

Scientism – the Restoration of Certainty.

Keep an open mind – that’s the secret. – Doctor Who [Tom Baker]

I consider it only rational to believe that whatever cannot
be disproven must be allowed for. – Ilfinor

All truth is rational. – Ilfinor

This essay is a criticism of certain claims made by Richard Dawkins in his book *River out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*, Basic Books, New York, 1995.

Wikipedia defines scientism thusly: *Scientism* is the opinion that science and the scientific method are the best or only way to render truth about the world and reality.

Then what are we to say about philosophy, art, wisdom, intuition, spirituality?

I believe that those who believe in scientism do so out of a fanatical need to apprehend all knowledge in the image of empirical certainty. A being of that mindset makes ‘scientific dogmatism’ easy to adhere to, while strongly condemning anyone who displays dogmatism in some nonscientific domain. But what shall we say is the role of skepticism in the scientific method? Has it been lost in the rush to cover up God and find certainty in empiricism?

Wikipedia defines scientific skepticism thusly: Scientific skepticism or rational skepticism (also spelled scepticism), sometimes referred to as skeptical inquiry,^[1] is a position in which one questions the veracity of claims lacking empirical evidence.

But I submit that this doesn’t go near far enough. How about some examples? 1) Lorentz had a great ether theory that used the Lorentz transformation equations and was supported by a vast amount of empirical evidence. Yet, Einstein was skeptical that one needed to postulate the existence of the rest space of the luminiferous ether, which Einstein regarded as the embodiment of an absolute space by which absolute velocities could be defined. Einstein invented special relativity, which had no need whatever of Lorentz’s ether or of any absolute rest space.

The physicists of Bohr’s early years had a firm belief that the laws of classical electromagnetism could not be violated in any theory of the atom. Empirical evidence for classical electromagnetism was abundant at this time. Yet, Bohr eventually became skeptical of this rule, and, after being willing to flagrantly violate it, he was able to come up with the Bohr model of the hydrogen atom – a revolutionary breakthrough in physics at the time.

Let's now look at some of Richard Dawkins quotes from his book *River Out of Eden*. Let's look at evidences in these quotes of Dawkins attempting to reject an honorable skepticism in his readers and replace it with certainty after the manner of his prejudices about the world. Let's be clear here: The issue is **not** whether Dawkins himself holds to these dogmas, but where he is trying, through the language he uses, to convince his readers to accept his dogmas as their own and call them 'scientific'.

Page: preface 12:

In one way or another, all my books have been devoted to expounding and exploring the almost limitless power of the Darwinian principle—power unleashed whenever and wherever there is enough time for the consequences of primordial self-replication to unfold. *River Out of Eden* continues this mission and brings to an extraterrestrial climax the story of the repercussions that can ensue when the phenomena of replicators is injected into the hitherto humble game of atomic billiards.

So, God, who created the heavens and the earth and all that is therein, is denied 'omnipotence' by these atheists, yet the evolutionists are willing to grant to the *Darwinian principle* 'almost limitless power'.

page 19:

Genes, on the other hand, can self-copy for ten million generations and scarcely degrade at all. Darwinism works only because—apart from discrete mutations which natural selection either weeds out or preserves—the copying process is perfect. Only a digital genetic system is capable of sustaining Darwinism over eons of geological time.

I dare say that Dawkins's claim that genes 'can self-copy for ten million generations and scarcely degrade at all' over the tens of thousands of species to which he seems to be granting oversight, has no direct empirical evidence. To test this claim properly, one would need to be clinically analyzing these millions of genes over those millions of generations, that could take millions of years (depending on the specie), yet, the ability to do so was only technically doable in the 1990s, and to this day has only been done recently and only on a very limited basis. What Dawkins has given us is his personal article of faith, and he should identify it as such.

page 33:

Science shares with religion the claim that it answers deep questions about origins the nature of life and the cosmos but there the resemblance ends. Scientific beliefs are supported by evidence, and they get results myths and faiths are not and do not.

Dawkins is not an authority over the actual results I get from my faith in Jesus. In mid-June of 2008, by faith in Jesus, I was, in one day, delivered from my gambling urge, my alcohol drinking, and, most of all, from my sex addiction, which I had lived with since I was a child. Up to that day, I had self-identified as a gay man for the previous 22 years, but after it, I identified as an asexual man (and have since to this day, successfully lived as such), dedicated to the work of Jesus Christ. So, I ask you, Dawkins, to quit thinking of yourself as empowered to speak for the results people get when they have real faith in Jesus Christ.

page 46:

Not only is doctor Margulis's theory of origins—the cell as an enclosed garden of bacteria—incomparably more inspiring, exciting and uplifting than the story of the Garden of Eden. It has the additional advantage of being almost certainly true.

What is your epistemology here, Dawkins? Is it that that which is most subjectively inspiring to you must be certainly true? Your dogmatism is obvious and your epistemology faulty. So, Dawkins feels justified to convince his readers to throw off scientific skepticism in the mad dash for what's "almost certainly true" and subjectively pleasing.

page 49:

Admittedly there is a single DNA letter in which pigs appear closer to yeast than to horses, but this is swamped by millions of resemblances going the other way. The argument is one of parsimony. If we assume that pigs are close to horses, we need to accommodate only one coincidental resemblance. If we try to assume that pigs are close to yeast we have to postulate a prodigiously unrealistic concatenation of independently acquired coincidental resemblances. In the cases of horses, pigs and yeast, **the parsimony argument is too overwhelming to be in doubt.**

Dawkins, I don't care if you personally have no **doubt** – that's your personal right. But quit preaching certainty to your readership under the name of scientific inquiry. Keep an open mind – that's the secret to scientific inquiry! You can't keep an open mind if you're too impatient to get to some personally 'favorable' conclusion.

Page 59:

Creationism has enduring appeal, and the reason is not far to seek. It is not, at least for most of the people I encounter, because of a commitment to the literal truth of genesis or some other tribal origin story. Rather it is that people discover for themselves the beauty and complexity of the living world and conclude that it "obviously" must have been designed.

Are we human beings not allowed to make decisions and formulate beliefs based on intuition, Dawkins? Have you never used intuition to formulate your personal beliefs? I'm pretty sure that **you** have, and so has every other angry atheist I have ever seen on YouTube or elsewhere.

So, I'm going to put it to all you secularists out there: Answer me this theoretical claim: *As of this moment in time, there will never again be another novel musical tune invented by any human or from any other source. The canon of novel musical tunes is closed!* So, is this claim true or false. Justify your answer with empirical evidence.

As for the issue of design, maybe it's actually irrational to conclude that things that look designed are not the creation of a designer.

page 95:

My clerical correspondent of the previous chapter found faith through a wasp. Charles Darwin lost his with the help of another: "I cannot persuade myself," Darwin wrote, "that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars."

God is not omnipotent, for the Bible tells us (those of us, that is, who actually *read* the Bible) that 1) God cannot lie, and 2) God cannot deny Himself. Therefore, God has self-proclaimed limitations. But, outside of those self-imposed limitations, I believe that God can do all things.

I think it is irrational to turn away from God just because you have personal issues with how God runs this world. God runs the world the way He runs it. Period. We have only one chance of salvation, and that is to follow the program that God gave us. If you want to spend eternity in Hell because you have 'issues' with the way God runs this planet and with His negative PR, then you have a long time to regret that irrational decision.

Jesus understood that the typical person is not going to like everything He preached about how God operates and how we are to serve God (or, for that matter, how God has operated in the past). He said, "Blessed is he who is not offended in me." [Matthew 11:6] I take that to mean that we mustn't let our natural offence mechanisms get in the way of us repenting and following Jesus.

I wonder how many intellectuals will end up in hell simply because they don't like the way God does things. Well, I am one intellectual whom I am planning on keeping out of hell, folks, regardless of my personal feelings about how God runs the world.

page 96:

We humans have purpose on the brain. We find it hard to look at anything without wondering what it is “for,” what the motive for it is, or the purpose behind it. When the obsession with purpose becomes pathological it is called paranoia—reading malevolent purpose into what is actually random bad luck. But this is just an exaggerated form of a nearly universal delusion. Show us almost any object or process, and it is hard for us to resist the “Why” question—the “What is it for?” question.

Dawkins, if you really believe that there is no meaning or purpose in life, then there is no such thing as good or bad luck. Are we humans really supposed to remove from our psyches all notions of a meaning or purpose to life in general or to our personal lives, in particular? If we did, why should we bother to continue to live at all? And furthermore, why did you bother to get a PhD? Why do you bother to write books and make nasty accusations to people of religion and against those nasty ‘tribal origin stories’ if nothing really matters at all? If nothing really matters at all: laissez faire!

pages 132-133:

On the contrary, if the universe were just electrons and selfish genes, meaningless tragedies like the crashing of this bus are exactly what we should expect along with equally meaningless good fortune. Such a universe would be neither evil nor good in intention. It would manifest no intentions of any kind. In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication some people are going to get hurt other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. As that unhappy poet A. E. Houston put it:

For Nature, heartless, witless Nature

Will neither know nor care.

DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music.

Dawkins, do we dance by choice or do we dance because we are forced to? If we are forced to, is that then our *purpose* in life? If Nature is both designless and pitiless, why should people—who are the offspring of Nature—bother to design beneficial and purposeful laws of social conformity and utility? When we do this, Dawkins, are we under the arrogant delusion that we are better than the heartless, witless, pitiless Nature from which we come?