

God, the Church, and Society: Turning Back the Tide of Atheism with *The God Question*

What happens, in a high profile TV and DVD series, when atheism clashes with theism on the interpretation of contemporary science? What impact does it have on viewers? How can your ministry benefit from it?

The God Question, released in 2013, is being broadcast on mainstream television in Europe, Asia and Africa to a potential audience of 300 million people- and growing. It is also available worldwide on DVD as *Exploring the God Question*. Its reach and impact are spreading fast. Among the series contributors are world renowned scientists, philosophers and theologians-including regular ELF speakers John Lennox, William Lane Craig and other highly credible Christian voices- who speak powerfully into the public debate. A unique characteristic of this resource is that it represents both sides of the debate, so contributing a rare sense of balance that makes it widely acceptable and creates opportunities for the Christian world view to be heard in contexts from which it is often excluded.

In this seminar, participants will:

- view and discuss excerpts from *The God Question* series
- learn how to use *The God Question* series and its underlying approach as a powerful tool to equip Christians to deal convincingly with issues of science and faith
- consider the effectiveness of the resource as an evangelistic tool and in stimulating public debate about God
- discover how the series is being used by teachers in schools
- hear about plans to translate the resources into Spanish, Latin Spanish, French, Italian, Russian and Mandarin Chinese

Find out how *The God Question* is ready to be used effectively in your country or region to educate, encourage, and engage Christian leaders in crucially important issues of science and faith as well as be a focus for outreach to those without Christian faith.

For more information on the series visit www.thegodquestion.tv.

For enquiries contact info@kharisproductions.com

Peter S. Williams (www.peterswilliams.com) studied philosophy at Cardiff University (BA), Sheffield University (MA) and at the University of East Anglia in Norwich (MPhil). He spent three years as a student pastor at Holy Trinity church Leicester before moving to Southampton to work alongside the Christian educational charity Damaris Trust (www.damaris.org), where as ‘Philosopher in Residence’ he leads Philosophy and Ethics conferences for sixth form students as well as undertaking various writing, speaking and broadcasting engagements. Peter is also Assistant Professor in Communication and Worldviews at Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication, NLA University, in Norway. His publications include *A Sceptic’s Guide to Atheism* (Paternoster, 2009), *Understanding Jesus: Five Ways to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Paternoster, 2011), *C.S. Lewis vs. the New Atheists* (Paternoster, 2013) and *A Faithful Guide to Philosophy* (Paternoster, 2013).

Lars Dahle is a theologian, educator, preacher and apologist. He works as Vice Rector at Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication in Kristiansand, Norway, where he has lectured in worldviews, ethics and apologetics since 1991. Lars wrote his PhD on Acts 17:16-34. It is titled: “An Apologetic Model Then and Now?” (Open University, UK). He is the Lausanne Senior Associate for Media Engagement as well as a member of The Damaris Norway Steering Committee, a member of the

European Leadership Forum Steering Committee and is Chair of the Senior Advisory Committee for NKSS (the Norwegian student movement within IFES). In addition, Lars leads the European Leadership Forum Media Communicators Network. Lars has his own blog – Media Messages Matter (www.larsdahle.no).

THE KEY ISSUES & THE THEIST vs. ATHEIST WORLDVIEW RESPONSES

Programme 1: Cosmology

The Questions

1. Why is there something rather than nothing?
2. The universe is temporally finite in the past. What does that imply?
3. Does the fine-tuning of the universe point to a fine-tuner?

The Atheist Response

1. Something can come out of ‘nothing’ (Lawrence Krauss).
2. Quantum Mechanics shows that the first event could have happened without a cause.
3. The specificity of the cosmic fine-tuning is a chance consequence of being winners in a cosmic lottery: Either we were very lucky, or we postulate a multiverse (even although there is no demonstrable evidence) to increase the chances of a finely tuned cosmos.

The Theist Response

1. The existence of something rather than nothing is consistent with the doctrine of creation ex nihilo by a necessary being (cf. the ‘Leibnizian’ type of cosmological argument).
2. The temporal finiteness of the universe’s past suggests the need for a transcendent cause (cf. the ‘kalam’ type of cosmological argument).
3. The fine-tuning is a strong indicator that intelligence deliberately designed cosmic circumstances compatible with life.

Programme 2: Life & Evolution

The Questions

1. Why is there life?
2. What explains the successful development of life?
3. Why does earth have an eco-system that permits such diversity and development of life?

Programme 2: The Atheist Response

1. By chance there happened to be an environment with the pre-conditions that somehow led to the emergence of life (i.e. we don't know/we were lucky).
2. Random variation and natural selection working over large periods of time are *assumed* to be capable of explaining the diversity of life.
3. We were lucky/there must be a lot of planets with varying conditions.

Programme 2: The Theist Response

1. God has intentions and purposes related to his valuing of the things that life exhibits: beauty, relationships, moral values.
2. God produces diversity. He clearly does do this through secondary causes. A secondary issue is whether God *only* uses secondary causes in producing the diversity of life.
3. There is not only cosmic fine-tuning but 'local' fine-tuning.

Programme 3: Mind & Consciousness

The Questions

1. Are human beings more than matter, more than their brains and bodies?
2. Can matter be mind? Can materialism/naturalism explain mind?

3. How credible is it to attribute transformed behaviour to a relationship with God? Is God-consciousness, manifest in so many different ways, delusional and wishful thinking or rational evidence for the existence of the creator?

Programme 3: The Atheist Response

1. Humans are nothing but complex arrangements of matter with a particular history, and we have the subjective value we confer upon ourselves.
2. Evolution is the most obvious source to consider. It is believed to produce increasingly complex forms. Mind is, or is a product of, the matter we call brain.
3. Behavioural transformation attributed to God is delusional and a religious placebo. Behavioural changes can be explained through a combination of natural and social sciences.

Programme 3: The Theist Response

1. Most Christians (and most people) are dualists and perceive the mind to be a distinct entity from the brain that, at least under certain conditions, can exist without the brain (cf. near-death experiences as well as theological beliefs about the afterlife). Theists identify that human minds have been made for interaction with the creator. (A minority of theists are 'physicalists' and would claim that matter is nothing but mind.)
2. The majority view among scholars of the mind-body problem is that there is no explanation about how matter could produce mind. Many theists argue that the existence and nature of mind provides compelling evidence of divine purpose (cf. arguments from mind & rationality).
3. Transformed behaviour can be evidence that interaction with the divine spirit can have transformational impact (cf. arguments from religious experience).

Suggested Resources:

www.thegodquestion.tv/

<http://snakkomgud.no/>

www.bethinking.org/

www.discovery.org/csc/

www.stephencmeyer.org/

www.reasonablefaith.org/

www.peterswilliams.com/ (for free papers, podcast, vids, twitter feed, etc.)

‘Christianity & Science Playlist’

www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWjeYJfOKB1YYXsInZ5GIPL_

‘Cosmological Arguments for God Playlist’

www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWjEXjiEjnCCbr_Qnu-1UbAa

‘Cosmic Fine Tuning Playlist’

www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWgDQGaBWATqNMu4Y9fdy65j

‘Intelligent Design Playlist’

www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWjckJboK1rfuBKPCHiMFTSO

‘Mind-Body Dualism Playlist’ www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWh0MdW-hlHBPYLRWgFjzhPT

Michael J. Behe, *The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism* (Free Press, 2007)

Michael J. Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, 10th anniversary edition (Free Press, 2006)

William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, third edition (Crossway, 2008)

William Lane Craig & J.P. Moreland ed.’s, *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis* (Routledge, 2000)

Paul Davies, *The Goldilocks Enigma* (Penguin, 2007)

Paul Davies, *The Fifth Miracle: The Search for the Origin of Life* (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1998)

William A. Dembski & Jonathan Wells, *The Design of Life: Discovering Signs of Intelligence in Biological Systems* (Foundation for Thought and Ethics, 2008)

Michael J. Denton, *Nature’s Destiny: How The Laws Of Biology Reveal Purpose In The Universe* (Free Press, 1998)

Phil Dowe, *Galileo, Darwin and Hawking: The Interplay of Science, Reason, and Religion* (Eerdmans, 2005)

Anthony Flew with Roy Abraham Varghese, *There Is A God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (HarperOne, 2007)

David H. Glass, *Atheism’s New Clothes: Exploring and Exposing the Claims of the New Atheists* (Apollos, 2012)

Stewart Goetz & Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Eerdmans, 2008)

Guillermo Gonzalez & Jay W. Richards, *The Privileged Planet: How Our Place In The Cosmos Is Designed For Discovery* (Regnery, 2004)

Bruce L. Gordon & William A. Dembski (ed.’s), *The Nature of Nature: Examining the Role of Naturalism in Science* (ISI Books, 2011)

- Gary R. Habermas & J.P. Moreland, *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence for Immortality* (Crossway, 1998)
- Rodney Holder, *Big Bang, Big God: A Universe Designed for Life?* (Lion, 2013)
- James Hannam, *God's Philosophers: How the Medieval World Laid the Foundations of Modern Science* (Icon, 2009)
- John C. Lennox, *God And Stephen Hawking: Whose Design Is It Anyway?* (Lion, 2010)
- John C. Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Lion, 2009)
- Angus Menuge, *Agents Under Fire: Materialism and the Rationality of Science* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004)
- Stephen C. Meyer, *Darwin's Doubt: The Explosive Origin Of Animal Life And The Case For Intelligent Design* (HarperOne, 2013)
- Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence For Intelligent Design* (HarperOne, 2009)
- Bradley Monton, *Seeking God in Science: An Atheist Defends Intelligent Design* (Broadview, 2009)
- J.P. Moreland & William Lane Craig ed.'s, *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)
- J.P. Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism* (SCM Press, 2009)
- J.P. Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God: A Theistic Argument* (Routledge, 2008)
- Thomas Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos: Why the materialist neo-darwinian conception of nature is almost certainly false* (Oxford, 2012)
- Terence L. Nichols, *The Sacred Cosmos: Christian Faith and the Challenge of Naturalism* (Brazos, 2003)
- John Polkinghorne, *Science & Christian Belief: Theological Reflections of a Bottom-Up Thinker* (SPCK, 1994)
- Del Ratzsch, *Science & Its Limits: The Natural Sciences in Christian Perspective* (Apollos, 2000)
- Victor Reppert, *C.S. Lewis' Dangerous Idea: In Defence of the Argument from Reason* (IVP, 2003)
- James F. Sennett & Douglas Groothuis (ed.s), *In Defence of Natural Theology: A Post-Humeian Assessment* (IVP, 2005)
- J.J.C. Smart & J.J. Haldane, *Atheism & Theism*, second edition (Blackwell, 2003)
- Keith Ward, *The Big Questions In Science And Religion* (Templeton Foundation Press, 2008)
- Keith Ward, *God, Chance & Necessity* (OneWorld, 1996)
- John G. West (ed.), *The Magician's Twin: C.S. Lewis on Science, Scientism, and Society* (Discovery Institute Press, 2012)
- Peter S. Williams, *C.S. Lewis vs. the New Atheists* (Paternoster, 2013)
- Peter S. Williams, *A Faithful Guide to Philosophy* (Paternoster, 2013)