

# **Deconstructing Dawkins' Defence: A Critical Response to the New Edition of *The God Delusion***

In 2016 Richard Dawkins published a tenth anniversary, second edition of his best-selling book *The God Delusion*, including a new introduction in which he attempted to defend the key points of his book from critics. This workshop will interact with Dawkins on the central question of God's existence: does the appearance of design in the world contribute to the case for God, and does Dawkins have a knock-down argument against belief in a creator?

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## **I. 'The God Temptation'**

### **A. Dawkins on Specified Complexity**

**Dawkins:** 'You and I, and every other living creature, are machines of ineffable complexity, complexity of a magnitude to challenge credulity.'

'Complexity here means statistical improbability in a non-random direction, the direction of seeming designed for a purpose.' – *The God Delusion*, second edition, new introduction (Black Swan, 2016)

**William Lane Craig:** 'in addition to high improbability there also needs to be conformity to an independently given pattern. When these two elements are present, we have... "specified complexity," which is the tip-off to intelligent design. Thus, for example, in a poker game any deal of cards is equally and highly improbable, but if you find that every time a certain player deals he gets all four aces, you can bet this is not the result of chance but of design.'

### **B. The Organic Design Problem**

**Dawkins:** 'every animal embodies a statistical complexity of detail...' – *The God Delusion*, second edition, new introduction (Black Swan, 2016)

1. i.e. every animal exhibits 'improbability in a non-random direction', that is, specified complexity

### **C. The Cosmic Design Problem**

**Dawkins:** 'the laws and constants of physics are fine-tuned in such a way as to set up the conditions under which... Eyes and peacocks, humans and their brains, will come into existence.' – *The God Delusion*, second edition, new introduction (Black Swan, 2016)

## II. Rebutting the Organic Design Problem?

### A. Darwinism to the Rescue?

**Dawkins:** ‘Darwin patiently tells us exactly how the Trick of Life works: cumulative natural selection.’ – p. 13.

1. So far as the question of the *origin* of life able to undergo evolution, Dawkins’ appeal to Darwinian natural selection is a red herring.

**Atheist Michael Ruse:** ‘we have today a vocal anti-Darwinian party, consisting somewhat surprising not only of the evangelical Christians of the American South but of some of today’s most eminent atheist philosophers...’ – ‘Darwinism as religion: what literature tells us about evolution’ <http://blog.oup.com/2016/10/darwinism-as-religion/>

**Atheist Jerry Fodor:** ‘it’s important to see that the phylogeny [i.e. common descent] could be true even if the adaptationism isn’t... the classical Darwinist account of evolution as primarily driven by natural selection is in trouble on both conceptual and empirical grounds... an appreciable number of perfectly reasonable biologists are coming to think that the theory of natural selection can no longer be taken for granted...’ - ‘Why Pigs Don’t Have Wings’, *London Review of Books*, 18th October 2007 [www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n20/fodo01.html](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n20/fodo01.html)

**Atheist Thomas Nagel:** ‘the dominant scientific consensus... faces problems of probability that I believe are not taken seriously enough, both with respect to the evolution of life forms through accidental mutation and natural selection and with respect to the formation from dead matter of physical systems capable of such evolution. The more we learn about the intricacy of the genetic code and its control of the chemical processes of life, the harder those problems seem...’ – *Mind & Cosmos*, p. 9-10.

## III. Rebutting the Cosmic Design Problem?

### A. The Multiverse Defence

#### 1. Dawkin’s Multiverse Argument

**Premise 1:** *If* there were enough different universes, *then* the specified fine tuning of our universe wouldn’t be complex (unlikely) enough to justify a design inference

**Premise 2:** There *are* enough different universes

**Conclusion:** Therefore, the fine tuning of our universe does not justify a design inference

#### a. ‘If, Then’ Doesn’t Do It

- a. *If* X number of monkeys existed *then* they could type Shakespeare’s works by chance
- b. Anyone faced with the ‘many monkeys hypothesis’ as an explanation for Shakespeare’s works will ask if there’s any *independent* reason to think X number of monkeys exist
- c. If not, they’ll favour the single author design hypothesis

## b. Multiverse, What Multiverse?

**Agnostic Jim Holt:** ‘Since other universes are, by definition, not directly observable from our own, the burden of proof is clearly on those who claim they exist.’ – *Why Does The World Exist?*, p. 165.

**Theoretical Physicist Brian Greene:** ‘people should be skeptical of multiverse theories because there is no evidence supporting their existence’ – Tia Ghose, ‘Stranger Things: How realistic are Parallel Worlds?’ *LiveScience*, August 2016.

**Theoretical Physicist Carlo Rovelli:** ‘I see no reason for rejecting *a priori* the idea that there is more in nature than the portion of spacetime we see. But I haven't seen any convincing evidence so far.’ – ‘Can Physics Ever Prove the Multiverse is Real?’, *SmithsonianMag*, April 2016.

**Stuart Clark & Richard Webb:** ‘The... difficulty... is how you get convincing evidence for the existence of any of them... by allowing every possibility besides the one you're probing to play out somewhere in the multiverse, science robs itself of its predictive power.’ – *New Scientist*, September 2016.

## c. Evidence Against a Multiverse

**Roger Penrose:** ‘consider how ridiculously cheaper (in the sense of improbabilities) it would be simply to produce, by mere random collisions of particles, the entire solar system with all its life read-made, or even just a few conscious brains... So the problem is: why did we not come about *this* way, rather than from an absurdly less probable Big Bang, after  $1.4 \times 10^{10}$  tedious years of evolution? It seems to me that this conundrum simply points to... the incorrectness of the bubble-universe idea.’ – *Fashion, Faith and Fantasy in the New Physics of the Universe* (Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 327-328.

**William Lane Craig:** ‘the odds of our universe’s low entropy condition obtaining by chance alone are on the order of  $1:10^{10(123)}$ ... The odds of our solar system’s being formed instantly by random collisions of particles is, on the other hand, about  $1:10^{10(60)}$ , a vast number, but inconceivably smaller than  $10^{10(123)}$ .... So if our universe were but one member of a collection of randomly ordered worlds, then it is vastly more probable that we should be observing a much smaller universe.’ [www.reasonablefaith.org/design-from-fine-tuning#ixzz3IEIFQxf](http://www.reasonablefaith.org/design-from-fine-tuning#ixzz3IEIFQxf)

## B. Dawkins Attempted Philosophical Rebuttal

### 1. Dawkin’s ‘Who Made God?’ Argument

**Dawkins:** ‘the designer himself, in order to be capable of designing, would have to be another complex entity of the kind that, in his turn, needs the same kind of explanation.’ – *The God Delusion*, second edition, new introduction (Black Swan, 2016)

#### a. Explaining the lesser by the greater



- Do we make an explanatory advance if we explain this complex portrait in terms of the yet more complex Rembrandt?

AllPosters

#### b. Being the Best Explanation

**William Lane Craig:** ‘in order for an explanation to be the best explanation, one needn’t have an explanation of the explanation... such a requirement would generate an infinite regress, so that everything becomes inexplicable...’ - ‘Why I Believe in God’, in Norman L. Geisler & Paul K. Hoffman (ed.’s), *Why I Am A Christian*, (Baker, 2001), p. 73.

#### 2. Dawkin’s Defence of Dawkins’ Rebuttal

**Dawkins:** ‘critics of my book...Grasping at straws, they tried to deny that a god capable of designing something complex must himself be complex.’

‘[God] has to be clever enough to calculate... the exact values of the physical constants that would fine tune the universe... You call that simple? ...God has enough bandwidth to listen to the prayers and praises of billions of people simultaneously... God may be almighty, all-seeing, all-knowing... but the one thing he cannot be, if he is to match up even minimally to his job description, is *simple*.’

#### a. Understanding Complexity & Simplicity

- ‘a god capable of designing something **complex** [i.e. something exhibiting the ‘specific complexity’ of *contingent* ‘statistical improbability in a non-random direction’] **must himself be complex** [i.e. something exhibiting *contingent* ‘statistical improbability in a non-random direction’].’



#### b. Misunderstanding Divine Simplicity

**Richard Swinburne:** ‘theism postulates for its one cause, a person [with] infinite power... Infinite knowledge... and infinite freedom.’ - *Is There A God?* (OUP, 2010), p. 40 – Dawkins misattributes this to page 43!

**Dawkins:** ‘God is simple, for Swinburne, *because there is only one of him...* Yet that one [God] has enough bandwidth to listen to the prayers and praises of billions of people simultaneously...’ – my italics.

- c. Swinburne’s point isn’t just that there’s only one God, but that God doesn’t just have some power, he is almighty, etc. and this is metaphysically simpler than explanations framed with reference to things where one can ask ‘why this much and not less or more?’

**Jay Wesley Richards:** ‘the doctrine of simplicity [is principally] the claim that God is not made of parts... God is not composite, in the sense of being made up of elements or properties more fundamental than God is.’


d. This doesn't entail that God doesn't have distinguishable properties, or that God isn't a Trinity of distinct divine persons, etc.

e. Complexity of Function not Structure

a. Dawkins: ‘I really don't see what you're saying’

**Agnostic Sir Anthony Kenny**

Demonstrating complexity of function doesn't demonstrate complexity of structure



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#### IV. Conclusion: Deconstructing Dawkin's Defence of *The God Delusion*

- A. None of Dawkins' observations is an argument showing that to fulfil His job description God must be complex and not simple *in the relevant senses*
- B. Dawkins *equivocates* over the terms 'complex' and 'simple' in order to *beg the question* against God being a simple, necessary being
- C. A book called *The Contingent God Delusion* wouldn't have sold so well...
- D. Dawkins' attempted rebuttal of the design argument does *not* remain intact, having been subjected to inescapably devastating criticism!
- E. As far as Dawkins shows, the apprehension of design remains a good reason to believe in a 'creator of heaven and earth'

### ***Suggested Resources:***

#### **Audio:**

Peter S. Williams, 'Dissecting Dawkins' Defence of *The God Delusion*'  
[http://peterswilliams.podbean.com/mf/feed/rr7cd9/SUCU\\_Dawkins\\_Delusion\\_2016.mp3](http://peterswilliams.podbean.com/mf/feed/rr7cd9/SUCU_Dawkins_Delusion_2016.mp3)

#### **Video:**

Peter S. Williams, 'Have the New Atheists over-reached themselves?'  
<https://youtu.be/kUEU-EWbJYA>

- 'If C.S. Lewis met Richard Dawkins' <https://youtu.be/28F4NA0ITnQ>

YouTube Playlist, 'Concerning the New Atheism'  
[www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWifP3P\\_gIS8MMsRXLOGDiG\\_](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWifP3P_gIS8MMsRXLOGDiG_)

YouTube Playlist: 'Specified Complexity'  
[www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWiQrIEmUwrpyxVxVaZMc4i\\_](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWiQrIEmUwrpyxVxVaZMc4i_)

YouTube Playlist, 'The Origin of Life'  
[www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWggFeEP9H7k1Lyccfxzv0Sr](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWggFeEP9H7k1Lyccfxzv0Sr)

YouTube Playlist, 'Cosmic Fine Tuning'  
[www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWj4aeE76A1vjLvPqWieH8tE](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWj4aeE76A1vjLvPqWieH8tE)

YouTube Playlist, 'Who designed the designer/caused God?'  
[www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWiHxffWcRQzOZmdZV5AEHei](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWiHxffWcRQzOZmdZV5AEHei)

#### **Reading:**

Peter S. Williams, *A Faithful Guide to Philosophy* (Paternoster, 2013)

- *C.S. Lewis vs. the New Atheists* (Paternoster, 2013)