

Re: Richard Dawkins – the God Delusion – Chapter 1.1 – A Deeply Religious Non–Believer

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 - *Date:* Mon, 11 Feb 2008 17:02:57 +0000
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On Sun, 10 Feb 2008 04:08:04 -0800 (PST), Paul Grieg put finger to keyboard and typed:

Thanks to Gordon for pointing out this chapter can be found here:

<http://richarddawkins.net/firstChapter.1>

Do you think Dawkins' suggestion that we should all refrain from using 'God' as a metaphor is a good one?

Yes, I agree. God isn't a metaphor, God is a reality and using the word as a metaphor can tend to confuse things.

Do you agree that Dawkins definition of God as 'a supernatural creator that it is appropriate to worship' is a good one?'

It's good enough. I think it's a reasonable, neutral term even if it doesn't cover all the nuances that most religions would assign to the word.

Are you convinced that Einstein and Hawking actually do not believe in God?

I don't know. I'm not in a position to judge the beliefs of other people by means of some rather enigmatic public statements. (Well, I'm pretty sure that Einstein doesn't believe in God, since he's dead (although he may well be with God), but that's another matter).

Are E & H just using God as a metaphor for 'the universe'?

Possibly. If they are I'd prefer it if they didn't. If they're not then I'd prefer it if they were clearer.

Dawkins quotes Julian Baggini's (excellent) 'Atheism: A Very Short Introduction' in defining the atheists (usual) commitment to naturalism. This suggests that atheists usually believe there is only physical stuff in the universe but "out of this stuff comes minds, beauty, emotions, moral values...the full gamut of phenomena that gives richness to human life." Isn't this the simplest hypothesis that fits with what we observe?

No. The preponderance of religious belief in human society makes the simplest hypothesis one that there is more to the universe than the physical.

Why do people need to add a Christian God to the stew?

If you start from the simplest hypothesis, then the next step is to try and find out exactly what it is that's beyond our universe. Christianity gives the most plausible explanation for that.

A Catholic bishop suggested that Einstein was unqualified to make comments about religion. Do you agree?

I can't answer that without seeing exactly what the bishop wrote, and the context in which he wrote it. Einstein was obviously not a qualified theologian or even known to have any particular knowledge of the subject as a layman, but one of the aspects of Judeo–Christian tradition is that it isn't necessary to have any qualifications in order to have valid opinions or experience.

Dawkins suggests that religion is not a proper field in which one can claim expertise.

I think Dawkins' claim is rather silly. Even if religion is a delusion, it's still such a common human experience that it qualifies as an important study for sociologists and psychologists. You can be an expert in religion without necessarily believing everything you study.

Having said that, I also agree with the opposite viewpoint, that only

someone working within a religion can truly understand it.

Would you defer to the expertise of a 'fairyologist' on the exact colour and shape of fairy wings?

If there were as many of them as there are members of the main religions, then yes – at least as far as accepting that what they told me is a reasonable representation of what they actually believe, even if I disagree with it.

Dawkins says, "Pantheists don't believe in a supernatural God at all, but use the word God as a non–supernatural synonym for Nature." (Schopenhauer said this about Spinoza). Do you think you can define pantheism this way?

I think that only a pantheist could answer this question accurately. As I understand it, pantheism neither requires nor precludes the supernatural – it's perfectly possible to see the supernatural as part of the universal whole, just as much as the natural is. The concept of a pantheistic universe which incorporates the supernatural is broadly the basis of "New Age" philosophy.

Wikipedia distinguishes between three main strands of pantheism, only one of which ("Naturalistic Pantheism") would fit Dawkins' description here.

Could most members of the public who say they are religious actually be woolly pantheists? And are they soon to become extinct? :-)

I think that a kind of woolly supernatural pantheism is very common, as evidenced by the popularity of tarot, horoscopes, fortune–telling and various mystical practices. I don't think it's likely to become extinct in the near future. I think it's a greater threat to Christianity, at least in the individualistic West, than is atheism.

Is the physicists use of the word God in their books, as Dawkins says, 'an act of intellectual high treason'? [Answer: Yes]

It's only treason if you think there is something being betrayed. And it's only betrayal if allegiance due to one authority is being given to another. What other authority are physicists who use the word "God" giving allegiance to?

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Mark

<http://www.BritishSurnames.co.uk> – What does your surname say about you?

"I'm gonna be there tomorrow"

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