

Response to Richard Dawkins's comments on my writings in his book *The God Delusion*.

I am grateful to Richard Dawkins for having looked at some of my writings. Here are very brief responses to the objections which he quite properly raises. Proper answers to the objections are to be found in the other writings of mine to which I refer below.

1. On p.64 Dawkins claims that my theodicy, that is my attempt to justify 'suffering in a world run by God' is 'beyond satire'. Given that God cannot do the logically impossible (as Dawkins acknowledges that I claim - along, I would add, with many philosophical theologians including Aquinas), it is a serious philosophical issue whether God can give humans free will to choose between good and evil and at the same time significant responsibility for ourselves and each other (including for our own characters) - which many people think to be a great good, without also permitting quite a lot of suffering. Dawkins should enter that philosophical debate, and not try to win by shouting. [Dawkins's claim that I 'attempted to justify the Holocaust' is highly ambiguous between the claim (1) that I attempted to justify the Nazis conducting the Holocaust, and (2) that I attempted to justify God not interfering to stop the Holocaust. I certainly did not attempt to justify the very wicked conduct of the Nazis, but I did and do attempt to justify God's non-interference.] For my full theodicy see my book *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, and (briefly) chs 10 and 11 of *The Existence of God* (second edition, 2004), from which Dawkins quotes, but again - without arguing any point. It is of course also a serious philosophico-scientific issue whether we do have free will; for my (provisional) views in defence of the view that we do have free will, see my *The Evolution of the Soul*, ch 13.
2. On p.65 Dawkins quotes my remark that 'too much evidence [for the existence of God] might not be good for us', and then understandably dismisses it as (in effect) absurd. Here the fault is mine - I should have given a reference to some place where I

point out the advantages of having to rely on a balance of probability, and not total certainty, with respect to the existence of God. (The reason why I did not do so is that the journal in which my comments appeared, *Science and Theology News*, wanted their articles to be self-standing, and not to include references to other writing. I should have insisted on a reference to a place where I defend the view in question.) For my defence of the advantages of a lack of total certainty, see pp. 267-72 of the second edition (2004) of my book *The Existence of God*. The basic point is that a good God (like a good parent) would surely want humans (by their own free choice) to form a naturally good character, and so – for example- to become naturally inclined to help the poor and starving out of love for them because they are poor and starving. But if God made it totally certain that he exists and will give a wonderful everlasting life to those who have formed a naturally good character, then inevitably humans will find themselves strongly inclined to try to form such a character and so to help the poor and starving, not out of love for the poor and starving but in order to please God and to gain everlasting life. This latter is a good motive for any action, but not always the best motive. It will be easier for humans to form a natural inclination to help the poor and starving out of love, if the existence of God and the prospect of everlasting life are not (at least for a considerable period of our earthly lives) totally certain.

3. On pp.147-50 Dawkins criticizes my view that the God whom I postulate (one personal being, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly free - and so perfectly good) is a simple being. He writes that ‘a God capable of continuously monitoring and controlling the individual status of every particle in the universe cannot be simple’. And why does he think this? He doesn’t say, but I take it that his reason for thinking this is that, if God gets his knowledge and exercises his power in the way in which we do (via brains) he will need to be very very complicated, since ordinary human brains with their limited powers of control are very complicated things. But (1) I am not the

same thing as my brain. The full story of the world would need to include both what happened to me and what happened to my brain. Split brain experiments illustrate this - see, for example, chs 8 and 9 of my book *The Evolution of the Soul*. And I (a simple entity) control quite a bit of my brain (a much more complicated entity) so that I can make it cause many different motions of my limbs, tongue etc. And (2) whether a hypothesis is simple or not is an intrinsic feature of that hypothesis, not a matter of its relation to observable data. Whether the hypothesis is such as to lead us to expect the data is a second and different criterion for assessing a hypothesis . Whether the hypothesis that one criminal committed all of some set of murders, or whether Newton's theory that all bodies attract each other with forces proportional to  $mm^1/r^2$  is

simple is something we can see by studying it. But, to be probably true, the hypothesis must also satisfy the criterion of leading us to expect the data. The postulation of one entity (God) with the stated properties (scientists prefer hypotheses postulating infinite qualities to hypotheses postulating very large finite quantities - other things, that is satisfaction of other criteria, being equal) is intrinsically simple. I also argue that it leads us to expect the enormously complex data (enormously large numbers of protons, photons etc. behaving in exactly the same way) For a detailed examination of the concept of simplicity, see my book *Epistemic Justification*, ch 4; and for an account of why it leads us to expect the data, see *Is there a God?* ch. 4 and (more fully) *The Existence of God*, chs. 6, 7 and 8.

I apologize for referring to so many of my own writings, but any justification of one's belief that there is, or that there is not, a God, at the highest intellectual level will inevitably bring in one's views about most philosophical issues. It is not possible to circumvent the serious philosophical discussions of these issues.