature of cosmology.

Prior to these discoveries, authority provided no advantage in the pursuit of truth. Worse yet, it was misleading. It misinformed and provided false confidence along the way. These are but two examples of historical errors of authority which were of great consequence. Of course there were countless more in the past and we can expect many more to come. So we reject this and other arguments from authority for good reason.

Meanwhile most atheist authors are keenly aware of the folly of appeals to authority and so they are careful to quickly acknowledge that the ostensibly high intelligence of some prominent atheists is not of itself any kind of evidence that no god exists. Yet they dismiss its significance only after citing the claim in the first place. I've yet to encounter an atheist author and/or debater who fails to cite the high percentage of atheists among leaders in science and academics, and among other great intellects. The citation of this intelligence claim, typically followed by the obligatory dismissal, seems to be a form of atheist two-step. So we can safely conclude that this is important to atheists and to their confidence.

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Even while knowing that it was deeply flawed, I must confess that this argument bothered me early on. It struck a nerve in me. Sadly my irritation likely said more about me than about the legitimacy of the point. At the most basic level the implication of the claim is insulting to believers. What is worse and even more troubling, it makes sense at first glance, sometimes even at second glance! They mean to say that only children and simple, if not stupid people still believe in God. Perhaps at best the theist might hope to be accused only of being irrational. The point is that smart people are atheists. It's just that

simple. If you still believe in God as an adult you are most likely a dimwit, uneducated, hopelessly irrational, or all of the above. On the other hand if you are an atheist, the odds are you are one of the smartest people in the building. If the smartest people disbelieve then it follows that as a person gains knowledge, she should unavoidably abandon belief in God. Assuming she is honest and rational, it is only a matter of time. As one becomes more intelligent, one moves further and further away from theism toward the realities embraced by atheism. Conversely then, to admit that one still believes in God is to confess a lack of intelligence and sophistication. It is to confess a failure to progress—a failure to grow up.

Reports of a “*Review of 63 scientific studies about religion and intelligence dating between 1928 and last year [2013]*” were published in the UK Daily Mail (49). Researchers claimed that of the 63 studies they reviewed, 53 showed a positive relationship between IQ and atheism and only ten showed a negative relationship. In other words, in 53 studies, the higher the IQ, the more likely a person was to be an atheist. The headlines announcing the findings were not subtle—“*A new study has concluded that religious people are less intelligent than nonbelievers.*” The researchers’ peers raised concerns about the former’s methods and the failure to consider important variables. For example, as IQ goes up so does the amount of education received. Critics noted that extended education amounts to greater exposure to the influence of largely atheistic instructors and coursework. Critics also challenged the researchers’ categorization of religion and belief. While studies like those reported in the UK Daily Mail are not overwhelming and are not without rebuttal, it is reasonable to conclude that there is at least a modest positive correlation between IQ and atheism. For the balance of this chapter I will assume that this claim is true.

The deconversion of believers in higher education deserves a brief observation here. We would be unwise to simply conclude that this trend is evidence that gaining knowledge inevitably leads to abandoning belief in God. In no way does it lend credibility to atheist conclusions. There is far more going on. In fact, given the makeup of higher education today it would be astounding if rates of atheism did not increase through the college and university experience.

Consider a hypothetical society in which 90% were atheists and 10% professed belief in God—roughly the inverse of our society in the U.S. Yet in this society the majority of college administrators and instructors were believers, say 70% to 85% - again roughly the inverse of current circumstances. Moreover,

the curriculum and broader atmosphere systematically presumed God's existence. Often the theistic world view was not just presumed but actively taught from the lecterns. Atheists in these colleges and universities were made to feel foolish for their disbelief and that of their families. In this hypothetical world we would expect to see many students entering as atheists and graduating as believers. Significantly, we would expect this trend wholly independent from the veracity of the theistic worldview. That is, the trend would be explained by social and educational forces, and not interpreted as evidence that theism was true. We have no more reason to interpret deconversions produced in higher education today as any form of evidence that atheism is closer to the truth.

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Nonetheless evolutionary biologist turned atheist evangelist to the world Richard Dawkins is especially encouraged by reports of the linkage of intelligence and education to rates of atheism. In *The God Delusion*, cited earlier, almost as if on cue he too cites a number of surveys purporting to show high rates of atheism among scientists (13). What's more, the data he cites seem to indicate that scientists with membership in elite professional organizations, presumably a proxy of high achievement and intelligence, report even higher rates of atheism. Furthermore, another report Dawkins cites shows that scientists in the life sciences such as Biology (like himself), Microbiology, Zoology, Anthropology and the like are even more likely to be atheists. Dawkins believes these scientists are more consistently atheists because they are more likely to have been "enlightened" by the power of Darwin's principle of natural selection. He maintains that physics and cosmology are awaiting their version of a Darwin to introduce a fundamental theory which, like Darwinism has done for the life sciences, will once and for all banish theistic thinking from the upper echelons of those fields as well. He is confident that it is just a matter of time.

It might just be me, but Dawkins seems to display a palpable reverence for the theory of evolution. Some of his terminology reflects the same. No wonder many critics of Dawkins' brand of militant atheism accuse him and his brethren of having discarded traditional monotheistic religion only to fervently embrace a newly minted religion, with Charles Darwin as the founding prophet, complete with all the attending dogma, apostles, and baggage. In this religion, evolution possesses all power and is the creator of all things. Some critics also argue that evolution is not susceptible to scrutiny in the same way that atheists claim theists

hold their God to be above and beyond scientific challenge.

But even reverence does not quite capture how this scientific theory has utterly enthralled Dr. Dawkins. Unabashedly gripped by the theory, he seems to see natural selection in action literally everywhere. Where some believers are accused of gratuitously seeing God everywhere and in everything, Dawkins enthusiastically claims to observe natural selection in virtually every natural system he encounters. He doesn't just see it within the zoological systems originally explored by Charles Darwin. He sees it at work in every other system as well and has written extensively on the subject. He has contributed to some of the literature which attempts to use natural selection to account for just about every behavior imaginable, including:

"...our bi-pedal gait, the tendency to laugh when amused, obesity, anorexia nervosa, business negotiations, the preference for tropical landscapes, political rhetoric, maternal love, infanticide, clan formation, marriage, divorce, certain comical sounds, funeral rites, the formation of regular verb forms, altruism, homosexuality, feminism, greed, romantic love, jealousy, warfare, monogamy, polygamy, adultery, the fact that men are pigs, recursion, sexual display, abstract art, and every form of religious belief" (50).

This list was compiled by Richard Dembski, Ph.D. in his book *The Design Revolution: Answering the Toughest Questions about Intelligent Design*. In his book Dembski argues both that Darwin's theory is insufficient to account for the diversity of life, and that it tends to be invoked more often than it should.

Dawkins sees natural selection and evolution in everything from the emergence and universality of religious thought to the development of the universe itself. That is, he suspects that our universe in particular is the product of a cosmic evolution. Ours is just one of many universes which were procreated and which are procreating. That's right. The most effective universes and those endowed with survival advantages ultimately reproduce others with those same traits.

To most of us, however, Dawkins' enthusiasm appears to have taken him a bit too far. Remember, this boundless optimism for a scientific theory comes from a man who routinely accuses believers of childlike gullibility and a remarkable eagerness to believe without adequate supporting evidence. Significantly, the scientific method typically demands the observability and repeatability of any proposed theory. Unfortunately, the eons required for evolution to yield meaningful change prevent scientists from observing or repeating it—with one small exception.

Much has been made of an attempt to do just that with thousands of generations of bacteria in a lab at Michigan State University. Dr. Richard Lenski and his colleagues have been monitoring the life cycles of several strains of bacteria since 1988. So far they have observed more than 60,000 generations of bacteria and carefully studied the results as they relate to natural selection and evolution. That is an average of one new generation about every four hours, making bacteria the best possible candidate for this kind of controlled observation. Lenski does report trends toward greater reproductive speed and efficiency; greater fecundity. So what bacteria seems to do best, reproduce, continues to improve. However, critics are quick to counter that no evidence of increased information is to be found in the resulting DNA. That is, 60,000 generations have served to improve viability of bacteria — something widely known about bacteria, including by moms everywhere, long before the experiment began. But they have not served to add information or features in a way which could conceivably lead toward a new life form (51).

In fact we might even say that what has been observed in this experiment is a life form becoming *more* of what it is, not less. That is, it seems that these bacteria have strengthened and amplified the features which make them bacteria! As I have confessed repeatedly, I am but a layman. But it seems to me that these results are quite the opposite of what Darwinists would have expected—some say what Darwinists would have hoped for. Yet somehow even these counterintuitive results are still presented as evidence *for* the sufficiency of evolution by natural selection. Incidentally, I am not opposed in any way to the possibility that speciation, meaning evolution by natural selection was and is the primary cause of the proliferation of species, is a valid principle. But it is clear to me that its proponents fail to subject speciation to the same scrutiny to which the subject theism in general and Intelligent Design in particular.

Without new features or new information, Lenski's experiment does not yield direct evidence of the class of evolution widely credited with producing global diversity of life. In short, both sides of the evolution debate claim validation. My point here is not that one side or the other is right. Instead my point is that professions of absolute commitment to believing only what science tells us, and nothing more, are not credible. Dawkins and his ilk attribute far more to natural selection and evolution than the scientific method can confirm. In fact, it is likely that of all that Dawkins "knows" and holds dear about evolution, only a tiny fraction has been or even can be validated by science.

Much of the rest ultimately amounts to aggressive extrapolation, speculation, wild speculation, and yes even faith in the theory.

Returning to natural selection among universes, we can expect that from Dawkins' vantage his views are perfectly reasonable and those of theists are utterly nonsensical. Fortunately he does admit that there is absolutely no evidence of natural selection among universes, nor even that there are universes other than our own. Regardless of those limitations, however, he confidently explains how this version of natural selection probably directed the formation of our universe. It is unfortunate that the uninitiated are bound to infer from his commentary that his claims can be supported. His prominence, accolades received, and his remarkable confidence certainly convey as much. We can assume that he is genuinely convinced that the principle of natural selection has accomplished so much in the biological realm that it must apply in all others. Here it's important to take note that Dawkins, along with many other materialists, finds it perfectly reasonable and rational to believe a proposition which by its nature cannot be ascertained through the scientific method. To him it is reasonable and rational to contemplate and even hold a view of a reality which cannot be observed, ever. This is a pivotal concession with an important application to the God Hypothesis as we will see in later pages.

At any rate, all this other-worldly talk makes perfect sense to Dawkins. Ironically it sometimes seems that Dawkins himself is a perfect example of the human predilection to find patterns everywhere, especially where they are none. We are reminded of Michael Shermer's theory, discussed earlier, that the human brain has evolved to identify far more false positives than false negatives. According to this theory we are inclined to find a pattern especially where none actually exists. Much like the claim that the greatest economists predicted 4 of the last 3 recessions, Dawkins arguably sees natural selection at work in all 4 of 3 systems.

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Abraham Maslow once said, "*I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail*" (52). This is sometimes known as the *law of the instrument*. Evidence of it can be found in virtually every discipline and occupation. I argue that this principle applies to Dr. Dawkins and many like him. No doubt, he is a respected authority in matters of

biology. It just might be that the methodology which served him so well in biology is less helpful in his consideration of existential questions. He appears to have resolved so many questions with one answer, whether it was justified or not, that it is now an inevitable part of his thinking. You might say that he is handicapped with a preferred go-to canned answer for everything. This is a case in which a measure of intelligence in one field of study is anything but helpful in others.

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In a debate with William Lane Craig, atheist philosopher Alex Rosenberg followed the atheist script and literally began his introductory statement by claiming that 95% of the 2,000 or so members of the National Academy of Science (NAS) identifies as atheist (53). This is a substantial overstatement, but the point remains. Shouldn't these statistics bother the thinking theist? Not necessarily.

So to summarize the atheist argument: Even if not technically evidence, the high rate of atheism in the scientific community bolsters the argument that God does not exist. The flaws inherent in this argument are best exposed through a brief examination of a parallel fact. An overwhelming majority of scriptural scholars agree that the Bible is the word of God and provides a reliable account of His dealings with humanity. These scholars know more about the Bible than anyone else on earth and presumably, like the atheist scientists, are highly intelligent. We could argue that Bible scholars are closest to the facts surrounding its origins and certainly are more familiar with its strengths and weaknesses than anyone else on earth. This is indisputable. Again, it should be equally compelling to argue that, while technically not evidence, the consensus of the best informed about the Bible is that it is, in fact, true.

The most obvious rebuttal to this claim is precisely analogous to the rebuttal to the atheist claims about the purported near consensus among scientists about God. First and foremost, there is an obvious selection bias at play. Those already inclined to value the scriptural view of the world are much more likely to be drawn to pursue further knowledge and even a career in Biblical studies. Moreover, those within the group, like any other specialty, will inevitably sort themselves by degrees of ability to excel using that specified methodology. The most intelligent will tend to settle toward the top of the heap. Thus we will find

those best equipped to excel using a particular discipline's methodology rise to the top of the heap. We should not be amazed that the highest performers will be even more inclined to trust that methodology.

Next, it comes as no surprise that an individual's expertise and profession will shape his view of the world. For example, having been trained in Economics, I can acknowledge my tendency to see and consider the world around me through Economic models. My surgeon brother acknowledges the same. My engineer brother and attorney brother both respectively confess the same tendency. The lenses through which we experience the world are unavoidably colored by our respective disciplines. The same must be acknowledged of human beings who make a living examining their piece of the material universe through exclusively materialistic methods. The scientist's inclination to view all things through the very same lens should come as no surprise to us.

At this point the alert atheist will beg my pardon. He will insist that the scientist's "piece" of the universe is intended to encompass everything, the cosmos. But this would be more than begging pardon; it would be begging the central question. Is the universe just one portion of "all things?" Often atheists begin by quoting the late popularizer of science Carl Sagan who declared that the cosmos is everything there ever was, is, and will be (54). Truth be told, Sagan merely made the claim—he didn't establish it through the scientific method or any other means.

Mind you, this declaration is merely descriptive, giving a name to the intended scope of science—at least the intended scope. As such, as really only a word, it has no power to prove or disprove anything. Yet materialist atheists wrapping themselves in the cloak of science to make their argument often attempt to use the arbitrary definition of cosmos to rule out the possibility of God. So they tend to begin with the conclusion firmly in mind. It is no wonder suggestions of concepts and things beyond their conception of the cosmos strike them as nonsense and not worth contemplation.

This materialistic confidence is misplaced. The claim cannot be scientifically verified. It is not falsifiable, an essential characteristic of any truly scientific proposition. Yet for some reason atheists are as convinced of the materialistic proposition as they are of any empirically established scientific fact. Hence the absolute commitment to comprehending all things exclusively

through the scientific lens.

In fact, we have often heard the atheist scientist marvel at how a theist colleague manages to leave his materialistic approach in the laboratory and somehow embrace a supernatural deity after-hours. Put less charitably, the atheist scientist sees his believing colleague discard the rationality of the laboratory for irrationality and fairy tales.

This criticism typically includes the words reason and rationality. The less diplomatic yet more apt term is materialism. How can Dr. Theist not employ the same reason (read materialism) he exercises during his day job after hours? This is an inadvertent confession that the atheist scientist is utterly incapable of doing the same. He cannot entertain thoughts of concepts not contained in his working *materialist* understanding of the universe. Reversing the translation, the atheist scientist confesses from the get-go that he is utterly unable or unwilling to consider the possibility of a reality beyond that which is accessible through the scientific method. He simply cannot fathom reality outside of what his instruments can read.

More important, the scientific method for better or worse by its very definition considers only naturalistic causes and effects. That is, only matter and energy of the variety heretofore experienced and known to us in our universe can be considered in this scientific worldview. But as we will see, this amounts to only a small fraction of what is to be found in the universe. Scientist and book reviewer Dr. Richard Lewontin famously declared that, with respect to protecting the scientific institution in general:

“Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism.

It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door” (55).”

We can safely assume that if Lewontin did not regret making this statement, many on his side at the forefront of the debate regret it for him. For the theist,

Lewontin's declaration captures most of what is wrong with the strictly materialistic pursuit of truth. We can't blame theists, including myself, for including it in every volume challenging atheism. It is a surprisingly frank confession or an acknowledgement of the intellectual blinders demanded by many in the movement. It gives the lie to the more absolute claims that representatives of science are impartial pursuers of truth no matter where it takes them. It would be more correct to say that they are impartial pursuers of truth no matter where it takes them, but only within the confines of materialism.

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Consider again Maslow's adage, "*if the only tool you have is a hammer, [you tend] to treat everything as if it were a nail.*" This principal describes a related human tendency to which scientists are not immune. In fact, due in part to the monumental success of science, scientists may be more susceptible to this tendency than most. In other words, although only a single tool like the hammer, their tool is particularly attractive because it works so very well.

To help explain this proposition let's look at something more familiar. I don't exercise as much as I should, but I do try to get to the gym a few times per week. On occasion I have observed a particular kind of gym enthusiast, a unique kind of weightlifter. Whether naturally blessed with them or having developed them through hours of hard work in the gym, or both, this guy has enormously muscular arms. And they seem to be his pride and joy! Sadly, his legs look scrawny. The truth is, I never seem to see him exercise those legs, just his arms. He seems drawn to exercising only his strengths. They are his only focus in the gym at the expense of every other muscle group. On some level this makes sense. Naturally he is gratified to focus on his strength, a feature which is superior to those around him. Conversely, he is uncomfortable venturing into an exercise which exposes his weakness. What's more, he has no interest in the work necessary to bring the rest of his body into proportion with his arms. His comfort and satisfaction with his 'hammer' compel him to ignore or even avoid anything that is not a nail. Equally important, we see that he is not interested in the health and the development of his body as a whole. It's not a leap to conclude that his achievement in one limited pursuit makes him less interested in a holistic regimen.

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The example above may admittedly reflect more superficial human inclinations. At the same time it does provide insight into how confidence, esteem and broader psychology directly shape our pursuits—no less the pursuit of knowledge. As human beings with these common tendencies, scientists, particularly those most accomplished and rewarded within their chosen expertise, quite naturally cling to it. After all, why venture outside of the very arena which has made them who they are? It is not hyper-cynical to recognize that practitioners of science, like everyone else, would be powerfully motivated to refuse to abandon the arena in which they are the best equipped. They would only stand to lose by even considering an activity in which they surrender the advantages they have worked a lifetime to develop. It only makes sense to stick with what works!

So it comes as no surprise when some of the most accomplished scientists dismiss the value of disciplines other than their own. So there is irony when they fail to recognize that they have wandered outside of their field. For example, professional philosophers have roundly criticized Richard Dawkins' opus *The God Delusion*; calling it horrible philosophy. Despite the view of the philosophical community the book is still a phenomenon, selling more than 2 million copies in English alone. Respected philosopher Alvin Plantinga opined that he would have given the work an F had one of his freshman students submitted it in his class. Having read the book myself along with reviews by others like Plantinga, I would say that *The God Delusion* is such bad philosophy that it doesn't even know it is a book of philosophy.

Even more celebrated scientists appear at least as unaware. World-famous physicist Steven Hawking co-wrote *The Grand Design* with colleague Leonard Mlodinow. Hawking of course wrote *A Brief History of Time* which gained notoriety as one of the best-selling, least-read books of all time because of its difficult content. But in his latest work he triggered wide-spread criticism for venturing far beyond where science, let alone his field of physics has standing. The criticism came both from within physics and from other disciplines. Their declaration in the Introduction that, "*Philosophy is dead*," added fuel to the fire (56). But Hawking and Mlodinow, like Dawkins, cannot have deduced or tested their claim in the laboratory. How would they have tested the notion that philosophy is dead?

Two additional quotes from Hawking's and Mlodinow's book warrant citation:

“Because there is such a law as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing.”

“Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist.”

Critics rightly chided the authors, reminding them that, among other things, laws do not create any more than numbers create. William Lane Craig joined the fray writing that the number seven doesn't create anything. We would be no less compelled by a literary expert attempting to convince us in the same way that, because the alphabet exists, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is bound to come into existence. As to their statement about spontaneous creation, we have equal justification to declare that their book exists because it exists. It would be an equally helpful statement. These two otherwise brilliant authors offer no support for their wildly illogical and completely unsupported assertions. *The Grand Design* is a tangible example of how woefully inadequate science alone is to our hopes of understanding our existence. After all, it is the product of two men who are said to be among the greatest minds of our day. It is also a disquieting example of the expert's tendency to attempt to pull the debate into his arena and to misapply his expertise.

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Imagine you are invited to be a contestant on game-show Jeopardy. Imagine further that you have made a career and reputation in providing answers to questions in your field. Naturally you have a certain area of expertise—but you also know that you are deficient in other areas of knowledge. Your opponents on the game-show come with different areas of expertise. They too have built lives around successfully providing answers to questions in their respective fields. Now imagine that all the contestants have the ability to influence the categories of questions to be presented in the game. We need only ask ourselves what would be the motivation of each of the contestants. It is abundantly clear that each would be inclined to direct the game or the debate toward his particular area of expertise.

Again, the atheist scientist will insist that his very first priority is to follow the facts using only reason and rationality. We can even acknowledge this point. No doubt their greatest and highest motivation will be the pursuit of truth. No matter how hard they try, however, it simply will not be the only motivation at work. This Jeopardy bias is part of human nature, including the nature of those

in pursuit of truth.

With these two parallels in mind, the arm guy and the game show contestant, I cannot help but think of intellectual authorities like Richard Dawkins a bit differently. Right or wrong I see him as a combination of the two. He seems to have highly developed intellectual “muscles” which unfortunately come at the expense of complimentary intellectual muscle. What’s more, he takes those one-dimensional muscles to the set of Jeopardy and battles to limit the questioning to only the narrow topics in which he excels. By asserting, for example, that “there are no legitimate why questions,” Dawkins effectively claims that there are no other worthy topics. “I’ll take zoology and other physical sciences, Alex. And by the way, there are no other categories.” Again, this behavior is perfectly understandable. But there is the risk of not recognizing it or minimizing its influence on the debate.

There is yet another tendency which can prevent the persistent pursuit of new concepts and truths. It can appear once a neophyte grasps one of his first applicable scientific concepts. Evidently it can affect even those with advanced knowledge as well. The non-continuous acquisition of grammar skills provides a helpful example of the phenomenon. I remember learning as a youngster that in certain circumstances it was better to say “you and I” than to say “me and you.” Prior to elementary school the latter expression seemed to have served me just fine. Then one day it clicked—better to say “you and I.” I wasn’t entirely certain what the rules were. So I decided to play it safe and use it in every instance. What I didn’t understand until a bit later was that ultimately both expressions were correct in certain situations. In fact, we were all taught that proper usage depended upon subjects and objects and sentence formation. This second lesson is not as quickly understood and adopted by everyone. Some continued and perhaps continue today to reflexively use the “you and I” at every opportunity because that first lesson stuck so well. So while in many circumstances the correct expression is “you and me” as in “Just between you and me,” many people can’t get themselves to use it. Admit it, you have heard people stick to the first lesson and say “just between you and I” because it just felt right to them. Better yet, it felt safe. There is also sometimes a kind of self-satisfaction that they resisted the second-grade impulse to say “you and me.” Not only do they misapply the rule, they even draw some degree of esteem from doing so.

Coincidentally, on the day after I wrote these words I happened to read about this concept, in fact, the very phrase we are discussing here. In his book,

The Sense of Style, author and expert Steven Pinker writes about why people make this common mistake. As an expert in the fields of language and linguistics, he provides a much more precise analysis. He uses as an example the Simon and Garfunkel song which goes in part, “*Me and Julio down by the schoolyard.*” Pinker explains:

“Moms and English teachers hear [this mistake] though. And they have drilled children to avoid it in favor of, ‘Julio and I were down by the schoolyard.’ Unfortunately, that leads to the opposite kind of error...the rationale for the correction never sinks in and people internalize a string-based rule. When you want to sound correct, say ‘So and so and I’ rather than me and so and so. That leads to an error called a ‘hyper-correction’ in which people use a nominative pronoun in an accusative coordination. ‘Give Al Gore and I a chance’ (57).”

Why this digression into a common mistake in English grammar in a book about God? This particular grammatical subject provides an analogy to potential mistakes made in the use of science and even valid scientific models, to understand the world. It seems that at times the greatest impediment to continual learning, as strange as it might appear, is the successful adoption of a prior lesson! People who regularly misuse the phrase above are unable to progress beyond the first lesson because of the gratification enjoyed when it was learned. Thus they also failed to grasp the limitations of one particular means of expression. So it can be with scientific learning or really any other kind of learning. We can hamper our capacity for continual learning by failing to grasp the limitations of what we do understand. We can be just as wrong when we attempt to apply perfectly valid scientific models indiscriminately as when we are misled by invalid scientific models. This risk sometimes goes unrecognized by those infatuated with an effective template.

Unfortunately we observe a similar short-circuiting in the theism vs. atheism debate. Heisenberg and Bacon, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter, were absolutely right. We often see people of faith completely derailed after their first encounter with what amount to simplistic interpretations of science. In these cases a little dabbling in popular science and science as presented alongside an unnecessarily atheistic orthodoxy sadly short-circuits theological understanding. Those who latch onto these atheistic interpretations do not progress. They rarely go on to appreciate the interdependence of science, philosophy, and faith in God.

Dr. Dawkins speaks of enjoying “*having my consciousness raised*” when he finally understood evolution and natural selection. He describes the experience as “*enlightenment*” (13). Further, he emphasizes the need for everyone to have his

consciousness raised by the power of natural selection. In fact, he has been a strong advocate of increased education on the subject. Dr. Dawkins' tendency to see natural selection seemingly everywhere becomes more understandable in light of this grammatical confusion. He's learned one lesson so well he cannot move beyond it. It appears to permeate all of his thinking. If a respected scientist like Dawkins can get carried away to a kind of ecstasy and patent over-application of a scientific theory, how much more likely will the lay people like me be at risk of doing the same? What do we risk missing by failing to remove the natural selection goggles through which Dawkins and the like encourage us to view our exploration? We can reasonably assume that the probability of such a misapplication is greater than zero.

Hawkins' ally Michael Shermer, atheist author and Editor of Skeptic Magazine, articulates the reasons why Dawkins is so keen to leap to the natural selection conclusion. Shermer describes the conditions in which our remote ancestors struggled to survive to illustrate the forces which shaped the evolution of humankind, "*Long long ago, in an environment far far away from the modern world, humans evolved to find meaningful causal patterns in nature to make sense of the world...*" (58). He continues:

"The problem is that we did not evolve a baloney-detection device in our brains to discriminate between true and false patterns. So we make two types of errors: a type I error, or false positive, is believing a pattern is real when it is not; a type II error, or false negative, is not believing a pattern is real when it is. If you believe that the rustle in the grass is a dangerous predator when it is just the wind (a type I error), you are more likely to survive than if you believe that the rustle in the grass is just the wind when it is a dangerous predator (a type II error). Because the cost of making a type I error is less than the cost of making a type II error and because there is no time for careful deliberation between patternicities in the split-second world of predator-prey interactions, natural selection would have favored those animals most likely to assume that all patterns are real" (59).

Shermer developed these theories, which he calls "Patternicity" and "Agenticity," as a materialistic explanation of the human tendency to infer unseen powers and ultimately to universally believe in a higher power. Again, his theory interprets these tendencies as a byproduct of a trait selected over generations as a means of self-defense. Better to err on the side of safety. Significantly, the theory cannot be demonstrated scientifically but it does make intuitive sense. It seems to make sense of why human beings tend to believe in God even when no god exists. Thus again, it presumes that no god does exist. Alternatively, it just may be that human beings universally tend to believe in a

higher power because a higher power does in fact exist and pre-loads his creations with that belief somewhat like software is loaded on your computer prior to shipment. The net of Shermer's claims is that people often see patterns or causes where they do not actually exist. Ironically this might very well be one explanation of Dawkins' perception of natural selection around every corner and in every otherwise unexplained phenomenon. If Shermer's theory has merit in the one case, it likely does in the other as well. And does Shermer's theory of the human tendency of false positive pattern attribution apply in any way to his attribution of his theory to theists? Maybe it applies in all three cases!

Having first identified the very real dynamics and tendencies above, we are now able to rephrase the atheists' argument about the smartest scientists. When we boil it all down we see that they are telling us that people who are not willing to consider non-materialistic concepts tend not to believe in a non-materialistic reality. This refined expression of the argument reveals its fundamental flaw. It amounts to confused circular reasoning, a tautology, which theists are typically accused of employing. In summary, when weighing in on the God question the experts in science are not telling us about the results of scientific deliberation or the product of the scientific method. Instead, they are telling us only about how they choose to frame their inquiries. Thus we cannot hope to use their expertise to help answer the God question.

Moreover, it's easy to impute unearned and undeserved expertise to someone based upon their notoriety in some other field. It's more than easy, it's natural. Advertisers play on that tendency by retaining athletes, actors, and other celebrities to sell us products—no matter the product, knowing that we consumers will invariably take the bait. It is in our nature. To some degree, atheists' appeals to the great intellects who also disbelieve are a method of exploiting our natural tendency to misattribute wisdom and knowledge. What's more, these appeals presume that the God Hypothesis is an entirely scientific proposition. That is, they erroneously base their argument on the notion that God's existence can be ascertained through the scientific method. Thus who better to consult than experts in science? Not unlike the basketball star selling us a car brand which happens to reward him well, we have biologists telling us that there is no reality but the physical—no reality beyond that in which they have expertise. On a related note, the guy with the metal detector spent all afternoon at the beach and reports that there is no plastic to be found there. After all, he has become an expert in his discipline. Even the most powerful conceptual models

lose their efficacy when imported onto a foreign soil.

The NBA star may be a fantastic basketball player, an all-star, but he may know quite a bit less about cars than you or me. What does this tell us about the best informed individuals in sciences like bio-chemistry, or microbiology, or astrophysics, or any other hard-science or discipline defined in exclusively materialistic terms? And do these experts of the physical world necessarily have more to tell us about the transcendent than the less educated, or even the non-educated? There is no reason to assume that they do. In fact, if what I have argued about the handicap of great specialized knowledge and accomplishment is true, and there are good reasons to think it is, these experts might occasionally have less to say precisely *because* of their expertise. Unfortunately, most of these forms of expertise are not portable. Worse yet, often the individual expert assumes that his expertise is.

Finally, physicist John Polkinghorne whom we met previously offers a more colorful criticism of those who either refuse or are unable to consider realities accessible outside of the *laboratory* (60). Polkinghorne compares limiting our pursuit of knowledge to use of the scientific method alone or materialism alone to opening and trusting only one of our two eyes. We are equipped with both for a reason. Furthermore, we know that to include the function of the second eye does more than just add the incremental vision of that eye. For example, depth perception is a capacity which is possible only with two eyes functioning and collaborating together. The benefit of these two organs operating together is far more than the sum of the benefits of the two operating independently.

Albert Einstein famously said that “*Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.*” Historians of science debate the context of his statement and what he really meant by it. There is no doubt that he did not believe in monotheistic religion. Debate continues on his conception of god with most agreeing that he did not believe in any form of personal theist god. Yet his statement about the necessity of complimentary forms of reasoning is still instructive. In fact, the statement either stands or falls on its own, independent of what even the greatest scientific mind of the 20th century really believed.

It’s worth noting here one of the struggles Einstein endured while formalizing his General Theory of Relativity. In brief, the only way he was able to complete the theory was to insert what is known as the Cosmological Constant. It amounted to a stop-gap measure of the unknown which he inserted

experts is less helpful than taking a step or two toward the sunset to get a better, bigger view of it!

I am keenly aware that much of this strikes the nonbeliever as desperate pleading. I know, because that is how it struck me as a nonbeliever. It's as if the believer is attempting to scratch out a tiny portion of reality in which God and the non-material could possibly exist. Without proper context the theist appears to beg for the plausibility of this tiny space to accommodate his beliefs. He implores the skeptics to acknowledge the possibility of a “somewhere” in which the objects of his faith just might exist—as if they are to be found within the “real world.” The timid and uninformed believer assumes his beliefs depend upon a subset of the material world—the material world which everyone accepts. In conventional dialogue it is the materialist’s world and the believer is sometimes permitted in a small corner of it.

But the truth is the other way around. It turns out that the material world is only a tiny portion of a much larger whole—a sliver of the grander reality. The scope of materialism is really just a tiny subset of reality. Science increasingly corroborates the vastness of realms yet unknown which theism has always contemplated. It is therefore more accurate to say that it is the theist’s world and the materialist atheist occupies just a small piece of it—largely because that is all he demands! Many theists do not realize that they are entitled to much greater confidence.

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Before I close this chapter let’s look at one final reason why the atheists’ appeal to what smart people think about God is not helpful to their cause. If as they imply, greater intelligence leads to the dismissal of the existence of God *and* we should therefore be inclined to defer to the smartest among us to any degree, we should expect to see this principal manifested even more vividly at the extreme end of the curve. That is, the few individuals found most intelligent of all should all be atheists. Quintessential genius Albert Einstein is not helpful on this score. He was neither an atheist nor a theist by today’s standards. Yet unsurprisingly conflicting quotes attributed to him on the subject have been used by both sides to claim the iconic mind as their own.

Author and philosopher Stephen Williams refers to another source for an indication of current genius opinion on the God question. Williams reports that

the five individuals who score the highest IQs today are no more helpful to the atheist thesis. He claims that four of the top five scores, approaching 200, belong to individuals who are not atheists. In fact, the individual with the highest reported IQ, Christopher Langan, is a theist (61). He believes in the theist God and in the reality of life after death. Thus the proposition that high intelligence generally yields an atheistic worldview which may be more reliable runs into a snag.

When asked his opinion on evolution and God he responded:

“I believe in the theory of evolution, but I believe as well in the allegorical truth of creation theory. In other words, I believe that evolution, including the principle of natural selection, is one of the tools used by God to create mankind..I believe that there is a level on which science and religious metaphor are mutually compatible” (62).

Should theists then make a similar appeal, that the smartest guy on the planet is a believer and that the smartest handful of people tend to be believers? No. For the reasons explored in this chapter, I am not particularly compelled by the theology of even these geniuses. I have no reason to believe they are any closer to the truth than those of average intelligence, by virtue of their own great intelligence. We have seen a number of reasons why great intelligence mustn't be mistaken for authority on the God Question. To be clear, the measure of 4-out-of-5 non-atheist geniuses serves only one purpose. It does not provide evidence in support of the God Hypothesis. As I argued in Chapter 3, the incremental brilliance they enjoy represents perhaps only a few grains of sand of knowledge—still an infinitesimal advance toward the planet-sized, or according to Popper the infinite, volume of what remains unknown. Similarly, a step or two toward the Sun still leave it 93 million miles from the viewer! No increased confidence is warranted. The one purpose served by the 80% is additional evidence that atheist presumptions about the significance of intelligence in the God debate are unfounded. In short, the reliability of atheism is not enhanced by majority consensus among intelligent people.

It is instructive to consider how atheist cynics respond to Langan's theism. The following was taken from a popular atheist blog whose regular theme is the intelligence of atheism:

However, [Langan] also claims that intelligent design and evolution are compatible ... really!! ... in that case, I can only conclude that he is perhaps not as smart as many folks consider him to be” (63)

This statement and the knee-jerk dismissal of Langan are revealing. It turns out that these cynics really believe that a person is intelligent because he is an atheist; not that a person is an atheist because he is intelligent. With this clarification in mind we can better recognize the defects in the atheists' boasts of intelligence within their ranks.

A brief survey of Nobel Prize winners also debunks the claim that brainy people are atheists. According to a 2005 report produced by Baruch A. Shalev, at least 85% of Nobel laureates over 100 years self-identified as believers. It will be much more difficult to argue that these people are not as intelligent and rational as we would expect.

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Science is one important means of acquiring knowledge. Meanwhile faith, theology, and philosophy, according to Dr. Polkinghorne, are also important means to other forms of knowledge and understanding our existence. Even with great expertise in the field of Particle Physics, he nevertheless recognized that his remarkable knowledge base did not equip him to draw sweeping conclusions about existential questions—let alone rule out possibilities. Instead, numerous avenues of pursuit together yield important and otherwise unobtainable conclusions.

Finally philosopher David Berlinski provides a much less charitable analysis of atheist scientific claims. But first, to identify him as simply a philosopher is an understatement. He is a modern-day polymath; Ph.D. in Philosophy from Princeton University, Molecular Biology research assistant at Columbia University, professor of English, professor of mathematics, professor of philosophy, research fellow at International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, author of numerous books on systems analysis, the history of differential topology, analytic philosophy, and the philosophy of mathematics, the history of mathematics—to name just a few of his interests. It's safe to say that Berlinski is no slouch. But equally interesting, he is an agnostic on the God question—it's not unreasonable to say that he really doesn't have a dog in this fight! Still he is far from impressed by atheist claims that science and intellectuals have done away with God. In his book *The Devil's Delusion* (the subtitle of which is quite direct; *Atheism and its Scientific Pretensions*), he writes:

"Has anyone provided a proof of God's inexistence? Not even close.

Has quantum cosmology explained the emergence of the universe or why it is here? Not even close.

Have the sciences explained why our universe seems to be fine-tuned to allow for the existence of life? Not even close.

Are physicists and biologists willing to believe in anything so long as it is not religious thought? Close enough.

Has rationalism in moral thought provided us with an understanding of what is good, what is right, and what is moral? Not close enough.

Has secularism in the terrible twentieth century been a force for good? Not even close to being close.

Is there a narrow and oppressive orthodoxy of thought and opinion within the sciences? Close enough.

Does anything in the sciences or in their philosophy justify the claim that religious belief is irrational? Not even ballpark.

Is scientific atheism a frivolous exercise in intellectual contempt? Dead on" (64).

CHAPTER SUMMARY – THINGS TO CONSIDER

The notion that most of the leading lights in science are atheist is profoundly misleading. For a variety of reasons we can reject the implication that these experts are somehow likely to be closer to the truth and that we would be wise to defer to their judgment. Expertise within a specific field is not portable, especially to broader questions of existence and purpose. In fact, due in part to the rule of the instrument and what I have called the Jeopardy bias, at times great expertise can be a stubborn obstacle to true understanding. As a result, we must carefully consider sources of authority and areas of expertise before assigning credibility to any principle or expert. Like the eyes and separate hemispheres of the brain, multiple sources of knowledge used in concert provide the best means of finding truth.

CHAPTER 8 - LIVING “AS IF”

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“Nature has never read the Declaration of Independence. It continues to make us unequal.”

—Will Durant, *Historian*

"We the Peoples of the United Nations, determined to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small..."

—United Nations Charter

THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK I refer to atheist thought and atheist arguments to examine where I believe they fail. On occasion I also concede a point or two. There are resilient atheist arguments of varying potency and there are common themes. But in reality there is no “atheist thought,” as a uniform and cohesive entity. Of course, atheist thinking and sentiment span a wide range, a broad spectrum. Atheism contains great diversity of thought. As in all important matters of thought, there are as many brands of atheist thought as there are individuals who consider themselves atheists.

It is common to hear talk within the debate of people who live and function “as if.” Many cynics claim, most often while attempting to argue that rates of belief in God are declining, that a large portion of the population lives as if no god does exist. No matter what survey respondents say, they neither attend church or synagogue nor refer to scripture. Nor do they make belief in God part of their lives in any meaningful way. In other words, we should focus on what they do, not what they say. Critics maintain that many respond to surveys about religious belief reflexively and give answers based upon how they used to think, how their families think, or even how they want to portray themselves. No doubt there is some inertia shaping disclosures of religious belief.

This might create significant errors in the conclusions reached by sociologists unless they take care to control for such tendencies. Or it might not.

I am not particularly concerned about precise percentages either way. But I am interested in the dynamic of claiming a particular basis of one's thinking and morality while at the same time living one's life in a way which seems to reflect wholly different ways of thinking. We will see in this chapter that nearly all atheists live a reverse form of the As If principle. They live as if they do believe in a higher power, a divine law-giver, while proclaiming disbelief. We need look no further than the near unanimity concerning the primacy of individual rights or human rights.

Theists maintain that humankind, along with the earth and all life, are divine creations. God created every life form. Human beings are unique, endowed with moral agency and the ability to contemplate God's existence along with their own. More important, as a member of the human family, each individual has intrinsic worth no matter her circumstances in the world. These are essential tenets of theism. As articulated most famously, all mankind is created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights. In short, the theist is equipped with a clear explanation for why all human beings must be valued and treated as equals. But how can this be so when clearly each individual is unique? The range of qualities important to us is remarkable. The range of intelligence alone illustrates vast differences in the function and abilities of human brains. Some are physically gifted while others suffer handicaps. Some are considered highly attractive while others not so much. Every characteristic of human beings provides a measure by which we are far from equal. So then why do we kid ourselves?

For the theist the explanation is simple. An individual's physical and intellectual features, along with every other feature, only represent her circumstances in this human incarnation. They do not define her in any meaningful way. The theist typically believes that, as a divine creation, the individual is infinitely more than her worldly manifestation. One theist has written in fact that we can no more measure an individual's worth than we can measure the breadth of the universe. Consequently, the theist can say with a straight face that every human being should be treated with equal dignity and that none is ever truly above another. His rationale is clear, it is certain, and it is coherent.

Then there are atheist proponents of equal dignity and rights. Christopher Hitchens presumably spoke for many when he said, "*human rights exist, whether religion recognizes them or not*" (65). He did not support that assertion

with an explanation. He likely felt no need to do so. In fact, atheists, to their credit, are often some of the most passionate and vociferous advocates for equal human rights around the world. They have been major contributors to important socio-political victories to improve the lives of many people. Less compelling are some of the trite proclamations like that of Richard Dawkins when he wrote that “...*I dislike unfairness...*” (13). That said, I have no doubt that the broader passion for human rights and equality among atheists, Dawkins included, is authentic. Instead I wonder what precisely the basis for this passion is. Better yet, I wonder how they presume to account for it. One thing is quite clear—it cannot be derived from a strictly atheist/materialist methodology.

Atheist materialism holds by definition that an individual is absolutely defined by his physical being. That is, each of us is no more than the sum, or at most the product of our constituent parts. More specifically, I am no more than the atoms, molecules, cells, organs, and physiological systems that make up my body. I am in the strictest sense no more than my body. It turns out that I am far less intelligent than some, far less kind, far less devoted, far less strong, far less generous, and far less by countless other measures. At the extremes, consider a prematurely born handicapped infant in an impoverished third-world nation with zero prospects. Then consider a senior scientist, or wealthy philanthropist, or pioneering surgeon, or world leader. Individuals vary both in the quality of their physical traits and in the actual contribution they make to the world. How then can an atheist argue that these two individuals are truly of equal worth, particularly for example, when one is characterized by universally undesirable physical traits and contributes little to nothing to society while the other possesses highly desirable traits and over the course of his life contributes in extraordinary ways? The earnest atheist will insist vehemently that indeed these two individuals are of equal value and entitled to perfectly equal rights. He simply cannot make the argument without overt appeals to emotion and sentiment—appeals which are strictly excluded from basic materialist philosophy. In reality there is no rational, materialist argument to support the claim that these two individuals should be valued as equals.

We heard from Christopher Hitchens that, in effect, human rights exist as a matter of brute fact. But his claim stands as an incoherent and fundamental departure from materialist reasoning on every other front. Materialists generally cringe upon mention of Social Darwinism, or the notion that the systems and processes which over eons produced modern humans can and should continue to

work their magic, picking winners and losers in society. But the principle is perfectly consistent with materialism. Somehow, they object to the very process which produced all life as we observe it today. Do they object to results of natural selection in the design of the digestive system, sexual reproduction, or any other biological function? Would they consider interrupting the carnivorous food chain to achieve greater peace and fairness?

As we strain to see the world through an exclusively materialistic lens we can no more protest social hierarchy and the attendant inequities, no matter how stark, than we can object to possessing two hands and two feet. Both features are merely brute facts, neither good or bad, nor right or wrong. We will hear more on the cold hard facts of evolution from Richard Dawkins below. We could even argue that as materialists, they should honor and accept the systems which gave them life in the first place. If we are to understand the logical fallacy of special pleading as the interference of emotion and desire with reason, there can be no better example than the materialist demand for universal human rights. Their demand ultimately derives from pure emotion, nothing more. A recent article penned by Physician Dennis Garvin echoed this confusion among Darwinists:

“Darwin renders foolish all your pretensions. Celebrate diversity? Why in the hell should we? Our diversity is no more valid than the diversity obtained by throwing mudballs against a wall. Establish a government which cares for the ill and the incapable? Rank stupidity. Darwin’s survival of the fittest would make short work of, say Diabetes, if we only let everyone who has the condition die as a result of it.

This makes Darwinist sense. Why waste money on poor contributors to the gene pool? Everyone is beautiful and special in their own way? There is no Darwinist support for such a vacuous and unempirical conclusion; quite the contrary.”

Darwin, however, can only permit a special status to humans if applied with a robust dose of denial” (66).

We see another clear manifestation of the chasm within materialism between its philosophical framework and its social objectives in debates about obligations to future generations. Two ever-pressing issues among many are the human impact on the global environment and the financial burdens governments will carry into the future. In the first case activists trumpet the importance of preserving nature and natural resources for future generations. In the latter case, those suing for balanced budgets naturally warn against stealing from generations yet unborn. To borrow and spend today what we expect tax-payers of tomorrow to pay off is to steal. Both causes are defined by a presupposed moral obligation owed by the living to future generations. Advocates need only

assert this moral duty and never feel the need to explain or justify it. They truly have no rebuttal to the counterclaim, generally made in jest, “What have future generations ever done for me?” Materialists do not have to genuinely understand exactly why essentially all psychologically healthy people innately recognize their moral responsibility toward all other people, including those they will never know. Like Hitchens, they enjoy this universal commitment as a brute fact and the basis of their social movements.

At this point some readers, misinterpreting the argument of the previous paragraph, will challenge my assumptions. They will insist that the non-believer is every bit as altruistic and moral as the believer. This is typically an attempted rebuttal to theist claims that morality comes from God. But as we will see later on, this is not the point. In fact, we can readily accept their claim. It is not in any way inconsistent with our challenge to the basis of their demands for equality. Our claim instead has to do with the rationale which motivates them, not the degree of their fealty to it. As I argued in Chapter 5, belief in God is not the cause or source of morality. Yes, atheists can be and often are every bit as moral as theists.

This cold, unsentimental, and brutally honest article authored by Dr. Garvin reminds us of the broader problem of the foundations of human morality. Put plainly, the absence of absolutes leaves us to wonder how to define morality in the first place. Richard Dawkins informs us that even the impulses we hold most noble; empathy, charity, and kindness, are all simply vestiges of advantageous traits and tendencies which were incorporated into the human animal through natural selection. He informs us that:

“We can no more help ourselves feeling pity when we see a weeping unfortunate than we can help ourselves feeling lust. Such feelings of pity are misfirings, Darwinian mistakes, blessed precious mistakes” (67).

Blessed, precious mistakes? Why not damnable, tragic mistakes? Materialism provides us but one reason why Dawkins can say why selflessness is blessed and precious; Dawkins’ preference. For no materialistic or scientific reason whatsoever, he prefers selflessness to selfishness. When another materialist atheist declares the superiority of selflessness, he can provide only one new yet equally arbitrary reason; his preference. And so it goes.

Thus we have no basis for deeming these characteristics superior to any other effective or useful characteristic. There are no virtues or vices. There are only traits and actions which provide advantage to us and those close to us, and

there are those which do not. Yet as we have seen, the most adamant materialist demands equality for all.

As a committed materialist, Dawkins cannot logically accept that in the end there is such a thing as altruism—at least altruism as we generally understand it. Altruism is typically used to describe genuine concern and/or action taken exclusively to benefit others. Thus by definition actions taken even with the most remote expectation of benefit to one’s self cannot be called altruistic. In the capacity of evolutionary biologist, Dawkins has an explanation of how humans came to behave in ways which at first glance appear to be altruistic. He writes that there are four reasons why an individual might take action to benefit others (13). They are:

1. *The natural liking for kin.*
2. *The expectation that if you do good to others, they may do good to you.*
3. *Gaining a reputation for generosity.*
4. *Establishing social dominance.*

Right away we recognize what all of Dawkins’ four reasons have in common. Each is an element of unmistakably non-altruistic behavior. So in his effort’s to provide an evolutionary explanation of the very real and ubiquitous phenomenon of altruism, Dawkins manages only to describe self-interest. Frankly, we had no need of an exposition of the origins and purpose self-interested behavior. No riddle has been solved and no argument advanced. Moreover, his justification that somehow true altruism today represents only “misfirings” of what anciently was an advantageous behavior does not bridge the gap. It fails because there is far more than a gap to be bridged. There remains a cavernous divide between two polar opposites. The notion of an evolutionary misfire is far from an adequate explanation of an enormously powerful and fundamentally unique human trait.

Despite the patent incongruity of their thinking on the subject, I have no doubt that materialist atheists who argue for equality genuinely believe in their cause, as much as do theists. Yet unlike believers, they cannot make a coherent argument for it from their core philosophy. Significantly, their position would undoubtedly shrivel before the same scrutiny to which they typically subject theism. It is irrefutable that their thinking must be imbued with some transcending non-material valuation for them to embrace equality. Claims that

all of us as human beings are equal necessarily rely upon a non-materialistic standard. Put succinctly, the atheist is in the untenable position of arguing for equality of patently unequal persons using exclusively non-materialist rhetoric. Human beings are incontrovertibly unequal as measured by all of the metrics available within materialism. Consequently, they are forced to step out of the materialist paradigm and borrow from others. Their most ardent conclusions are in direct conflict with their most basic tenets. Their position on equality, while noble from the theist's perspective, absolutely does not follow from their materialist framework. It most certainly is not consistent with the strict constraints to reason they otherwise advocate.

Again, for entirely non-material reasons, they can and do cherish the principle of equality among human beings. In this profoundly important way the atheist lives "as if." While maintaining that human beings are most definitely nothing more than their physical bodies, atheists live and often militate as though human beings are far more. While maintaining that humanity is not the creation of a Creator but only the product of random natural forces, they behave as if all life was indeed created by a Creator and literally endowed with value beyond that which is captured by physical form. Even more, atheists argue that the individual cannot hope for anything beyond her material existence, while simultaneously attributing to her vastly more significance than can reasonably be derived from her physical nature.

To be sure, at one level some people who claim to believe in God do indeed live "as if" they don't believe. Their daily routine and lifestyle does not appear to be influenced by theism. They may only profess belief because they came from a tradition of belief or may have believed in their youth or some other reason—but have not seriously studied the question. But these can only constitute some portion of the God-professing population. Whatever the percentage, it is smaller than the percentage of atheists who function "as if" God does exist. All atheists who have adopted the modern principle of human equality behave as if they believe that everyone was in fact created by a Creator. They live "as if" God exists. Yet few recognize it.

CHAPTER SUMMARY – THINGS TO CONSIDER

No matter how vehemently they object, a core impression that all human

beings were created by God directly shapes the views and behavior of all psychologically healthy people. This impression is most clearly manifested in the genuinely passionate conviction that everyone is innately entitled to equal human rights and dignity. It is most striking in avowed materialist atheists whose core philosophy would dictate precisely the opposite. Some cynics argue that many who claim to believe in God in reality live “as if” there is no God—they are practical atheists. Because of the universally accepted notion that all are equal, it is much more accurate to say that nearly all people live as if there is a God. They live as practical theists.

CHAPTER 9 - PROJECTION AND PERSONIFICATION

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“We each project to others a reflection of the world which includes our choices of perception.”

—Bryant McGill, *Author*

WHEN MY SON WAS 4 he just was learning to pray. I’ll never forget one of the sincere requests he made in prayer. He said, “Dear God, Bless Heavenly Father and Jesus that...(pause)...they will be nice to each other...(pause)...and won’t fight.” In his innocence he quite naturally assumed that others would need the same kind of help he needed. Like him, even the Creator needed help of a practical nature. After all, he struggled mightily to be nice and not to fight with his siblings and friends. So who wouldn’t need a little help on that front?

I can’t help but think of my son’s sincere prayer based upon his understanding of God when I consider some arguments made by atheists. Put succinctly, a major flaw in their reasoning is the degree to which they ascribe human attributes and limitations to God. For example, if time is a fundamental limitation for us, then it must be the same for God. If space, raw materials, and efficiency are critical considerations of every human endeavor, then certainly any proposed god must be similarly mindful of the same. So to the cynic, with this conception of God in mind, any successful argument for God’s existence must fully explain how He deals with these troubling constraints.

Richard Carrier is particularly concerned with Christian apologetics’ inability to produce adequate explanations for him. He is convinced that any standard of goodness which we apply to ourselves, for example, must also apply to God. He is strangely unconcerned, or perhaps unaware, of the folly of imputing obligations and restrictions to an entity defined by omnipotence, omniscience, and infinite goodness. Moreover, he appears confident enough in his understanding of the universe to draw absolute conclusions about God’s

performance against the standards Carrier himself proposes. The audacity of this kind of analysis is striking but often a feature of atheist criticism.

Let's imagine someone who has never before seen a chess board and has no understanding of the game who nonetheless presumes to judge the merits or the prospects of a game in progress. Further, if he were fortunate enough to have a view of most of the board and most of the pieces (which is vastly more than we can say of our comprehension of the universe) he might reasonably infer a purpose or an objective of the game. The odds are he would be wildly mistaken. For example, based upon his limited vantage he might reasonably infer that the purpose of the game is to get as many pieces as possible to the other side of the board—nothing more. With this restricted view and the perceived purpose it engendered, he would be disappointed to see pieces move backward or to be lost and removed from the board altogether. More specifically, with this take on the game he would be disappointed to see his preferred pieces failing to reach the other side even if the game were progressing toward a successful conclusion. Now multiply the number of chess pieces, squares on the board, and game strategies as proxies for the complexities of the universe with all its moving parts, by some fantastically gigantic number and we may get a small glimpse into the expanse which Carrier and his ilk presume to judge...”conclusively.” All of this is based upon the relatively miniscule amount of information in their grasp. We can be forgiven for noting the audacity of such claims. And again these unwarranted conclusions are drawn and published by those who castigate the theist for holding beliefs with inadequate support.

Of course, Carrier is not alone in giving God failing grades against his own contrived standards of performance. Other prominent atheists are equally prone to indict God for failure to meet certain expectations—expectations they typically make very little effort to support. It appears that they feel no need to justify these expectations, as though they are givens. One of the various reasons the late Christopher Hitchens gave for his disbelief was God's patent failure to endow mankind with better bodies—higher performance bodies. In contrast to what many see as the astounding complexity of human sight, specifically the eye itself, Hitchens was in fact underwhelmed. Concluding a critique of what he understood of the human eye, Hitchens grumbled:

“A creative deity, of course, would have been more likely to double the complement of the optics in the first place, which would have left us nothing to wonder about, or to discover” (11).

Of course? I would venture to say that had the complement of optics been doubled as he suggested, Hitchens would have been no less unimpressed. We get the feeling that there really is no degree of bodily optimization which would satisfy Hitchens and the like. So long as there are imperfections in the body there will be criticism and speculation that God would not have been the designer. Let's consider the alternatives.

At bottom, we are left with only two possible types of creation: perfect and imperfect. There is of course no middle ground. Thus there is no point to debating the infinite degrees of imperfection across innumerable evident in the human body. The performance of the eye is no more or less significant than all the other countless anatomical and physiological imperfections. Again, the only relevant question boils down to: would a perfect God create imperfect beings? You may have seen video of a dog or cat energetically jumping and clawing at wherever its owner directs a red laser pointer. While directed only by the holder of the laser pointer, usually both the pet and the owner seem to enjoy the exercise. Atheists would have defenders of the God Hypothesis running madly to every less-than-perfect human feature to defend its degree of performance. But if the believer is genuinely interested in true understanding and not the thrill of the debate, she would be wise not to take the bait. In the end every one of the examples of imperfect design or function alleged by atheists is, in itself, entirely unimportant unless and until they demonstrate that the theist God would not or could not tolerate any imperfection in general.

For our purposes here let's just take Hitchens at his word. Let's set aside the cynicism which presumes that he would never be satisfied with incrementally improved design and performance. It's clear that, like Carrier and so many non-believers, Hitchens assembled quite a list of particular expectations of God—at least any god worthy of belief. Each item seems to represent a particular frustration they experienced—a grievance. Apparently, to some it goes without saying that if God existed he would have only created perfect eyesight, and presumably perfect bodies. But that expectation is ponderously more than just a peripheral notion. And as usual, he who makes the demand appears to have absolutely no appreciation for what it would entail. Consider it. The only way to a perfect body, in the end, is a perfect environment, which would demand a perfect planet, and so on. This is sometimes called a Platonic Heaven. Once again we find that the atheist is demanding much more than he understands. Equally troubling is Hitchens' assertion that if God existed he would, "*have left*

us nothing to wonder about, or to discover.” If he meant what he wrote, and we have every reason to believe he did, he placed no value on the wonder and the discovery made possible only in a world of texture—an imperfect world.

What is most interesting about the atheist’s tendency to personify God is a second irony. Believers are often accused of creating a god in their own image. We have seen evidence, however, of non-believers fabricating a god in their own image, in the image of a man. They do so both unwittingly and wittingly; that is, with an objective. As we have seen in Dr. Carrier’s work, some do so for the purpose of fashioning a straw god which they can easily dismantle. Again, ultimately their exertions tell us nothing of God but a great deal about themselves—about how they envision the God they don’t believe in. Incidentally, having read his work and thereby understanding his conception of deity, we can understand why he is not a believer. In fact, we can grant that it is rational of him *not* to believe. The only alternative I can fathom is that he intentionally distorts the actual image of God held by theists. Unfortunately Dr. Carrier either does not understand the fundamental characteristics attributed to God by believers, or he does understand but elects to misrepresent the same to make his points. In either case, we would be wise to stand alert to his and other similarly confused methodologies.

CHAPTER SUMMARY – THINGS TO CONSIDER

Almost without exception what atheist critics cite as examples of God failing to perform in ways they predict can be traced to the atheists’ misapprehension of the nature of the theist God. That is, they presuppose certain divine objectives, limitations, and constraints against which they attempt to judge the real features of life and the universe. Strangely they presume to appreciate the nature of an infinite being in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Thus unsurprisingly their expectations of God are never met. They can’t be. We can concede that the god imagined by these critics does not exist.

CHAPTER 10 - THE WILL TO LIVE

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“A lot of what is most beautiful about the world arises from struggle.”

—Malcolm Gladwell, *Journalist/Author*

“The weak die out and the strong will survive, and will live on forever.”

—Anne Frank

CHARLES DARWIN IS RIGHTLY CREDITED with revolutionizing our understanding of the emergence of the immense diversity of life on earth. While there were others before him who came remarkably close to many of the same conclusions, Darwin combined original, extensive research and observation with clear composition in a way that couldn't be ignored. What's more his work dramatically advanced the layman's understanding of the natural world. Prior to his work and release of *On the Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection in 1859*, the prevailing understanding was that God created each life form in its current state from the get-go.

Darwin's Theory of Evolution is the foundation upon which modern biology, zoology, and the other natural sciences are built (68). The understanding now is that the immense variety of life forms is the product of countless episodes of reproduction. Each reproductive event literally provided an opportunity for an alteration to occur, a mutation—mutations which were essential to any possibility of change to any species. Moreover, Darwin's theory holds that none of these alterations was planned or directed by any intelligent force. Rather, they simply resulted from essentially random variations in organism characteristics and system function. In most cases, the mutation, ended up in the dustbin of biological history. It left no trace. And as Darwin himself cautioned, *“Unless profitable variations do occur, natural selection can do nothing”* (69). Thus the assumption that “profitable variations” occurred in sufficient numbers is essential to his theory's explanatory power. It is interesting to note therefore that every feature in every organism we observe today originated quite modestly as a

random profitable variation—a mistake! Of course this is true only *if* the theory does indeed account for all life and that there was no intelligent agent directing any stage of the enterprise.

Despite Darwin's express expectations of his theory, the fossil record still stubbornly refuses to surrender any tangible evidence of these transitional structures. In any case, every once in a while a mutation appeared which entirely by chance provided some adaptive survival benefit to that species. The offspring whose characteristics aided the flourishing of the species tended to successfully reproduce more viable offspring—offspring better equipped to survive in the immediate environment. In other words, the mutations which conferred advantages to the species were “naturally selected” and incorporated into its fundamental anatomy. Over the eons these mutations multiplied, accumulated, and yielded abundant variety and produced the great diversity of life we observe on earth today. Note that the best estimates put the ratio of non-productive to productive mutations at around one million to one. That is, there are approximately 1,000,000 unhelpful or dead-end mutations for every single helpful or productive mutation. No wonder so much time is necessary for random variation and natural selection to produce results and significantly alter an organism.

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Despite using words like “selection” Darwin's theory proposes that no supervising intelligence played a part in this multi-billion-year enterprise. None was necessary. The selection at play was dictated by the system and the ecological settings in which they occurred. Random variations, necessity, advantage, and astronomically countless acts of reproduction created all forms of life on the planet today. “Selection” is not the only word used which tends to create confusion. Perhaps even more misleading is the Origin in the title *Origin of Species*. In stark contrast to what we would reasonably conclude from the title, Darwin acknowledges that his theories presume certain things for which he had no explanation. Most significant, he makes no attempt to propose any theory of the origin of life itself. He accepted the existence of the first form of life as a brute fact. It just happened—obviously. He recognized that a true understanding of the ultimate origin was far beyond his grasp and that of his contemporaries. No doubt he would have anticipated that by our time, more than a century and a half later, greater progress toward that understanding would have been achieved.

To his credit, Darwin articulated clear parameters to the scope of his theory. Even so it changed the way we look at the biological world.

Incidentally, proponents of Intelligent Design (ID), the proposition that at least some elements of complexity and diversity required the direction of intelligence or a designer, argue that the theory of evolution is riddled with defects. They cite the paucity of the fossil record, particularly of transitional forms—the versions of life we would expect to form the links between the more established forms, as a major deficiency in the theory. In fact, they remind us that Darwin himself explained that these fossils should and would be found if his theory was to hold up to scrutiny. He wrote that tangible evidence of his theory would appear in the form of transitional structures he was certain would be found in time (69). Moreover, ID proponents also insist that a number of organs and other features found in life forms today do not appear to have been developed through gradual discrete mutations as demanded by the theory. Instead they claim that some could only have been formed through wholesale and simultaneous changes to the organism.

Biologist and Professor Michael Behe is widely known for his research which he argues shows that certain features in organisms could not have developed gradually as required by natural selection (70). In summary, Intelligent Design advocates maintain that Darwin's Theory of Evolution alone does not and cannot account for all the complexity and diversity of life. All of this Intelligent Design analysis is a direct violation of the instruction given to most students of introductory biology not to mistake the appearance of design in life forms for actual design itself. Lest we forget, we mustn't mistake the wheel-like object for an actual wheel quite simply because there were no wheels. The veracity of Intelligent Design and the sufficiency of the Theory of Evolution are important issues but they are not part of my arguments for God. God exists or does not exist independent of how modern life forms came into existence.

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At a more fundamental level the concept of life itself continues to befuddle us. The definition of life, for example, is still not fixed as all efforts to do so have missed the mark. Each definition proposed seems to miss some key feature or limitation. According to one report, new definitions are proposed in academia and the scientific community at the rate of more than 50 each year. Key

characteristics are included in each. For example, we know living things reproduce so reproduction is cited as a condition. But what then do we make of the mule and other indisputably living creatures which cannot procreate? Even while all of us have an unmistakable sense of what life is, a technical definition is still elusive. According to author Addy Pross:

“So we have here an intriguing phenomenon— biologists, the scientists who devote themselves to the study of living systems, and who possess a deep appreciation of life’s complexity, having successfully probed many of its key components, remain mystified by what life is, and physicists, with their deep understanding of nature’s most fundamental laws, are no less confused. Both continue to struggle with the nature of life question and we can only conclude that the 3,000-year ‘what is life riddle,’ remains that—a riddle” (71).

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I am a big fan of the author Bill Bryson. His writing spans an eclectic mix of subjects but always manages to make even the mundane interesting and to make the mind-boggling accessible. One of his bestselling titles is *A Short History of Nearly Everything*. It is an amazing work of nonfiction which Bryson himself describes as the story of “...how we went from there being nothing at all to there being something, and then how a little of that something turned into us” (72). Although not a scientist himself, Bryson has a charming knack for making the complex explicable and for making it all make sense to the layman—me, in particular. In fact, he confesses to once hating science until determining to become an ardent student. What impressed me most in his “*Short History*,” and I have read many of his other books, was how he articulated the baffling improbability of life itself, let alone intelligent life, human life.

Bryson correctly explains that while countless atoms make up the entire human body, obviously if you had a set of itsy-bitsy atom tweezers and plucked away from yourself one particular atom, no matter the element, it would be no more alive than a grain of sand. Instead all these atoms form the environment or the vehicle in which life can be. Guiding us from the atomic level, to the molecular, to the cellular, and so on, he reminds us of the remarkable complexity of even the most simple protein.

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Dr. Francis Collins is a world-class authority on the language of life. In *The Language of God*, the geneticist who headed the Human Genome Project

provides an accessible account of the most complex information system known (73). To create even the simplest form of life, over 1,000 specific amino acids must be assembled in a particular way. Scientists remain amazed, given random activity as the driver, by the effective impossibility of amino acids assembling themselves in such an opportune way. Moreover, he explains the vital role of DNA to all life. DNA seems to exist for the purpose of replicating itself, which it cannot do. Enter RNA. RNA exists only to replicate DNA and to do nothing else. We are left to wonder how these two critical components of life originated, independently but simultaneously, through random mutations and natural selection. A wonder it is.

Again we confront the question of abiogenesis, the instant at which inanimate particles assembled in a way to create the first life form. The notion that even the simplest cell managed to self-assemble by random chance is plainly preposterous. So the challenges to the materialist account of life's origins are more than substantial. Michael Denton explains:

“The complexity of the simplest known type of cell is so great that it is impossible to accept that such an object could have been thrown together suddenly by some kind of freakish, vastly improbable, event. Such an occurrence would be indistinguishable from a miracle” (74).

It is important not to be misled by some of the dismissive claims made by materialists here. You will sometimes hear them all but deride expressions of wonder at the complexity or the “miracle” of life. Some seem to be saying that science is close to figuring it all out—just a little more time and we'll be there. Dawkins has admitted that the life sciences don't quite yet understand how the first life originated. By “quite yet” he really means that they have absolutely no idea whatsoever. Physicist Paul Charles William Davies admits:

“Many investigators feel uneasy stating in public that the origin of life is a mystery, even though behind closed doors they admit they are baffled” (75).

This total loss for an explanation has motivated some to offer theories like Transpermia, the planting of the first life on earth from some other source in the universe. Even if we did grant that life came from an extraterrestrial source we would still face the original question discussed previously: how did atoms and molecules which were one moment dead transform the next moment into a living system—the very first life?

Some of us have seen demonstrations in a science classroom in which the instructor displays precise amounts of the primary six elements which make up 99% of the human body. Here some oxygen, there some carbon, and so on. I was 13 years old when I saw the presentation at my middle school. I probably wasn't alone in my sense that there had to be a way to form life if we could have only added the last few trace elements and given the whole concoction a rigorous shake—and maybe a jolt of electricity. Somehow an individual organism could have crawled off the table. Obviously there is a ponderously vast gap between the collection of abundant materials on display in my classroom and those contained within a living, breathing, thinking human being. Unfortunately, however, science thus far can explain only a small portion of that difference. The rest of the gap is filled by our imaginations, speculation, and wild speculation. We are left to wonder what animates otherwise inanimate matter. It turns out that our most current biological knowledge is virtually as far removed from a satisfactory answer to the life question as I would have offered as a 13-year-old.

This lack of understanding has not dissuaded atheist activists from claiming that science has all but figured it out. Especially misleading was Carrier's summary of biomechanics in a lecture he gave to an atheist organization. He explained that scientists do understand how life came together from non-life—abiogenesis. To paraphrase him, you just put amino acids together under the proper conditions and life is bound to emerge. Apparently, it's just as I thought as a kid. Listening to Carrier you wouldn't be crazy to conclude that scientists are close to creating original life in a lab somewhere—maybe later this year—stay tuned. This couldn't be further from the truth. But the truth is that, under the proper conditions, life scientists who are closest to cutting edge research will acknowledge that even a partial understanding of abiogenesis is nowhere in sight.

Let's consider life's desperation to be or as Darwin put it, the struggle to survive. When reading nearly any account of the origination and the propagation of life I am always struck by commentary on the will to live or the will to be. This applies not only to sentient beings but also to all lesser forms and their components and subcomponents. And this is where it gets interesting. It's not difficult to understand the stunningly complex brain of an animal, including homo-sapiens, initiating a will to live which infuses the creature with that same will. Or at least we think we understand it. After all, the brain is the source of all our wants and wills as well as our aversions. So how do we account for evidence

of a will of any kind by the components and the subcomponents of living organisms? At one end of the spectrum we have the complete sentient organism, fully equipped with a brain and attendant consciousness. At the other end is the single atom of carbon pulled from the body by tweezers as imagined by Bryson earlier. Between these two extremes is the range of constituent parts of life. At what point along this spectrum does the will to survive and to propagate present itself?

Bryson uses expressions like “life just wants to be” and even a unicellular organism will “bear any cost and endure any pain just to survive.” Admittedly these are expressions of a layman—a layman endeavoring to accurately capture and convey the language of the experts in the field. Yet this would appear to fundamentally contradict the spirit of the declarations of the materialist life scientist who, for example, warns us not to mistake the appearance of design for design itself. Moreover, materialism holds unequivocally that there is no such thing as unembodied mind—the mind and consciousness are products of highly complex electrochemical activity. It is only after billions of neurons forming trillions of connections that anything like human volition can emerge. In short, it is the brain’s exquisite complexity that makes it all possible. How then can materialism account for the intentionality of the microscopic constituents of biology?

Again, materialism holds that the mind is exclusively the product of complex interactions of billions of neurons forming trillions of connections—not some inexplicable essence from an intangible plane, conjoined to and couched within the brain. Thus on the one hand, the only source of intentionality or will is an immensely intricate network of cells. Yet somehow there are manifestations of a will to live and multiply within single-celled organisms and even their constituent parts. How can this be?

We would expect the same scientist to warn us against attributing things like will and desire to simple units of life which, by any traditional measures, clearly do not possess intelligence. Certainly something without the complexity of the brain activity described above cannot exhibit traits which we know to originate only in the brain. We find that, perhaps even against his own better judgment, Darwin himself uses phrases like “the struggle to survive” when describing the actions of brainless and vastly less complex forms of life. It just may be that these expressions are the most apt available to us. All this leads me to a fundamental question about life.

Why does life want to live? More precisely, why does life in all its forms demand to exist? Like Bryson and Darwin and so many in between expressed it, why do even the simplest forms want to be, endure any cost, and struggle for existence? Although these questions don't seem to be asked as often as they deserve, I found some repeated but entirely unsatisfactory answers on a number of internet science fora and articulated by experts in the field. Some answer that micro-organisms display this apparent will because they are the product of natural selection through which the ancestry which happened to possess that trait (don't forget, we are talking about a will to live in a single-celled organism at most) quite obviously were the most likely to produce surviving descendants. In short, they have the will to live because they descended from other unicellular organisms who had the will to live first. So, how did those ancestors come to have the will to live? Well, their ancestors...You get the problem.

Without intelligence of any kind as we know it, how is the amoeba not perfectly indifferent between existence and nonexistence? To answer with an explanation of how it was endowed with it by innumerable generations of ancestry only makes matters worse. According to the theory of evolution, to continue to wind the clock back to prior generations seeking the first individual organism with this trait is to find even simpler forms of the same organism. So if we are stunned to find this generation of amoeba with an intangible will to live we will be even more stunned to find the same will in prior, less complex ancestors. Are we to understand that the power of random mutations produced this will to live as an intangible trait and then introduced it into subsequent generations? If so, what was the vehicle of transmission?

Authorities in the life sciences appear to just assume the will to exist. It is yet another brute fact around which they operate. The scarcity of explanations and the apparent absence of curiosity are troubling. It's strange that the most important driver or force in the field remains so unexplored. Here's an example to illustrate my point. Imagine asking a sailing enthusiast about the mechanics of sail boating. Imagine further that you come to him with no understanding whatsoever of any of the physical forces involved. He answers your query by first carefully explaining the concept of buoyancy. Then he describes in detail everything about the boat itself, the rudder, the mast, the rigging, and the sail. Finally, he explains that with the sail in proper position it delivers force through the mast to the rest of the boat. You follow up by asking how that is, what is the cause exerting force on the sail initially and how. You find that he has no

answer. He observes only that when the sail assumes a taut convex shape all the motion seems to begin. Conversely, he observes that when the sail loses that shape and it hangs from the mast, all motion seems to cease. But in the end he has no idea what the wind is or how it works upon the sail. That is, he has no concept of the vital force which makes it all happen in the first place. You discover that as you press him for a greater understanding of what is ultimately responsible for the movement of the sailboat he offers you only more detailed explanations of how the boat is manufactured and how it functions. In effect, his understanding simply assumes an unknown force (a brute fact) which makes it all happen. That force simply is. For all his specialized mechanical expertise, the sailing enthusiast in a much more important way knows nothing about what makes the sail boat go!

So it is with the most informed life scientists. They are able to describe with increasing specificity how the vehicles of life interact and combine in all organisms. In fact, when pressed to better explain what's going on, they typically continue to elaborate on the mechanics of bonding, replication, stable vs. unstable conditions, *etc.* But they can tell us absolutely nothing about the "wind" which drives it all forward. Much as the sailing enthusiast whose expertise seems to begin once pressure is magically applied to the sail, the life scientist is relegated to blindly assuming a force upon which all activity depends—that certain something that, while currently invisible to us, provides all the necessary motion.

By dint of his high-profile position in the scientific community we can safely assume that Richard Dawkins is among the best and brightest in the life sciences. Yet at a more fundamental level he has absolutely nothing to teach us about life, arguably the most mind-boggling phenomenon begging for some kind of explanation. For this reason I cannot grant him credibility or authority about the ultimate cause of life, the ultimate cause of all of us. He most certainly is not in a position to declare that there is no life force or something resembling a soul which animates an individual when he cannot even tell us what causes the will to live. Frankly he has as much expertise in the true source of life as the sailing enthusiast described previously has expertise in meteorology. Neither can tell us anything about fundamental causes.

In the opening chapters of *The Selfish Gene* Dawkins does his best to explain how the first molecules became organic. He opens his second chapter:

“In the beginning was simplicity...Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection is satisfying because it shows us a way in which simplicity could change into complexity, how unordered atoms could group themselves into ever more complex patterns until they ended up manufacturing people. Darwin provides a solution; the only feasible one so far suggested to the deep problem of our existence”

With the expertise and clarity we would expect of him, he then carefully breaks the process down to its simplest parts and steps. He does so in a way that a lay person can understand. He explains that “somehow” two important things happened. First, the ability to self-replicate emerged. He writes:

At some point a particularly remarkable molecule was formed by accident. We will call it the ‘replicator.’ It may not necessarily have been the biggest or the most complex molecule around, but it had the extraordinary property of being able to create copies of itself. This may seem a very unlikely sort of accident to happen, and so it was. I was exceedingly improbable” (67)

So in about one page, Dawkins provides the sum total of our *scientific* understanding of how life emerged. Next, he explains, some of these ‘replicators’ acquired a preference for certain other molecules. With self-replication and self-ordering in place, life was then bound to proliferate and evolve into greater complexity. Dawkins’ more detailed explanations of the mechanics of molecular bonding and replication are supposed to help us better understand the emergence of the first life without God. To paraphrase Dawkins, no god was needed because we have a pretty good idea how life came about. But in reality he has only restated the miracle from a more microscopic vantage! Once again he has elaborated only on the *mechanics* of the phenomenon. He still has not touched the core question, nor can he. No wonder Dawkins hates “why” questions and actually insists there are none.

With ever-increasing confidence, Dawkins next explains how these self-replicating molecules probably took the next step to form the first living cells:

“Other replicators discovered perhaps how to protect themselves, either chemically or by building a physical wall of protein around themselves. This may have been how the first living cells appeared. Replicators began not merely to exist but to construct for themselves containers, vehicles for their continued existence. The replicators that survived were the ones that built survival machines for themselves to live in.”

We must remember that the basis for all the speculation above is that natural selection created all living things. Next, Dawkins et al know that natural selection created all living things because all living things exist. If all this seems a bit circular to you, you are not alone. I am reminded of when I was about 5 years old—I remember wondering why, if my arms were strong enough, I

couldn't grab hold of my belt with both hands, pull up with all my might, and lift myself up off the ground. At the time I assumed that my lack of success was due to a lack of strength, nothing more. In the same way, evolutionary biologists acknowledge that the formation of life as described by Dawkins and others is the ultimate in "bootstrapping." Yet even with that acknowledgement, they still don't seem to appreciate the inadequacy of their explanations.

Let's look more closely to understand why the account above is so very presumptuous and unsatisfying. We heard earlier from Sir Fred Hoyle. He too marveled at the complexity of even the simplest forms of life. He was profoundly troubled by the sheer improbability of this kind of complexity randomly self-assembling—no matter how much time elapsed. He claimed that, based upon his calculations, the odds of cellular life evolving would have been less than one in $10^{40,000}$ (one ten followed by forty thousand zeroes)—which is again to say that it was impossible. His exclamation is often cited by those who question the sufficiency of evolution alone as the cause of all life—for obvious reasons:

"The chance that higher life forms might have emerged in this way is comparable to the chance that a tornado sweeping through a junkyard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the materials therein."

"Life as we know it is, among other things, dependent on at least 2000 different enzymes. How could the blind forces of the primal sea manage to put together the correct chemical elements to build enzymes?"

Note that this cynicism came from an atheist. What's more, experts would advise us in fact that the Boeing 747 in this example is far less complicated than a single living cell. So it's an even bigger problem for evolution than implied in the analogy. In any case, with Dawkins at our side as we contemplate the tornado in the junkyard described by Hoyle, Dawkins could offer similar explanations. He could explain how first each component of the jet engines came together in the fierce winds, then a wing, then the hydraulic systems, and so on. He would probably do so with a sense of self-satisfaction that he has helped answer the pressing question and make sense of the miracle. Moreover, he would likely assure us that with more time and investigation he and other scientists would continue to provide even more detailed answers—they would be able to explain how the tornado assembled even the smallest subcomponents, wiring, circuitry, *etc.* Yet his elaboration in this case would be just as helpful as his elaboration of the mechanics of molecular self-assembly and replication which are said to have generated the first life. Clearly he would have explained

nothing! Still he probably would not understand why we were not enthusiastic and satisfied with his explanations.

Of course there is a fundamental flaw in Dawkins' approach and methodology which will prevent him from ever answering the question. Consider an analogy. We learn of a man who won the lottery. The next day he wins another lottery. On the third day he wins yet another. His luck continues on the fourth day, the fifth day, and so on. After thirty days this fantastically lucky man has won thirty different lotteries. Quite naturally, along with the rest of the world, we are astonished. In this analogy Dr. Dawkins is a lottery expert. He and his associates launch an investigation to learn more about how this man pulled it off. That is, the forensic experts are on the scene to make sense of this extraordinary series of events for the rest of us—they intend to answer our questions.

In due time Dawkins and his colleagues report their findings. We are optimistic partly because these experts appear so self-assured and pleased with themselves. Then they explain in great detail the steps this man took on each of the days he won. They explain where he bought the tickets, what time of day, what else he bought at each retailer, and so on. Confused, we press for more details—but how did he do it? They return, they say, equipped with even more answers. In this round they explain when the man bought a lottery ticket with cash, when he paid with a card, and even more details of each transaction. They even explain what he was wearing each day, the precise path he took to each vendor, even his debit and credit card numbers, and more. They have collected a substantial number of details surround the man's activities. Having presented extensive details of the *mechanics* of what happened, the experts close their presentation stating, "And that is exactly how he won all those lotteries."

Now exasperated, we ask, "But *how* did he win all those lotteries?" Taken aback, they respond, "Again, on day one he was wearing these clothes, he took this route to this retailer, he purchased the ticket using a ten-dollar bill with this serial number, he also bought a soft drink, *etc.* That is how he won! You're welcome." But obviously for all the details they have provided, they have not answered the question—they haven't even come close. They have painted a series of vivid and perhaps even perfectly accurate pictures of what may have happened—the mechanics. But of course the mystery, the miracle and what we really want to know, remains entirely unexplained. In the most important way, the experts have actually explained nothing. No matter how many more details

of this kind they provide, the fundamental question goes unanswered.

It's important to recognize that this is the sense in which materialist atheists assure us that science has explained everything and that God was not needed. This is especially clear in the study of the origins of life. In the same way some claim to have dismissed the need for a creative intelligence (*remember Dr. Steven Hawking's assertion, "It is not necessary to invoke God to ... set the Universe going."*), these same experts could go on to assure us that even Hoyle's hypothetical tornado was not necessary—after all, we know exactly how the millions of aircraft parts must have come together—we know precisely what came together! We know the source of each component and the path it must have taken to become part of the 747. Why do you still question the sufficiency of our scientific explanations? Unfortunately, Dawkins, Hawking, and the like seem to think that an increasingly detailed account of how the moving parts of life and the universe would have had to come together is sufficient. It's not. Nor can it ever be.

In fairness, Darwinists argue that Hoyle's 747 analogy is flawed; implying that the first single-celled organism was formed in a single event. This is not how natural selection is said to have worked. Instead they explain that this first living organism was formed through a *series* of astronomically improbable events—a gradual process in which each new step built upon the one which preceded it. But this correction cuts both ways, at once making the event more explicable on one level and less explicable on another. Let's return to the 747 to make sense of the Darwinists' clarification. We can imagine the aircraft's components coming together one at a time rather than all at once. But for one thing, this version of the story necessitates the recurrence of tornadoes, millions of them—each one perfectly timed and placed to add to the progress of those before it. Equally important, each subsequent tornado mustn't ruin what has already been accomplished. That is, on balance they must add to the progress already made and not destroy it.

So even understanding the self-assembly of the first living organism (again, far more complicated than a Boeing 747) as a cumulative, step-by-step process still strains credulity. Returning to the analogy of the lottery winner; a series of astronomically improbable (impossible) events taking place can certainly be more unlikely than a single major event. Is a man winning a lottery per day for 30 days any less extraordinary than that same man winning 30 lotteries in a single day? Of course not. It turns out that appealing to a gradual and cumulative

process may introduce even more statistical hurdles. But most important, as we have seen, all the descriptive minutia in the world still does not provide a satisfactory answer to the question of life.

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Again, as styled so aptly by theist scientist John Polkinghorne, Dawkins and the like may have great vision, but only in the one eye he chooses to use and only within a narrowly circumscribed field of study. Step beyond that demarcation, and he has as little proficiency as the layman. He is a fish out of water. Better yet, he is a fish *in* the water who knows absolutely nothing about water—he unknowingly presumes it while denying that it even exists! But as we have seen, unfortunately many on both sides of the debate wrongly attribute portable proficiency to Dawkins and to other specialists. To assume portability of expertise is clearly unwarranted and amounts to an especially troubling form of the Argument from Authority. A question as important as God’s existence demands much more from us.

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The dramatic improvements to life and health thanks to the efforts of this same scientific community are a marvel. For example, life expectancy in first-world countries has essentially doubled in just over a century. Infant mortality rates in first-world countries, where the benefit of those advantages are more fully realized, is literally a tiny fraction of what it was a century ago, falling from approximately 7.5% in 1915 to less than one half of one percent today (76). Nearly every measure of quality of life has also improved dramatically. What’s more their contributions have also added enormously to our collective understanding of the world, satisfying one of our most profound aspirations. In short, the list of science’s accomplishments is long and impressive. Through it we have found numerous answers to the how questions. But we mustn’t allow our appreciation for these accomplishments to diminish the importance of the *why* questions. Dawkins has consistently proclaimed in his inimitable style that there are no *why* questions—at least no why questions of merit.

In a debate conducted in South America in 2010 Dawkins declared that “*the why question is a silly question*” (77). This of course was simply a restatement of an assertion he makes in his writing and other appearances. Then he continued

with supreme confidence to insult the otherwise well-respected, courteous opponents on the debate stage by saying:

“We humans are obsessed with purpose. It seems perfectly natural when we’re presented with an object to say ‘what’s it for?’ It starts in childhood.” He continued, *“Children then mostly grow out of that purposive way of looking at the world, (then gesturing to his opponents on stage) but not apparently everybody.”*

This insult was met with predictably approving applause from the die-hard Dawkins fans in the audience. More than anything else, this episode illustrates the dismissive view Dawkins and like-minded atheists hold of believers, even the most well-reasoned and articulate among them.

Let’s return briefly to Dr. Polkinghorne who makes much more sense on this topic to the two-eyed investigator than does Dr. Dawkins. Polkinghorne explains that both the how and the why questions are important and that working toward solutions for both is not a contradiction. He offers the example of a tea kettle boiling water on a stove:

“Science tells us that burning gas heats the water and makes the kettle boil. The kettle is boiling because I want to make a cup of tea. I don’t have to choose between the answers to those two questions. In fact, in order to understand the mysterious event of the boiling kettle, I need both those kinds of answers to understand what’s going on. So I need the insights of science and the insights of religion if I’m to understand the rich and many-layered world in which we live” (78).

As shown earlier, we might expect the dismissive posture from Dr. Dawkins, rejecting the existence of a second useful eye as it were, along with the possibility of something important to be observed through it. He has built a career and an esteemed reputation, and deservedly so, by finding answers to many of the how questions through the tools of science. Consequently, his is well-equipped and skilled in answering how, but tragically unable to even fathom why. As I argued in Chapter 7, we all prefer to play to our strengths. So it is not surprising that Dawkins has no interest in venturing outside of his home field, his area of expertise. In fact, he is categorically opposed to it. What began as the virtue of his expertise becomes a vice of dogmatism when he attempts to fence in the dialogue and the pursuit of full understanding to only his home field. After all, he reasonably presumes that he has everything to lose and nothing to gain.

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I close this chapter by returning to the baffling phenomenon of volition at

the microscopic level. How can such tiny forms come to prefer existence to nonexistence? It does no good to cite bonding and describe how these particles arrange themselves. Why do they do so? As we have seen and as illustrated by the buckets of elements displayed at the front of the classroom, life scientists have easy access to every single kind of atom which makes up the human body—or the body of a mouse, or of a dung beetle for that matter. What's more, they understand the nature of the bonds and processes which sustain life. Yet they are light years from being able to reproduce any form of life on their own. We are not asking for a man-made mammal, but maybe a reproduction of the simplest single-celled organism known. To quote the iconic late physicist Richard Feynman, "*What I cannot create, I do not understand.*" While uttered in reference to physical systems, this is certainly also true of biologists and other life scientists despite all the accumulated knowledge in the field. There can be no doubt that something essential is missing, even if every necessary element is gathered in perfect proportion in the laboratory. Absent is some essence or force which, by definition, must be present in organic matter to distinguish it from the inorganic.

That certain something which animates every living organism is thus far perfectly inaccessible to science. It is beyond the grasp of any materialistic epistemology. Yes, they can tell us, for example, that organic matter contains some portion of carbon. They can even tell us about many of the molecular mechanics at work. But beyond that, it's almost as if there is an invisible barrier between our efforts to discover and whatever it is that bestows life. Somehow we can get painfully close through brilliant work on the part of our very best minds in science but, like a dog chasing its tail, discovery remains maddeningly distant. Is it irrational to allow for the possibility that this indefinable, inaccessible, inimitable, and elusive something is a manifestation of what theists insist is outside the material world? Or is contemplating such a possibility instead a reasonable if tentative explanation of a phenomenon based upon all we can observe? As we have seen, cosmologists were tormented for some time by readings and measures which simply did not make sense given the amount of mass and energy apparent to them in the universe. It was entirely rational of them to posit the existence of a reality not directly visible to them to account for what they could see. In precisely the same way and with precisely the same rationality, the theist can posit a transcendental force or essence, the life force or soul, to account for the effect seen on otherwise inanimate buckets of elements. Put succinctly, as cosmologists deduce dark matter and energy from the

workings of the universe, theists deduce the soul from the workings and the nature of human beings. Both can confidently assert the rationality of their respective methodologies. We are justified to contemplate what we cannot observe directly based upon what is revealed by what we can observe directly.

CHAPTER SUMMARY – THINGS TO CONSIDER

There is no explanation for how life emerged on the earth. Despite claims from some atheists, it remains a profound mystery to the life sciences. The two possibilities of either a divine power creating the very first life forms or their emergence from inorganic matter would both be considered miraculous events. Thus in a very real sense both the atheist and the theist alike are compelled to believe in at least one more miracle (the first being the creation of all things from nothing). Moreover, atheism cannot account for the will to live which is demonstrated seemingly by all forms of life, from the brainless micro-organism to the largest mammals. Thus chemistry and brain activity are not sufficient explanations of what Darwin described, perhaps inadvertently, as the “struggle for life.” The Creator God Hypothesis is a compelling and rational start to an explanation for the extraordinary life force that permeates all living things.

CHAPTER 11 - CLEAR THINKING

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“I have never been lost, but I will admit to being confused for several weeks.”

—Daniel Boone

“No one is so thoroughly superstitious as the godless man.”

—Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Author*

Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away.

—Philip K. Dick, *Essayist*

THE THEIST AND THE ATHEIST are joined in one most important way—they are both human animals. As such, from the outset they are both handicapped by the universal flaws of human nature. So I must confess to being more than a little amused when atheists resolutely declare that they are reluctant slaves to fact and reason. They are the reluctant but valiant warriors. They just don't have the luxury enjoyed by so many believers of kidding themselves with wishful or otherwise flawed thinking. The most militant among them display a distinctive self-satisfaction as intrepid intellectuals in the face of a cold and brutal universe. To be sure, the atheist scientist can be genuinely committed to the scientific method and principles designed to prevent faulty methods and conclusions. But again, he remains a lowly human, subject to all the things which conspire to make clear thinking a challenge. Try as he might he can never completely rid himself of subtle biases and his own forms of wishful thinking. After all, the Christian theist too embraces a firm set of principles which, despite his best efforts, he inevitably fails to consistently meet. We can see evidence of failed objectivity in some of the arguments they make. The truth is atheist evangelists systematically advance arguments designed to provoke an emotional response. Ironic but true. I will present just one example here.

The most common argument offered by even prominent atheists has to do with the Problem of Evil. It's also the most common argument of the lay atheist.

This is an authentic objection which we considered at length in Chapter 4 and in several other chapters. My objective here is to illustrate a not-so-subtle yet too often unrecognized pull at the heart strings which is usually a pivotal element of the atheists' argument. In contrast to their insistence on considering only quantifiable facts, here they do just the opposite. I do not mean to minimize the significance of pain and suffering in the world but I do insist on recognizing the emotions around it for what they are. We need to understand the nature of the appeals made so that we can avoid conclusions not supported by the facts. While this is most often a warning raised by atheists about theistic entreaties, it most certainly applies to some atheistic appeals as we will see.

Dan Barker is a former Christian evangelist who lost his faith some thirty plus years ago and who has since been a “missionary” for atheism to the Christian world he left behind. Having been born again himself as a young man, he claims to keenly understand how Christians in particular think and why and how they are led astray. As he likes to say, he switched teams after discovering that the faith of his youth failed to withstand scrutiny. Barker is a prominent and influential atheist. As such, many message-board atheists adopt his arguments. These are the pajama-clad anonymous intellectuals who pontificate in virtual arenas of debate. In organized debates and his other public appearances Barker invariably cites the prevalence of evil in the world—both the natural (acts of nature) and the man-made (people hurting people).

We have no reason to doubt the sincerity of Barker's commentary on the volume and scope of evil around the planet. There's no need for him to convince us of something so obvious. Much of what he has to say on the topic is indisputable. To make his case he often suggests:

“Just go to any pediatric oncology ward at a hospital and you will know without a doubt that there is no god” (79).

The pediatric oncology ward is a staple of web-based atheist arguments, for good reason. It would seem that to succeed Barker must only convince us that two things cannot coexist; the evil all around us and a figure which cannot be seen or heard or otherwise detected through our physical senses. No doubt he frames the argument to his advantage.

Moreover, the image he describes is troubling—innocent children suffering the ravages of an agonizing disease mankind appears unable to check. The scene is vivid and compelling. That's his point. At this stage of his monologue on evil

his content is clearly designed to illicit an emotional reaction. He invites us to feel the pain of evil, to experience it. Who wouldn't react? Barker has made his point. But for an apostle of pure reason it seems inconsistent with broader claims of detachment from emotional commitments either way. At a minimum, he surrenders his claim to exclusively rational thought and argumentation.

Generally, this is a good way to communicate to an audience, to connect with them, and ultimately to get them to feel what you feel. It's a form of an appeal often made in other emotionally charged social issues: funding for research and treatment of various diseases or appeals for new rights for homosexuals, for example. Advocates tell us we would understand if we knew someone who had a particular disease. Or we would feel differently about same-sex marriage if one of our family members was gay. The particular point is true; people do feel differently when they are emotionally tied to an issue. The broader point is false; the more intimate we are with a particular issue, the more likely we are to make wiser decisions about it. This is almost never true. We see this borne out in countless arenas. To illustrate, I will compare it to the jury selection process in court.

If emotional proximity to an issue truly enlightened us, in the sense that it guided us to more sound judgment, then the jury selection process we are all familiar with would be turned on its head. Think about it. Attorneys know to question prospective jurors on what they know about the case. More important, they ask the prospective juror if he is acquainted with the defendant. If he is, typically to any degree, that potential juror is immediately disqualified. The judicial system presumes the obvious fact that the closer a person is to an issue or individual at the center of the case, the less likely the former will be to render a sound and sober judgment. Imagine the relative of a murder victim is selected as a juror to hear the case against the defendant. After all, this relative not only knew the victim well but also acutely understands the pain and suffering caused by the murder. Conversely, imagine the prospective juror is a relative of the defendant. She certainly would appreciate the defendant's journey prior to the crime and she would be deeply sensitive to the impact of either a guilty or not guilty verdict. When we imagine Barker's debate tactic employed in criminal court, its flaw is unmistakable. In short, when it really matters we understand that proximity to the emotions of a particular subject tends to short-circuit our ability to reason clearly. Consequently, we take precautions to prevent this natural predisposition to lead us astray. We must beware of the same

predisposition in relation to the Problem of Evil. Does our familiarity with evil, particularly with its painful effects, make us more or less rational about its connection to the possibility of God's existence? Do Barker's and the other professional atheists' routine references to the endless forms of evil, to activate our deepest empathies, improve the reliability of our reasoning of the God question?

The answer is unavoidable. Barker's invitation, and that of every other atheist to immerse ourselves in our experience with evil is a not-so-subtle invitation to engage our emotions and thus to seriously cloud our judgment. There can be no other purpose to intentionally inflame emotions. No doubt his is an effective tactic in a debate. Unfortunately, as every one of us knows directly the pain of evil, we all face a stiff challenge to fully set aside the scars of our personal experience and genuinely attempt to understand. Of course, by its very nature this is much easier said than done.

As strange as it might seem coming from a believer, I think that we must learn to ignore our emotions. If we can shed ourselves of our scars from evil we can more clearly see how evil is not an argument against God's existence but can actually argue for it as we saw in Chapter 4. For now we see that emotions and other less-than-reliable human impulses are just as likely to pull us away from the God Hypothesis as they are to push us toward it. Atheists' assertions about the emotional motivations of believers may often contain some truth but they explore only one side of the coin. At bottom, emotions are a net neutral in the debate because there is no evidence that either side benefits from them more than the other. We do not know if emotions convince more believers or non-believers. This is just one reason why we would be wise to set emotions aside and move on to more informative facts.

Unfortunately, leading atheists are happy to exploit emotions in much more negative ways to advance their cause. Some encourage their followers to make use of shaming and good old fashioned peer pressure to subdue the apparent influence the religious have in the public square. Atheist activists held a Reason Rally in the National Mall in Washington, D.C. in the spring of 2012. The stated purpose of the event was to "*Unify, energize, and embolden secular people nationwide, while dispelling the negative opinions held by so much of American society*" (80). This seemed like a reasonable objective. Yet Richard Dawkins, widely recognized as the top ranking authority on hand, urged the pursuit of other objective. He encouraged the gathering "*...to ridicule and show contempt*

for the religious and their doctrines” and to “mock and ridicule the religious in public.” Clearly the vaunted principles of strict reason and rationality are less important in at least some aspects of modern atheism—the implementation of its social agenda is one of the more obvious ones.

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It is refreshing to find instances in which individuals have managed to consider the evidence and the arguments with an open mind and regardless of the potentially unpleasant consequences of an unanticipated conclusion. One well known atheist provides an encouraging example of sincerity and courage no matter the outcome. The late Antony Flew was a noted British philosopher who specialized in the philosophy of religion. Put less charitably, religion was his pet peeve and the focus of his extensive criticism. He had argued throughout his long career that in the absence of affirmative empirical evidence the natural state of a rational person should be atheistic. He made the case for this position in his signature book, *The Presumption of Atheism* (81). He steadfastly maintained this atheism throughout his other books and professional publications. In fact, he was a prominent voice for atheism among academics, participating in a number of public debates to argue against the existence of God. He served as a quote maker for many in the atheist movement over most of his career.

All that changed in 2003. At that time Flew was retired and at 81 was frankly an old man. He later explained that his life had been dedicated to the pursuit of truth, no matter where it led. Even in retirement his dogged pursuit continued. He explained further that, despite his long history of atheist advocacy, scientific and philosophical considerations had compelled him to fundamentally rethink his position on the God Hypothesis. Several months later Flew announced publicly that he had changed his mind on the question. In short, he explained that he had come to believe in a creator-God. To explain why, he stated that *“the most impressive arguments for God’s existence are those that are supported by recent scientific discoveries”* (82). The most recent findings in science are what moved him. In summary, he claimed that science and reason had caused him to abandon his lifelong atheism and to believe in the Deist creator-God. As might be expected, some indicted his motives and even his mental state. Meanwhile those closest to him came to his defense, insisting that he was still of sound mind and remained committed to truth. As such, Flew represents the possibility that an honest consideration of the arguments for God

can lead one to believe.

Flew's story is remarkable in part because it is the exception to the rule. When it comes to someone who is even slightly comfortable in his current thinking, it has been my experience that no single argument for or against God's existence really makes a dent. Even the cumulative argument rarely changes minds. This is true on both sides and applies especially to the more passionate advocates on both sides. In fact, it is safe to say that the debates we witness have nothing to do with changing minds. In reality, they are all about entertaining and firming up the respective bases. Still I agree with Peter Hitchens, brother of the famed late atheist icon Christopher Hitchens, that those engaged in debates are in fact seeking to convince themselves that their position is correct.

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An important challenge to processing the arguments is identifying what constitutes genuine evidence and arguments against God's existence. This can often be more difficult than we would expect. Unfortunately, the recent interest in the God Question and the volume of writing it has inspired have not refined the debate, but muddled it. Far too often even the most sincere atheists raise issues which, while interesting, have nothing to do with the central argument. That is, they focus their efforts on criticisms which simply do not add to or subtract from the arguments for God's existence. Some would call these misdirected arguments straw men. Perhaps understandably, critics often scrutinize the flaws of the individuals and the institutions which possess and promote theistic beliefs.

Take for example the imperfections of believers. Many profess deep faith and belief, but fail to live by their own religious principles. In fact, they all fail—some just fail far more dramatically and more visibly than others. No doubt they provide atheist critics attractive, even irresistible targets. As I write these words, a well-known Christian has just been accused of sexual misconduct in his youth and leading a secretly promiscuous life as a married man. As might be expected, critics now construe his misbehavior as proof that his worldview is invalid. Some even admit that they have been waiting for something like this to be revealed for an opportunity to make their point. Similarly, most atheistic monologues will cite examples of Christians failing to behave, well, like Christians. That the standard above is applied by believers and non-believers

alike is telling. Ideal Christian behavior has become the gold standard.

Of course there is far more egregious behavior of religious people to be found. Believers and atheists alike rightly condemn the horrific violence perpetrated by Islamists in recent years. Yet even legitimate criticism of this kind has no bearing on the God question. Frankly, even if believers could be shown to be the least virtuous of all human beings, the atheist still could not argue accurately that it followed that no god exists.

In short, on the one hand we have the behavior of believers, both good and bad. On the other hand, we face the question of whether God exists. There is no legitimate, logic-based argument between the two. Many have come to conflate the behavior of self-proclaimed adherents with the veracity of the theology. We shouldn't accept the claim, whether implied or explicit, that nasty behavior on the part of believers makes the God Hypothesis any less believable. It does not. It cannot.

The next most attractive target of atheistic ridicule is the vast array of historical and current supernatural belief systems. Important here are those which strike the modern reader as most bizarre. Atheists chronicle the near endless list of admittedly strange sounding beliefs which were historically held to account for natural phenomena: thunder, lightning, earthquake, and in short, everything else we did not understand. For most of humankind's existence this amounted to just about everything. These examples are typically presented in a way designed to color all current forms of belief in the supernatural and God, as similarly nonsensical. It's almost as if the critics demand that the modern theist be held to account for every iteration of belief of the supernatural ever held by humanity. The same could be demanded of science and its defenders—they could be held to account for every misstep and flawed conclusion since the scientific revolution. Such a demand of modern science would be no less unwarranted than that made of modern theism. "They say people used to believe that the earth was perched on a series of turtles going back forever. Crazy huh? Well some people still believe in a magic man in the sky." Again, the conclusion does not logically follow.

The fact that humanity has held now plainly nutty beliefs does not demonstrate that all current beliefs in God are nutty, or even invalid. For we could also argue, "They say people used to believe that our world was perched on a series of turtles going back forever. Crazy, huh? Well some people say

today that as something approaches the speed of light it assumes infinite mass. Imagine that!” Let us simply stipulate to the thesis to which Michael Shermer dedicated an entire book—“people believe weird things.” People also believe true things, some of which may even seem weird at first glance. Each belief, no matter how weird it may seem, must be considered on its own merits.

Let’s say for a moment that we are wrong on this point. Let’s suppose, for argument’s sake, that the nuttiness of historical beliefs did indeed demonstrate that some forms of belief in God today are similarly nutty. This again would only tell us about humankind’s capacity to apprehend God, not the reality of His existence. Again, there is the range of human beliefs about a higher power, and then there is the question of the actual existence of that higher power. Similarly, there has been mankind’s evolving understanding of the phenomenon of gravity (still far from complete even today) and then there has been the actual force of gravity over that very same period of time. To chronicle the wacky but steadily improving interpretations of the nature of gravity ultimately says nothing about the reality of gravity. It’s worth noting that we still don’t have a full understanding of precisely what gravity is. But we know that it is.

There is no need to debate whether faith-based beliefs over the course of history were rational. All the bizarre notions ever held by human beings ultimately are not evidence that no god exists. In this sense the phenomena are quite independent. Thus all atheist talking points centered on the history of flawed belief systems and bad believer behavior are ultimately off point and often fundamentally misleading. Don’t fall for them.

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Richard Carrier, among others, seems to have made a career or at least a profession of disproving Christianity. Not satisfied targeting just one brand of faith, Carrier moonlights working to disprove the existence of the mono-theistic god in general. One of his preferred arguments centers on the enormous variety of religious belief systems. He argues that, 1. If there was a god, he would give us all the same instructions for life. 2. The million differing views of god argue against his existence. He adds that if there really are one million distinct religions, the odds that any single one is correct must be one in a million. In short, Carrier asserts that there are so many inconsistent explanations of God, we can safely assume that he does not exist (6). He employs an all-or-nothing analysis to the wide variety of views of deity. We will see that Carrier’s

interpretation is fatally flawed.

Instead of God, let us consider an analogy which demonstrates that Dr. Carrier is processing disparate testimonies in precisely the wrong way. Imagine that authorities receive reports of a streak of light across the night sky. They spring into action and begin to identify witnesses and collect information. They receive reports from people across a twenty mile range. Some people report that the light appeared directly above their location. Others report that it appeared in their southern sky. Still others report having seen the light in their northern sky, and so on. Some of the reports claim that a loud noise accompanied the light while others say nothing of a noise. Obviously, anyone attempting to make sense of all these reports would be horribly mistaken to adopt Dr. Carrier's methodology. It would be foolish to interpret the differences in accounts as evidence that no light actually appeared. In fact, like Carrier, we could pursue a strategy of collecting only contradictory evidence and testimonies and work to build a case intending to prove that nothing occurred. Given the nature of human beings and the frequent failures of eye-witness testimony, we would be certain to find plenty of what we want. This approach would ignore the fact that if something observable to individuals far and wide did occur; we would expect to encounter a variety of accounts of the event.

Instead a wise investigator or a seeker of truth would first consider the context of and the relationship between the disparate testimonies. He would be wise enough to recognize that the variations in the accounts of the event are largely attributable to the perspectives of the witnesses. He would understand that each witness could have experienced the same phenomenon in a different way. Or each experienced a different feature or aspect of the very same phenomenon. The element of vantage point would be an essential consideration.

We can pursue this analogy a little further for greater insight. Each of the witnesses to the hypothetical event described above perceives the surrounding world in a unique way—the only way they could experience it. Possessing only finite means of observation and interpretation, each individual would by necessity experience the event in a unique way. Some have excellent vision while some would have poor vision. The same goes for hearing. What's more, some would have had obstacles or obstructions between them and the phenomenon which would have altered their perception of it. All would be subject to some degree of distraction. The truth is, we would expect in some ways to hear as many unique reports as there were witnesses.

Now imagine further that after a number of years we return to the witnesses to discuss the same event. We also interview those who have heard about the event second and third-hand. It's not an unreasonable stretch to speculate that the variety among accounts would have increased dramatically. Once again, the variety would tell us much about the individuals, their relationships, their particular idiosyncrasies, and how information is lost and corrupted over time. But it certainly wouldn't serve to disprove the occurrence of the original event.

Thus, far from discrediting the general report of a phenomenon in the sky, numerous unique accounts actually together serve as powerful evidence of what took place. To return to Carrier's preferred question: what would we expect if God were actually communicating to all these different people. I suggest that, as with the example of the light in the sky, we would expect to find as many different accounts as we find witnesses. Every human being has what amounts to a unique vantage to experience or make first contact with God. The vast variety of personal, mental, and spiritual traits will inevitably yield a vast variety of testimonies of God.

In fairness, there will be instances when accounts don't merely differ, but actually contradict one another. This is true. My point here is not that there is no truth—far from it. There is truth and there is absolute truth. Instead, my point is that diverse and even conflicting reports of the God phenomenon tell us about the people who experience it. These reports tell us about the nature, idiosyncrasies, and individuality of those providing the testimony. The breadth of the testimony actually serves to build more compelling evidence for God. The atheist argument here is upside-down. In summary, Carrier's analysis of the diversity of religious belief fails to distinguish between information and the media through which it is conducted. It is therefore misleading.

CHAPTER SUMMARY – THINGS TO CONSIDER

Often arguments to disprove God's existence smuggle in assumptions which cannot be justified. They are also regularly couched in subtle appeals to our emotions. Unfortunately the emotions aroused by such appeals almost always cloud our judgment. The more powerful the emotions, the less rational our

consideration of the facts—this is not surprising. Atheists understandably point to the rich variety of sometimes strange forms of religious belief to discredit all theistic belief. Ultimately, however, this is not a logical argument. As challenging as it may be, we must carefully separate distractions like these from genuine arguments. The good news is that even the most staunchly committed atheists can and do yield to some of the recent scientific findings, even those which clearly support theistic belief.

There are two distinct phenomena worthy of investigation; the question of God's existence and the nature of human understanding of God. The two can be unrelated. The weirdest and most irrational beliefs about God we can conceive of have no bearing on his existence. Equally important, if God does exist, we can reasonably assume that the rich variety of human natures, interpretations, and capacities will yield a variety of forms of belief and faith. In this way the diversity of faiths is not at all surprising and is to be expected so long as human beings are free to contemplate them. Finally, the *sensus deitatis*, or the universal sense of the reality of a higher power, is powerful evidence that God exists.

CHAPTER 12 - ONE GUY'S STORY

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“I love to think of nature as an unlimited broadcasting station, through which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only tune in.”

—George Washington Carver, *Botanist, Former Slave*

I WRITE THIS AS SOMEONE who has lived on both sides of the theological divide. I have both firmly believed in God's existence and firmly believed that He does not exist. Equally significant, I have experienced conversion from one side to the other, in both directions. That is, I have gone through the transition of belief to disbelief and from disbelief to belief. This does not give me any special claim of knowledge. But it has helped me understand what people experience as they transition from one side to the other. I believe, I hope, it has made me more empathetic.

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I spent years of my adult life as an atheist — this despite growing up in a family of ardent faith and devotion to God. But as I approached the age of thirty, having directed what I believed was a desperately needed rational and skeptical critique of the faith of my youth, things changed. At the end of my inquiry I came to the conclusion that there was no god. This conclusion was at once devastating and liberating. Yet there was still a part of me which refused to let it go. While I didn't recognize the extent at first, my prior experiences in the faith made indelible impressions on me.

The atheist reader might well say that the first stage of my journey, losing my faith, is a common and desirable development as an individual matures. It's a good thing that so many grow out of the childish superstitions ingrained upon us through a form of brainwashing or religious training. In fact, that is precisely how I viewed my emerging atheism. I saw it as an inevitable stage of the intellectual maturation process. Conversely, I believed that not to gravitate

toward some form of atheistic thinking was to refuse to grow up. During this period I could not fathom ever believing in a personal god again, much less ever having any kind of religious devotion. I looked back at believers in wonder.

Naturally as an agnostic then atheist I began to see the believers around me, including my family, in an entirely new light. Frankly I was bothered by what appeared to me to be a pathetic lack of curiosity. It seemed to me that there was a strong inverse relationship between a person's belief and the amount of critical thinking he had done about it. I simply could not understand how believers could continue as rational adults still believing as they did. I was completely convinced that any believing adult either never took the time to honestly consider his belief, was incapable of doing so (unintelligent, weak, or cowardly), or could not escape the powerful grip of wishful thinking.

For a time I was agnostic, convinced that nobody really knew or could know. Then after what felt like a natural evolution I concluded that I was in fact an atheist. I had not only reasoned my way out of the specific principles and doctrines of my family's faith, but out of belief in any form of god whatsoever. My progression from belief, to agnosticism, to atheism is not at all unusual. What's more, like so many today who find religion nonsensical, I came to despise what I understood to be the principle of faith. Put simply I found it absurd and frankly maddening that those more inclined to believe, in some cases the stupidly gullible, were said to somehow occupy a higher, nobler plane than those of us who bothered to dig in. This claim and those like it were offensive to me.

As could be expected of an atheist, I rejected the virtue of accepting as true any scheme which by its nature was inaccessible to rigorous intellectual or scientific methodology. Faith, as I understood it, was an intellectual handicap. To me it was preposterous that faith provided any meaningful advantage whatsoever. At bottom I saw faith not as a virtue but as a vice. Convinced that I had finally permitted myself to think critically and rationally, I was asked occasionally how confident I was in my new belief system. I typically responded that I was 98% certain that there was no god. I felt at the time that it would be prudent to allow for a small possibility I was wrong, even if only a miniscule chance.

I continued to fully associate with and love my family and friends who remained devout in the faith. In retrospect it is clear to me that this was due to

their guiding principles and efforts, not mine. Moreover, I retained a genuine respect and love for what belief in general had done for my family and community. Again, unlike many who abandon their faith and experience the chilling effects of alienation from their closest relations, I experienced the opposite. It was upon my abandonment of the faith of my youth that I witnessed the practice of the highly esteemed Christian virtues of tolerance and love on the part of those closest to me. I couldn't help but be impressed with so many who did actually live what they preached.

Still I was supremely convinced that, unlike these people whom I continued to love, I had managed to somehow rise above narrow and irrational thinking. It felt like figuratively I had been elevated above the fray and thereby enabled to finally see things the way they really were, the way they had always been, and to see the bigger and more correct picture. I was conflicted about believers. Even while convinced they were dead-wrong, part of me envied their optimism and clear purpose in life. Sadly a larger part of me saw them as profoundly misguided and under the spell of hocus pocus and wishful thinking. Like so many other atheists, I simply could not respect their intellect. I did my very best not to feel superior or condescending to believers—or at least not to show it. But I am certain that I failed miserably.

Yet after years of thoughtful atheism, I had nagging doubts. More accurately I doubted my doubts. I found myself once again imagining the possibility of a creator-God—something which just years earlier I thought utterly impossible. The particular events and milestones of my return to a belief in God are less important here than the nature of the transition. I had reasoned my way out of belief—then I reasoned my way back. It was not a retracement of the same path. Instead, the reasoning which created a new belief in God included considerations that were new to me. I came to know first-hand that reason can produce belief in a higher power which cannot be directly apprehended through our physical senses, including through the scientific method. In short, careful thought and reasoning can and does lead a person toward either conclusion. Reason can in fact yield the God Conclusion.

Today I recognize that my criticisms of believers were largely inaccurate. I do not claim greater intelligence than the critics of believers. I do not believe I am more rational than atheists. In fact, nowhere in this book have I made that claim or anything like it. But I do claim to be just as rational. I believe the same can be said of most thinking believers. Atheists and theists are equal parts

rational and irrational — they differ only in the subjects which trigger their irrationality. Perhaps naturally then each side is determined to identify the offending subjects on the other side and the ostensibly irrational conclusions, and to make debate points of them.

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We all know someone who, seemingly infatuated with atheistic proofs and talking points gleaned from online sources, simply cannot resist sharing his newly acquired knowledge with anyone who will listen, and even those who would rather not. This evangelist of atheism could be a sibling, an in-law, a family friend, or maybe a college roommate if you're young. In my case, it was me! I felt an almost irresistible drive to expose the truth I had worked so fervently to discover. So I empathize with those atheists whom we might accurately label militant, those unwilling to let it go. I suppose this zeal might be pay-back for a history of relentless proselytism by believers. Often the apostles of atheism are no less zealous than those of the original Christianity. After all, newly minted atheists are also out to save the world; not from sin and mortality like the ancient missionaries, but from superstitious, foolish, and we are told, downright destructive delusions.

I have not attempted here to precisely define faith, but only when needed to vigorously argue what it is not. Just as we have seen that there are countless credible definitions of life posited in life sciences, there are likely at least as many respectable definitions of faith. It most certainly is not the corruption leveraged by the more cynical critics—"to pretend to know what we really don't know." In fact, faith includes the willingness to quickly confess what we do not know, and not to fear that lack of knowledge. It is also to patiently consider the atheistic points and, especially without a complete explanation in hand, permit that they may not be exactly as advertised.

As I have explained, while I was an atheist among believers nothing bothered me as much as the virtue attributed to those possessing faith. In fact, it exasperated me. I refused to believe that the faithful somehow enjoyed an eternal advantage. That is, the predisposition to believe could not be a virtue. All other things equal, he who tends to believe (he who is gullible as I saw it) is more virtuous. Utter nonsense. I knew that for a god to esteem or judge an individual favorably simply because of the latter's inclination to gullibility would be

horribly unfair. Surprise—as a believer today I have not changed my mind! What has changed, however, is my understanding of the nature and purpose of faith.

In Chapter 2 I acknowledged the wide array of workable definitions of faith. Here I offer my definition, albeit a partial one. It is not unlike life in this respect—it is difficult if not impossible to strictly define. But we most certainly can identify some of its critical features. Faith is not a quality or characteristic which by itself sets us apart from others or makes us somehow more worthy. It is not simply a virtue to be put on display like window dressing. Instead, to me faith is a posture which puts us in a position to benefit from the rest of God's arrangements for us. Think of it this way. Let's say your faith compels you to show up at a bus stop at the right time and the right place to have the bus arrive, open its door to you, and convey you to your desired destination. All you have to do is show up. All you have to do is have faith. Meanwhile I don't have that faith so I am not compelled to show up at the right time and the right place. I miss the bus. Your faith has thereby benefitted you by enabling access to other resources—resources the faithless like me never enjoy, and this by our own choice. As such, faith is the enabler or the facilitator. Greater clarity came to me as I began to think of faith not simply as a feature or abstract virtue which made some more righteous in God's eyes than others, but as a practical means of access to greater powers and resources.

My next realization was equally profound to me. Like many agnostics and atheists I had been deeply concerned about the obvious unfairness of a supposed judgment based entirely upon a person's inclination to believe the seemingly unbelievable. How could God judge a person based upon the measure of a characteristic He gave her—a feature over which she has little if any control? This patent injustice was one of the varied nails in the coffin of my belief in God or anything beyond the material world. Years later with this entirely new take on faith I reconsidered. The more than 7 billion individuals on earth today represent a vast range of characteristics—strengths and weaknesses. Imagine if God were to judge humanity based entirely upon intellect, a characteristic He supposedly defined and granted us in the first place! Talk about a loaded deck. Take any other feature or measure of strengths and weaknesses. The range is extreme and, according to the very theology which presumes a final judgment, was endowed by God himself. Again, all the countless human characteristics seem horribly unfair measures of judgment.

If there was to be a final judgment, to me at least, there had to be a much more equitable metric against which the dumbest among us and the smartest among us could be measured without giving advantage to either. For that matter, it had to be fair to the richest and the poorest, the youngest and the oldest, the best informed and the least informed, the most fearful and the most courageous, and so on. Better yet, instead of judgment, what if we understood it simply as the means by which God would grant access to something better. After all, the word judgment carries far too much baggage. No doubt its true theological nature has been distorted over time. That seems more like it. A loving and fair Creator would provide access by means of a feature/posture which is universally attainable—something which is a product of individual choice. Importantly this means would deny no one outright.

If you have read this far you might expect that I came to understand faith as this perfect measure, as the ideal means of access. You would be right. It is not beyond anyone's reach. It is attainable by all of us. With this formulation in mind, I came to fathom the possibility of a God who is perfectly fair while offering something better based entirely upon personal choice, not a stacked deck. Once again, I witnessed the implosion of what had once been a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to belief in the theist God.

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My understanding of the nature of faith directly shapes my view of humanity's grasp of reality (I emphasize *my view*—as in it is entirely a matter of my opinion). It leads me to believe that the bounds of our ultimate understanding of the universe and reality are firmly established, and for good reason. If as I have argued faith is the universally equitable test of mortality and the means by which we can hope for access to something better, I suspect it will be preserved as such through all generations. That is, God will maintain equal access and obstacles to faith. As a result, even while I embrace its power and importance I don't think science or any other intellectual pursuit will produce absolutely conclusive evidence of God's existence. Instead, to the living, His existence will forever remain a matter of faith.

No matter how exciting and enlightening the scientific revelations to come, none will serve to settle the debate vindicating one side or the other. The individual will remain free to interpret the latest finding as evidence of God's

existence or evidence that there is no god. It will continue to depend upon one's chosen lens. Each individual will remain free to believe in God or not. In the same way God fine-tuned the universe for our existence, I believe He fine-tuned reality and our ability to understand it in such a way that preserves the primacy of faith. In this way God protects and preserves our personal agency. With this realization I must confess a personal irony. It turns out that the theistic principle which bothered me more than any other during my years as a non-believer, faith, turns out to be the most important part of our existence. We might say that it is the key to the kingdom.

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Both experience *and* reason lead me to believe that absolute morality is as real as any material phenomenon. Logic persuades me that more than just chance conspired to cause the formation of all matter, energy, space, time, and other variables in precisely the way which would yield intelligent life. My experience has shown me that new information tends to dissolve even seemingly insoluble challenges to what is the eminently rational God Hypothesis. Careful assessment of the most stubborn objections reveals that none is conclusive and that many turn out to be indefensible. In fact, as we have seen, some can even arguably be reversed entirely and amount to evidence for God. But for many of us it takes effort. At bottom it is wholly rational to conclude that everything, including our extraordinary capacity as human beings to employ reason and logic to debate the very question, came from some intelligence.

For these reasons among others I have concluded that it is much more reasonable and rational to believe that there is an author of everything that is, that God exists. Moreover, as the author of this book, I composed it with a certain purpose in mind. As a literal creation, the book is endowed with a purpose. More broadly, it seems to me that whatever is authored and brought into existence likewise has a purpose. It follows then that as an individual creation myself, I have a purpose. Everyone with whom I have contact has a purpose and all of God's creations have divine purpose. To recognize this endowment of purpose is not to understand it in full, but perhaps it is the first necessary step toward more complete understanding.

CONCLUSION

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WE ALL LIVE OUR LIVES based upon what we believe. Ultimately that belief is a product of choice. Meanwhile our choices are based upon our physical senses, our experiences, information we receive, and any other resource available to us—tangible and intangible, both quantitative and qualitative. Yes, *believe* is the operative word notwithstanding the protestations of the most vocal atheists, some of whom indeed “protesteth too much.” We have heard quite a bit from Dr. Lawrence Krauss in this book—he who authored the book asserting the inevitability of the universe popping into existence out of nothing; only to acknowledge almost under his breath that by nothing he actually meant quite a few *things*.

Another of Krauss’ protests centers on the notion of belief. In a three-part debate and lecture series with Dr. William Lane Craig (the leading theist who has also had much to say in this book) in Australia in the fall of 2013, Krauss did what seemed to be his best imitation of a cornered politician. When asked simply if he *believed* in certain scientific principles or facts, Krauss awkwardly insisted that he and other reputable scientists (presumably only atheist scientists) do not *believe* anything. Apparently the word itself has been so sullied by association with theistic belief that it is no longer tolerable in Krauss’ lexicon. Instead, Krauss insisted that he only accepted facts which were justified by the data. The very word *belief* pained him—it was equally painful to watch his contortions. He declared, “Scientists don’t believe things. I don’t believe anything!” He then encouraged the audience not to believe anything either.

We could have given Krauss a pass in light of the heated debate and attribute his comments to the passion of the moment. But his anti-belief language appears in much of his literary work. It is a theme. In short, it is no joke or misinterpretation that one of cosmology’s most prominent and most

respected voices stubbornly contends that there is no place for belief of any kind in the pursuit of knowledge. Nor is it a tangential or trifling concern. Instead it is a reflection of an increasingly central guiding principle in the scientific disciplines out to discover the nature of reality. It is a reflection of the more explicit charge we heard from another leading scientist in Chapter 7 imploring other practitioners of science “*to keep the divine foot out of the door.*” We have seen that this commitment to absolute materialism drives and shapes much of the work of staunchly atheistic scientists today. In that context Krauss’ irrational reaction is more explicable.

Yet even absent the overt declarations of war on belief, the absurdity of Krauss’ claim is astonishing. First, it directly contradicts the eminently truthful statement made by Sir Isaac Newton in response to the embarrassment of accolades and renown heaped upon him for his prolific and varied achievements in the natural sciences. Said the great theistic scientist and father of classical physics, “*If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants*” (83). Put succinctly, Newton was somehow able to accept, dare we say *believe*, the work and discoveries of those who preceded him. Only in this way was he able to advance the pursuit of knowledge in his chosen fields of study. In truth, this is the only reasonable methodology which is in fact practiced by every expert in every field in every age. Krauss’ compulsive aversion to words with even the mildest theistic association drove him to propose an utterly ridiculous mindset—one which would have prevented, by definition, progress beyond any single generation and any single individual. Krauss dug deeper and urged the audience not to believe anyone either. Don’t settle for belief, he urged, insist on checking the facts directly yourself.

Krauss would have us believe that he is unwilling to accept any conclusions submitted by anyone but himself. One wonders, as a cosmologist has Krauss himself measured, for one of countless possible examples, the actual distance of the moon from the earth? After all, he refuses to believe what others who claim to have made the measurement might say. He must conduct the measurement anew himself. But there’s no way for him to be certain that the necessary instruments have been manufactured correctly or calibrated properly. By his own proclaimed methodology Krauss himself must see to it. Incidentally, for starters how can he be certain that the conventional instruments are actually the best ones for the job? He cannot. He must then learn for himself, first-hand and perhaps by trial and error which are the ideal instruments on his own, trusting no

one. Now what about the manufacturing specifications and tolerances? He cannot passively believe in their reliability can he? And so the silly regress continues ad absurdum. His claim is preposterous on its face. The awkward truth is simply that Krauss will go to any length no matter how extreme or ridiculous to make the case that faith and anything like it is foolish. This is the only way this incoherent table-pounding could ever come from such an intelligent person.

In reality everyone, including Dr. Krauss, must make a place for rational and reasonable belief if we are to make any progress at all—and not just in physics and cosmology. Like rock climbers on a sheer wall, we must pick and choose the best possible footholds and handholds to move upwards. Either they are sturdy and take us in the right direction or they do not. We do our best to determine which are the most reliable and which will enable ascent. So it is with the God Hypothesis. Belief is not a dirty word. To believe is not to play the fool. Instead to believe is to elect to move forward using the very best information available to us, the best we can find within our reach at the time. Belief is what propels us ahead. In fact, the overwhelming majority of questions we must decide upon to make it through life are those for which we must accept or reject the calculations and findings of others. Those who advance our collective understanding then first must find and accept methodologies which accept the progress made by those who preceded them. This is one form of faith. Similarly, the individual would be wise to do the same. We see here that faith is not the antithesis of learning, knowledge, and progress. In fact, these are all dependent upon faith. Alternatively, faith can be said to be a necessary facilitator of the same. Faith is in fact the essential element of progress.

As we have seen and at the risk of articulating a mere tautology here myself, the experts and great minds who allow for the possibility of a reality beyond the physical do, in fact, believe in a reality beyond the physical. To elaborate on physicist Sir John Polkinghorne's analogy, those willing to utilize both kinds of perception do find that there are immaterial forces to be perceived. Much like the immensity of the nonvisible light spectrum which simply did not and could not "exist" until a means of observation was developed; the supernatural is not recognized without non-natural instrumentation and methodology. It is a profound mistake to define the supernatural today as the impossible. Unfortunately in many circles these two terms are regularly conflated. Instead the supernatural is more correctly defined as merely that which is not susceptible to material methods and instruments. The supernatural resides outside our

natural or material grasp. In short, use of the terms natural and material speaks to the nature of our tools and methods but conveys no information about actual existence or the likelihood of existence. As we saw earlier with the metal detector; the word metal tells only what the device is capable of detecting—in fact, what it is designed to detect. It tells us nothing about what exists outside of that capacity.

Similarly, we have seen that most of matter and energy in the universe are entirely invisible to us; by a long shot. We call them Dark Matter and Dark Energy as a confession of our inability to observe them, let alone understand them. They are as dark to us today as the nonvisible wave-lengths of the light spectrum were to us at one time. As a result, we exercise our powers of reason and inference to conclude that they must exist. The universe makes sense to us only when we assume their existence. To reuse a phrase above, those among the greatest minds who are willing to allow for matter and energy beyond what we can directly detect do, in fact, conclude based upon the best information available to them that Dark Matter and Dark Energy exist. They have confidence in this conclusion despite their utter inability to observe it directly. So it is as we endeavor to apprehend nonmaterial reality. We consider what we deduce to be the effects of an unseen cause and we rationally infer the existence of a causer God who set the universe in motion and infuses otherwise inanimate matter with a life force which to date is undetectable to our finest instruments.

In contrast to the entirely reasonable approach described above, we have sampled some of the prescriptions of the new atheist fundamentalists which, if implemented faithfully, would smother not only the theistic dialogue they detest but also much of the scientific enterprise they rightfully esteem. The very strictures they would impose upon spiritual and transcendental inquiry would stymie their own methods. For example, were we to disqualify any explanation offered without a complete explanation of itself (If God created everything, then who created God?), all tentative hypotheses would be discarded upon conception. Even the most accurate and promising postulate would be disqualified out of hand. There would be an infinitely regressive demand to fully explain every cause of every of every cause, *etc.*

Were we to apply the definition of miracle to all pivotal moments from the Big Bang onward, the Big Bang itself could no longer stand even as a tentative possibility as presently constituted. Furthermore, paradoxically we would have to rule out all conceivable causes of abiogenesis very simply because

fundamental biology insists that life does not and cannot emerge from nonlife. To presume that it can is a strange return to pre-Pasteur speculation of the mid nineteenth century. At that time the expert and the common man alike believed that flies and even mice could emerge anywhere spontaneously. The great French scientist famously demonstrated through experiment that not even the simplest life form can spontaneously arise out of inanimate materials. Instead, we now understand that without exception life comes only from existing forms of life. In fact, the term abiogenesis denotes the impossible, a miracle. Put succinctly, the scientific enterprise could not survive the adoption of the standards and rules that materialist atheists impose upon those who would tolerate belief in God and a reality beyond that detected through our physical senses. In fact, the scientific framework which vigilantly precludes all non-natural phenomena would per force exclude the origin of life as a legitimate subject of study. But fortunately it appears that the “natural forces only” rule is not always strictly enforced. It follows that reason and rationality permit and even suggest that we reject such exclusive demands and instead grant the tools of faith and belief some of the same tolerance.

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Recently I heard one well-known atheist claim that the fundamental difference between believers and atheists was an open mind. That is, he argued that believers have closed minds, unable to accept or even contemplate facts which might indicate that there is no god. Thus he says that believers are closed-minded, not open to certain truths. Of course this is not an uncommon belief among atheists. On the other hand atheists, having courageously accepted the facts to which he alluded, and as we have seen are said to intrepidly confront even the harshest, scariest realities in a godless universe, by definition have open minds. By the most fundamental measure, he could not be more wrong.

Let us picture two realms of reality. The first contains all that science has so far identified, all that is material. I say so far because, as we saw earlier, it has been only in my lifetime that science discovered the 96% of material reality labeled Dark Matter and Dark Energy. As I write these words today the known universe is 25 times more massive than it was on the day I was born just five decades ago. The scientific conception of the universe a hundred years earlier was again but a fraction of the conception which had evolved by the time of my birth. The further we roll back the clock, the smaller the perception of reality.

This is but one example of our stubborn tendency to horribly underestimate both the volume and the nature of reality. We can say that atheists and theists alike accept the existence of everything within this first realm. What's more, both sides would accept this statement. Put another way; in realm one theists accept everything that atheists accept.

Next picture the second realm. It represents anything and everything not captured within realm number one—all nonmaterial reality including what might be called spiritual reality, the immaterial spirit, unembodied mind, *etc.* Theists accept this second realm of reality just as they accept the first. They accept both. Their minds are *open* to both. In contrast, atheists reject even the possibility of such a reality as represented by realm number two. We might say that atheists' minds are hermetically sealed to realm number two. Their minds are securely closed to it. Thus there is nothing accepted by atheists which is unaccepted by theists. Meanwhile much of what theists accept goes unaccepted by atheists. We can say most assuredly that the theist has an open mind while the atheist's mind is closed.

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Peculiarly many within atheism at once claim that believers are rigidly closed-minded on the one hand and dreadfully gullible on the other. I hope to have made two points on this topic. First, I have argued that the theist is no more gullible or prone to believe non-scientific propositions than is the atheist. What differs is the nature of the propositions which each tends to believe. With respect to the posture of the mind, a simple examination of what both sides accept and that which theists also accept but which atheists reject reveals that this claim is simply false. Accusations of gullibility and closed-mindedness are misplaced.

In the end the truth exists independent of our respective inclinations, tendencies, and blind-spots. Our only hope to overcome them is to employ every resource we have been given, discarding none. With this in mind, we can say that it is far better to proceed keeping both eyes open, using both the left brain and the right brain, and keeping a mind and every other capacity we may have, open to all realms of reality. Our history has made one thing clear; we are bound to find more out there than what we can imagine today.

EPILOGUE

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NOT ALL OF THE ARGUMENTS for the existence of God are compelling. Not all the arguments against God are without substance. But on balance, it is entirely rational and reasonable to believe in God. The believer mustn't accept the indictment that to believe is to ignore reason. As we have seen, emotions and other personal baggage can tend to cloud our thinking, both for and against the evidence for God. As such, they should not be permitted to lead us in either direction.

I am uncomfortable when Christian apologists present historical evidence as proofs of Christianity. As with all historical claims, the miracles permeating the life of Jesus of Nazareth, including his birth and resurrection, do not lend themselves to the customary means of examination. To attempt to convert others to Christianity through historical evidences of these same events is simply an impossible task. By taking it too far, as it were, these apologists undermine the power of the broader arguments for God's existence. I believe that we can reason ourselves to a firm and rational belief in the God of theism, perfectly compatible with Christian theology. While this same reason can open our minds to the possibility of the truth of the Christian Gospel, it cannot propel us the rest of the way. To presume to convince anyone of this brand of monotheism using only historical facts and logical argumentation is misguided. What's more, if Christianity is true then God can certainly speak to us in ways above and beyond the tools of history and science.

This brings us back to the question of how we come to knowledge. For all its power and accomplishments, the scientific method cannot illuminate some of life's most important truths. It cannot, for example, confirm that the people around us are actually conscious, like we assume they are. It cannot demonstrate that our memories are not unreal and just a construct of the current moment. After all, materialism informs us that memories are merely a fleeting biochemical arrangement. Science cannot produce a list of moral rights and wrongs. It has great descriptive power but no prescriptive power. It can tell us much about the way things *are* but can never tell us how things *ought* to be. Moreover,

it cannot even prove the validity of the rules of logic—rules which it presupposes and subject to which science inescapably operates. Not many of these enormously important questions are within the grasp of science. Their elusiveness does not diminish their significance. Each can in fact be apprehended.

The more peculiar questions answered by Christianity fall into the class of truth which is inaccessible to science. No matter how irksome to the skeptic, the materialist, and the atheist, these questions can in fact be explored—but not in the laboratory. The endeavor to apprehend them is certainly no less important.

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As I stated in Chapter 1, nothing written by the best theist minds, let alone what I have written here, will trigger anything but rebuttals from militant atheists. Perhaps they might say the very same of their writings in the hands of the militant apologist. My more modest hope is to suggest reconsideration among those who have been tempted to abandon belief in God and to don the bullet-proof vest of atheism described earlier. As a believer, turned atheist, turned believer myself, my experience has been that what at first glance may appear to be a knock-down argument against God's existence has without exception turned out to be something less. In fact, in some cases the very argument intended as such, upon careful examination, turns out to be if not pro-God, quite convivial to belief that He exists. This to me is a validation of faith.

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More often than not, our initial philosophical or theological formulations do not survive. They must evolve. It often takes time and continued reflection to make sense of things. I have found that when I cannot seem to put the pieces together—when they don't make sense, the true source of the confusion is my misinterpretation of some fundamental component. The dramatic evolution of my interpretation of the concept of faith discussed above is one of many such instances. My confusion and condemnation of the principle was caused by my failure to understand a critical aspect of the subject. So there is no need to frantically rush to immediately resolve this or that criticism of belief. For one thing, more often than not these criticisms are advanced in cynicism by those who have a priori defined God and the nonmaterial out of existence. When we

do, we are like the house cat scrambling after the laser-pointer aimed by the skeptic—to the skeptic’s amusement and delight. We can dial it down and relax a little! To have faith is partly to permit reasonable inferences today and to accept that better and more complete explanations can come, and likely will come in time.

Even so, I cannot blame many within the new atheism. I believe many are motivated by a sincere desire to enlighten others. Having freed themselves from the shackles and blinders of belief, they militate to help others do the same. Yet there is also a subtle but nearly always unmistakable hostility to a belief system which they believe deceived and oppressed them and continues to do the same to a majority of the world's population. Yet the hostility on display can still seem inordinate, even when we are willing to impute the loftiest motivations to the activists.

The perennial success of religion in general and Christianity in particular may be another reason for some of the antipathy toward it. It is not surprising when success breeds a degree of contempt. It's the same reason why so many baseball fans around the country passionately hate the New York Yankees—they just won't go away and let someone else enjoy the spotlight! It can grow tiresome to see them continually win year after year after year. Something in our nature frequently compels us to root against the winner and against the favorite, against the incumbent. That compulsion doesn't seem to spring from a virtue. In fact, it can drive a person to bitterness and resentment. This is not to say that religion has not been its own worst enemy at times, fully deserving and directly inciting some of the fiercest opposition to it. There is no need to recount here all the misdeeds committed in the name of religion. There is no shortage of books on that subject along with wide-spread overstatements and hyperbole by some of the most militant anti-religionists. Suffice it to say here that, with respect to Christianity, historical atrocities in its name have most certainly been manifestations of the inevitable human failure to live by its precepts, not the actualization of the precepts themselves. No doubt the instances cited by opponents represent patent failures to adhere to the Christian message. To argue otherwise is simply untenable. In fact, we can argue that the atrocities would have never occurred had Christianity been more successful, not less. That is, had its principles and objectives been implemented more universally, many lives would have been spared.

All told, resentment of religion and faith is typically only a part of the emotions which animate most leading atheists. Often those who are resentful make efforts to veil it, if for no other reason than to get along. But there are stark exceptions to this rule. Some of the most popular militant atheist voices we have heard here, Richard Dawkins, Peter Boghossian, Richard Carrier, and the late

Christopher Hitchens to name just a handful, make no effort to camouflage their antagonism. In fact, they lead with it. They conclude with it. These are not the only ones to have helped the modern movement earn the title of “angry atheism.” But their hostility did not arise in a vacuum.

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Many atheists are exceptionally smart people. In this book we have examined the notion promoted by many atheists that intelligence and atheism are positively correlated and that this somehow lends credibility to atheist conclusions. By some measures it is undeniable that as intelligence increases so does the rate of atheism. It’s not a stretch to say that this notion is a plank in the atheist’s philosophical platform. Yet much like the risk of interpreting kindness for weakness, there is a risk of mistaking atheism for intelligence. It is a mistake to blindly conflate the two. For example, the implication that atheism is simply a feature of intelligence is horribly misleading. Conversely, many theists are incredibly smart people. The fact is that more of the brilliant and consequential scientists through history have unquestionably been believers in God. The broader drift toward atheism, particularly in the hard sciences, is a recent phenomenon. Nonetheless, earlier we met a number of brilliant, impeccably-credentialed, and highly respected scientists who are similarly devout in their belief in God, some so much so that they retired from their scientific pursuits to serve their chosen faiths.

You certainly wouldn’t know this from some of the more recent labels claimed by atheists: rationalists, thinkers, nones (as in “none” as an option for religious affiliation on some forms), and even “brights.” As a group they probably don’t risk being seen as overly modest—which doesn’t seem to concern them. Understandably atheists embrace these labels to attempt to differentiate themselves from believers. They would have us believe that to be rational is to disbelieve in God, as though disbelief is a property of intelligence. We have seen that this is not true. We are entitled to take back some of the non-believers’ new labels; theists can be equally rational, thoughtful, and bright.

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It is telling that I am compelled to make the case for the rationality of theists, even among the great minds in science and philosophy who should need

no defense. For example, the continued shift of academia toward an even more comprehensively materialist structure is sure to have a very real influence. Students are immersed in an environment which inflexibly presupposes a materialist atheist philosophy and effectively ridicules the slightest theistic impulses. We should not be at all surprised to find dramatic spikes in the rates of self-proclaimed agnosticism and atheism over the course of students' undergraduate and graduate experiences. In fact, this phenomenon might well be an example of natural selection and survival of the fittest in academia. The individuals who best adopt and reflect the materialist philosophy are more likely to find a long-term home as faculty and administration. They are the fittest in that environment so they flourish. As aficionados of natural selection, atheists are sure to recognize the power of the academic system to reinforce atheism in society, independent of its ultimate veracity. What's more, it is widely understood that natural selection is not concerned with the pursuit of truth. Thus the tug toward atheism in higher education tells us nothing about truth.

Of course the truth remains intact regardless of social trends. I am encouraged that, with very few exceptions, we are all equipped with the means to pursue truth and we are free to draw closer to it. It certainly is a struggle—I believe by design. Fortunately no Ph.D. or other advanced degree is needed—not even to engage in public dialogue. In the most important way, it is a perfectly level playing field. Thank Heavens.

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APPENDIX

FINE-TUNED VALUES

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For physical life to be possible in the universe, several characteristics must take on specific values, and these are listed below. In the case of several of these characteristics, and given the intricacy of their interrelationships, the indication of divine "fine tuning" seems incontrovertible.

1. Strong nuclear force constant
2. Weak nuclear force constant
3. Gravitational force constant
4. Electromagnetic force constant
5. Ratio of electromagnetic force constant to gravitational force constant
6. Ratio of proton to electron mass
7. Ratio of number of protons to number of electrons
8. Ratio of proton to electron charge
9. Expansion rate of the universe
10. Mass density of the universe
11. Baryon (proton and neutron) density of the universe
12. Space energy or dark energy density of the universe
13. Ratio of space energy density to mass density
14. Entropy level of the universe

15. Velocity of light
16. Age of the universe
17. Uniformity of radiation
18. Homogeneity of the universe
19. Average distance between galaxies
20. Average distance between galaxy clusters
21. Average distance between stars
22. Average size and distribution of galaxy clusters
23. Numbers, sizes, and locations of cosmic voids
24. Electromagnetic fine structure constant
25. Gravitational fine-structure constant
26. Decay rate of protons
27. Ground state energy level for helium-4
28. Carbon-12 to oxygen-16 nuclear energy level ratio
29. Decay rate for beryllium-8
30. Ratio of neutron mass to proton mass
31. Initial excess of nucleons over antinucleons
32. Polarity of the water molecule
33. Epoch for hypernova eruptions
34. Number and type of hypernova eruptions

35. Epoch for supernova eruptions
36. Number and types of supernova eruptions
37. Epoch for white dwarf binaries
38. Density of white dwarf binaries
39. Ratio of exotic matter to ordinary matter
40. Number of effective dimensions in the early universe
41. Number of effective dimensions in the present universe
42. Mass values for the active neutrinos
43. Number of different species of active neutrinos
44. Number of active neutrinos in the universe
45. Mass value for the sterile neutrino
46. Number of sterile neutrinos in the universe
47. Decay rates of exotic mass particles
48. Magnitude of the temperature ripples in cosmic background radiation
49. Size of the relativistic dilation factor
50. Magnitude of the Heisenberg uncertainty
51. Quantity of gas deposited into the deep intergalactic medium by the first supernovae
52. Positive nature of cosmic pressures
53. Positive nature of cosmic energy densities
54. Density of quasars

55. Decay rate of cold dark matter particles
56. Relative abundances of different exotic mass particles
57. Degree to which exotic matter self-interacts
58. Epoch at which the first stars (metal-free pop III stars) begin to form
59. Epoch at which the first stars (metal-free pop III stars) cease to form
60. Number density of metal-free pop III stars
61. Average mass of metal-free pop III stars
62. Epoch for the formation of the first galaxies
63. Epoch for the formation of the first quasars
64. Amount, rate, and epoch of decay of embedded defects
65. Ratio of warm exotic matter density to cold exotic matter density
66. Ratio of hot exotic matter density to cold exotic matter density
67. Level of quantization of the cosmic spacetime fabric
68. Flatness of universe's geometry
69. Average rate of increase in galaxy sizes
70. Change in average rate of increase in galaxy sizes throughout cosmic history
71. Constancy of dark energy factors
72. Epoch for star formation peak
73. Location of exotic matter relative to ordinary matter
74. Strength of primordial cosmic magnetic field

75. Level of primordial magnetohydrodynamic turbulence
76. Level of charge-parity violation
77. Number of galaxies in the observable universe
78. Polarization level of the cosmic background radiation
79. Date for completion of second reionization event of the universe
80. Date of subsidence of gamma-ray burst production
81. Relative density of intermediate mass stars in the early history of the universe
82. Water's temperature of maximum density
83. Water's heat of fusion
84. Water's heat of vaporization
85. Number density of clumpuscles (dense clouds of cold molecular hydrogen gas) in the universe
86. Average mass of clumpuscles in the universe
87. Location of clumpuscles in the universe
88. Dioxygen's kinetic oxidation rate of organic molecules
89. Level of paramagnetic behavior in dioxygen
90. Density of ultra-dwarf galaxies (or supermassive globular clusters) in the middle-aged universe
91. Degree of spacetime warping and twisting by general relativistic factors
92. Percentage of the initial mass function of the universe made up of intermediate mass stars
93. Strength of the cosmic primordial magnetic field

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