

THE GOD DELUSION: A RESPONSE FROM ALVIN PLANTINGA

INTRODUCTION

Since the release of Dawkins', *The God Delusion*, numerous theologians and philosophers have spoken out or written a response to Dawkins' ideas. This resource will consider Alvin Plantinga's (1932-) response.

An American philosopher, Alvin Plantinga has argued that Dawkins' arguments, particularly with regard to the teleological argument, are weak. In an article for the publication, *Christianity Today - The Dawkins Confusion: Naturalism ad absurdum*, Plantinga acknowledges Dawkins' proficiency as a science writer but questions his philosophical reasoning skills. In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins, he says, does not present a *'thoughtful commentary'*, rather, *'the proportion of insult, ridicule, mockery, spleen, and vitriol is astounding.'*

Dawkins' claims that for someone to create a complex world that person would have to be as complex or more complex themselves. The designer would have to have at least as much information as what it designs, and information is inversely related to probability. Therefore, he thinks, God would have to be monumentally complex, hence astronomically improbable; therefore, it is highly improbable that God does not exist. Rather than a deity involved, evolution is responsible for the world as it is today.

RESPONSE TO THE GOD DELUSION

Plantinga strongly contests Dawkins' theory that a belief in God is improbable. He questions the notion that:

- God is complex: much classical theology (including St Thomas Aquinas) accords God with simplicity – there is no distinction of thing or property, essence and existence.
- The more complex something is, the more improbable it becomes.
- The evolutionary process just started on its own, by *'unguided Darwinian mechanisms'*: Plantinga is not disputing the possibility of God using evolution in creating the world; he queries the idea that it could have started independently.
- Natural selection and evolution are compatible: in his evolutionary argument against naturalism, Plantinga argues that if we accept evolution as a truth, naturalism is automatically undermined.
- Religion and science are incompatible.

Ultimately, Dawkins draws his conclusions about the improbability of God from, what Plantinga considers, the unsound logic that, because it is *biologically possible* these various organs and systems should have come to be by these *'unguided Darwinian mechanisms'*, then they must have. This premise leads him to conclude that no deity was involved.

Dawkins' argument follows this 'logic':

We know of no irrefutable objections to its being possible that p ;
Therefore, p is true.

Plantinga argues, this is an invalid philosophical argument which no self-respecting philosopher would use. However, Plantinga believes that God could have used Darwinian processes to create the world, he believes that science and religion are compatible.

'Religion and science share more common ground than you might think, though science can't prove, it presupposes that there has been a past for example, science does not cover the whole of the knowledge enterprise.'

(Exploring the Real Conflict: Science vs Naturalism', Plantinga, 2012)

TASKS

1. In your own words, summarise Plantinga's main opposing arguments to Dawkins' ideas.
2. What are the strengths of Plantinga's arguments?
3. What are the weaknesses?
Explain your answers fully.
4. Who do you agree with more? Why?