

# Faith & Thought



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# ***FAITH and THOUGHT***

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## Editorial

This edition of the journal contains a miscellany of articles. The first two deal with the question of what is 'real'. Professor John Warwick Montgomery, one of our vice-presidents sheds light on how quantum physics can help us to understand more about God's existence and Professor Duncan Vere, a member of the council, gives a critical appraisal of Richard Dawkins' new book on the magic of reality. The final piece is a review essay on the subject of Christian Apologetics, which, from the beginning, has been the primary concern of the Victoria Institute

## The Last Meow: An Indeterminacy Argument for God's Existence, with a Further Glance at Schrödinger's Cat

John Warwick Montgomery\*

Heisenberg's "indeterminacy principle" has posed a number of problems for classical theology. This brief paper will suggest that, when they are not pseudo-problems, they have a remarkably positive bearing on the case for the objective value of Christian evidences and the existence of God.

### 1. The Principle

Heisenberg determined that, on the subatomic level, one cannot objectively determine both the position and the momentum of an electron or other elementary particle; only when the observer tests the situation is the quantification known. This does not mean that it was always there: it means that the observer is essential to the establishment of the data.

The formula for this is:  $\Delta x \Delta p \geq h/4\pi$ , where  $x$  is the position of the object,  $p$  is the momentum, and  $h$  is Planck's constant. This means that the product of position and momentum uncertainty is always greater than, if not equal to, the (finite) number  $h/4\pi$ , i.e., either the position or the momentum will be known—but never both. As the one declines, the other compensates by rising so as to maintain the product of the two ( $h/4\pi$ ).

Neils Bohr understood this extraordinary situation to mean that the ontological reality of the electron comes about only when it is observed; prior to observation, the electron is objectively in a state of non-being. This view, termed the "Copenhagen interpretation," was "abhorrent to Einstein,"<sup>1</sup> who preferred a "hidden variable" theory: we must postulate the existence of variables the measurement of such would eliminate the irrationality of indeterminacy—even though we have no evidence for

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds, and the Laws of Physics* (London: Vintage, 1989), p. 362.

their existence.<sup>2</sup> Another interpretation of the phenomenon to commend attention is the so-called “many worlds” argument: that, on measurement, the quantum system splits into possible states, one of which (the one observed) remains in our world whilst the other states pass into other worlds, creating ontological enlargements of the universe as a whole.<sup>3</sup> The “hidden variable” and the “many worlds” hypotheses suffer from the same overwhelming problem: an entire lack of empirical evidence supporting them.<sup>4</sup>

### 1. Consequence for arriving at objective knowledge

Should one conclude from the uncertainty principle that the subject-object distinction has been broken and objective knowledge is therefore not possible—that the observer is a necessary factor in establishing knowledge? Surely not.

2.322 Empirical method assumes a distinction between myself as empirical investigator (the subject) and the empirical world I am investigating (the object).

2.32201 “Bohr has emphasized the fact that the observer and his instruments must be presupposed in any investigation, so that the instruments are not part of the phenomenon described but are used” (Lenzen).

2.3221 Neither Einsteinian relativity nor the Heisenberg indeterminacy principle destroys the subject-object distinction; indeed, relativity and indeterminacy could not even have been discovered if Einstein and Heisenberg had lost the distinction between themselves and what they were investigating

2.32211 How sad Robert Benchley’s account of his college biology course, where he spent the term meticulously drawing the reflection of his own eyelash as it fell across the microscopic field.

2.32212 How unfortunate also if, as has been suggested, Schiaparelli’s Martian “canals” were in part the result of incipient cataract in his own eye.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ian G. Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (“Gifford Lectures, 1989-1991, Vol. I”; London: SCM, 1990), p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> F. Tipler, “The Many-Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics in Quantum Cosmology,” in Roger Penrose and C. J. Isham (eds.), *Quantum Concepts in Space and Time* (reprint ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 206-207.

<sup>4</sup> This is, to be sure, the difficulty with all “multiverse” cosmologies, *pace* Stephen Hawking; see Montgomery, “Speculation vs. Factuality,” in his *Christ As Centre and Circumference* (Bonn, Germany: Verlag fuer Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2011), Pt. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Montgomery, *Tractatus Logico-theologicus* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; Bonn, Germany: Verlag fuer Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2009).

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### 2. Schrödinger's Cat

The standard illustration of indeterminacy has been offered by way of a cat placed in a closed container with a toxic gas inlet that can be triggered from within. The cat can only be known to be dead or alive *when the observer lifts the lid on the container*. It is important to note that the observer does not cause the cat to live or die; whilst the container is closed, the cat is *neither dead nor* alive; it is the observation that establishes the cat's otherwise indeterminate state. So with the position/momentum of the electron.

In Douglas Adams' striking novel, *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, Gently speculates whether a psychic could see into the box without opening it. But his interlocutor rightly notes that "the whole thing turns on what happens inside the box before it's observed. It doesn't matter how you observe it, whether you look into the box with your eyes or—well, with your mind, if you insist. If clairvoyance works, then it's just another way of looking into the box, and if it doesn't then of course it's irrelevant."<sup>6</sup>

The point is simply this: no observer, no specificity for subatomic events.

### 3. The Macro-world

Of course—unless we are alcoholics in an advanced state of inebriation—we do not experience this problem in our day-to-day existence. Owing to probabilities, we find our world subject to the ordinary laws of Newtonian physics and regular testability. At levels above the subatomic, the act of observational measurement, having collapsed the probability waveform wherein electrons have an infinite number of possible courses of action, produces a resolution into actual events. The cumulative result is indistinguishable from the outworking of classical, Newtonian physical law. Though this is our daily experience, we must not forget that underlying our everyday world the subatomic realm operates in the absence of observation without any definitive objective existence or specifiable character.

### 4. Solution

For the cosmos to have objective existence and be subject to objective investigation, only three realistic explanations are possible<sup>7</sup>: (1) the cosmos has its objective

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<sup>6</sup> Douglas Adams, *The Dirk Gently Omnibus* (London: William Heinemann, 2001), p. 124.

<sup>7</sup> We ignore unrealistic—and fantastic—ones, such as that the universe created itself out of nothing (Daniel Dennett; physicist Lawrence Krauss). Maria—in Richard Rodgers' and Oscar Hammerstein's *Sound of Music*—provides a sufficient reply: "Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could." As to why God needs no creator to explain Him, see Montgomery, *Tractatus Logico-theologicus* (*op. cit.*), sec. 3.85.

existence due to human observation; (2) the cosmos has its objective existence due to non-human observation—by other finite creatures; (3) the objective existence of the cosmos is due to its observation by a transcendent God who created it. Option (1) appears hopelessly anthropocentric (was there no universe before we began to observe it? Does the subatomic tree falling in the forest not exist unless someone is there to see it fall?). Option (2) is entirely gratuitous, since we know of no extraterrestrials, much less extraterrestrials engaged in observing the universe. Option (3) is thus the reasonable answer—requiring a God who has observed the cosmos from its creation and whose observations of it have elevated its content to a state of determinate factuality.

Alastair Reynolds science-fiction novelet, “Understanding Space and Time,” eliminates the inadequate solutions most effectively:

And , , , how did this universe manage for fifteen billion years before we dropped by and provided an intelligent observer? Are you seriously telling me it was all fuzzy and indeterminate until the instant some anonymous caveman had a moment of cosmic epiphany? That suddenly the entire quantum history of every particle in the visible universe—right out to the furthest quasar—suddenly jumped to one state, and all because some thicko in a bearskin had his brain wired up slightly differently to his ancestor?

... “No . . . I’m not saying that. There were other observers before us. We’re just the latest.”

“And those other observers—they were there all along, were they? And unbroken chain right back to the first instant of creation?”<sup>8</sup>

And Ronald Knox made the same point poetically (*God in the Quad*) vis-à-vis Bishop Berkeley:

*There was a young man who said, "God  
Must think it exceedingly odd  
If he finds that this tree  
Continues to be  
When there's no one about in the Quad."*

<sup>8</sup> Alastair Reynolds, “Understanding Space and Time,” in *Science Fiction: The Best of the Year, 2006 Edition*, ed. Rich Horton (Rockville, MD: Prime Books, 2006), pp. 298-99.

*REPLY*

*Dear Sir:  
Your astonishment's odd:  
I am always about in the Quad.  
And that's why the tree  
Will continue to be  
Since Observed by  
Yours faithfully,  
GOD*<sup>9</sup>

**5. Theological commentary**

“Truth” in biblical terms is conceived normally in terms of factually accuracy—as the correspondence between an affirmation and objective reality.

2.38412 “It really ought to go without saying that with all its different genres and figures of speech, Scripture, like all cognitive discourse, operates under the rubrics of a correspondence idea of truth: see John 8:46; Eph. 4:25; I Ki. 8:26; 22:16, 22 ff.; Gen. 42:16, 20; Deut. 18:22; Ps. 119:163; Dan. 2:9; Prov. 14:25; Zech. 8:16; John 5:21-32 ff.; Acts 24:8-11; I Tim. 1:15; note, too, the forensic picture which haunts all of Scripture—for example, such concepts as witness, testimony, judge, the Eighth Commandment, etc.; John 21:24” (Robert Preus).<sup>9</sup>

But, since “the devils also believe and tremble,” mere acknowledgement of factual truth does not save: one must enter into a personal, living relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God who died on the cross for us, to inherit eternal life. And, on the most fundamental level, personal relationships constitute the nature of truth: the Holy Spirit—“the Spirit of truth”—“guides into all truth,” for he speaks not of himself but of the Son and glorifies him, just as the Son speaks of and glorifies his Father (John 16:13-15).

And, as we have argued elsewhere, it is only because God is *not* “unitarian” that from eternity love has existed (as among the persons of the Holy Trinity) owing to their interrelationships.

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<sup>9</sup> Montgomery, *Tractatus Logico-theologicus* (op. cit.). Cf. Montgomery, *Crisis in Lutheran Theology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2 vols.; Minneapolis: Bethany, 1973), II, 24.



3.747 The philosophical importance of Trinitarian doctrine (three Persons in one Godhead) is often overlooked: if God is indeed love, and has always been so (even before he created other persons), he would have to be more than monopersonal.

3.7471 The only alternatives for a unitarian God would be (1) in his essential nature he is not love, or (2) his “love” was first and most fundamentally manifested in self-centredness—for prior to creating other persons it could only have been directed at himself.

3.74711 Aristotle’s Deity was of the latter sort, spending eternity loving himself, since no other object of love could be equally worthy of his attention.

3.74712 “Even if God exists, yet is of such a nature that he feels no benevolence or affection towards men, good-bye to him, say I. Why should I say ‘God be gracious to me’?—since he cannot be gracious to anybody” (Cicero, *De natura deorum*).<sup>10</sup>

It is no less true that God’s observation of—interaction with—his universe is the only explanation as to why its subatomic non-specificity has been transformed into the objective solidity we experience every day of our lives. No God necessarily means no concretisation of the subatomic into the reality of everyday experience. But the world of our experience is patently there; *ergo*, so is its Creator and Sustainer. Is this perhaps the point of Colossians 1:17 (God in Christ “is before all things, and by him all things consist”)?<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Montgomery, *Tractatus Logico-theologicus* (*op. cit.*).

<sup>11</sup> καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν.

## Unreasoned atheism, unreasoned reality

Duncan Vere

After a long series of appealing and brilliantly drafted books by Richard Dawkins, another appeared recently in a language and with copious illustrations suited to child readers, on the theme of Reality. This was accompanied by a whole page review published by the Times and a costly launch meeting at the Royal Albert Hall chaired by the editor of that newspaper. Leaving the matters of our present times, it is important to attend to the logic behind the reasons given for atheism and against religious faith of any kind. There appear to be four arguments that are put forward.

The first argument is surprisingly just an assumption. This is that nothing exists, or is “real” unless it is observable repeatedly, or/and is demonstrable by and to numbers of

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observers. That it can be shown to exist. This is clearly an assumption, for both a simple and an extended reason. The simple reason is that since nothing has been shown to exist beyond that which is observable, there can exist no observed evidence either for or against its existence. Exclusion of the reality of the supernatural is an assumption. The extended reason for this assumptive nature can be seen readily by thinking of the inverse of the proposition; suppose that there are, in fact, things which exist beyond those that are demonstrable. Then, since these are supernatural no evidence of a natural kind can be evinced to support their existence. Material evidence can neither prove nor disprove that they exist. Their non-existence is an unevincenced supposition. They could only be shown to exist were they to reveal their existence through ideas to an observer, or if ideas are revealed which are predictive and are later fulfilled by natural events, or if they reveal powers which transcend natural objects or forces. All of these properties characterise Christian belief and understanding.

The second reason advanced to support atheism is parallelism; there are streams of ideas placed in parallel with similar or related arguments for theism, and which when drawn alongside those arguments are used to imply that a theistic argument is false or ridiculous. But the parallel argument, though in some ways similar to the theistic argument, has no necessary analogy with it. It is a false parallel which cannot disprove the theistic postulate but can be used only in an attempt to discredit it; it neither proves nor disproves anything. Theistic statements are often described as "fairy tales" or "dreamed up stories" that people "want to believe."

The third reason used to support atheism is in many ways more subtle; it is simply the omission of large amounts of the ancillary information given in the original account of the happenings described in the scriptural text. This information, for example from witnesses of the event, would increase the likelihood that it was a true record of what took place, however the arguments given against theistic events or descriptions are said to be those of likelihood.[

The fourth argument is that whereas religious statements are said to be believed purely by faith, demonstrable arguments are not matters of faith but of observable fact. Each of these arguments is evident, both in the book about reality and its review

Discussing these arguments in series, these would be reasoned criticisms of each. The first, assumption, should not be used by scientists, who should only argue from what can be shown, repeated and tested publicly. The whole is a dual assumption that nothing exists beyond the demonstrable, and that since no evidence can be adduced for its existence it cannot therefore exist. Many who are most critical of Christianity as a faith, who contrast this and all religions with the 'reality' of scientific explanations, seem to be unaware that their belief in science is itself a faith. Of course, what they mean is that whereas religious beliefs are in the ordinary sense untestable, the findings of scientific work are testable and demonstrable to all. This leads to a belief that science is ineluctable. Such views are often criticised by the

genuine objection that scientific demonstrations are always provisional, and large numbers of them have been forced to change as new findings supercede the old. Though true, this rebuttal is not alone. Michael Polanyi<sup>4</sup> displayed a range of other critiques of a more subtle kind. His main arguments are well summarised in a paper where he showed how a belief in hard science began with Galileo and culminated with Laplace. In this view, truth is revealed by breaking complex objects and systems down until universal laws are revealed. In this atomistic analysis Polanyi showed that if this analysis is looked at in reverse order, demonstrable facts and their increasing combinations are found to form series of higher levels of ascending complexity ending with a whole functioning organism or system at the top. Each layer transcends those below it in a hierarchical sequence of increasing complexity. This transcends the laws of physics and chemistry which were shown by reductive analysis. Physics and chemistry, he argued, cannot pre-dispose design, intent, usage, purpose and coordination of structure. Here those who support scientism make assumptions about origins and about the universality of natural laws. But the highest levels in the hierarchy are those of content, of meaning, of recognition which are true of all living organisms. Here Polanyi stated two essential principles; the more complex and intangible the level in a hierarchy the more meaningful it is, and that meaning cannot be construed from the reductive analysis of those levels which lie below it. He went on to state a rule of 'tacit knowledge', which is the reverse of reductive analysis. For example, factual recognition is a hierarchy which starts with factor recognition. These factors are then integrated into total recognition by their combination and a known person is recognised. Polanyi discussed three other aspects of this; the possibility of a higher coordinated structure 'indwelling' a set of lower hierarchical steps or entities; there are also sudden movements in the ordering of information in time (the 'paradigm shifts' of Kuhn<sup>5</sup>) to enter a different setting and is also the way in which a scientific idea system enters human recognition. He argued that this is by a 'gestalt' process (gestalt – German ; ordering, structure, coordination) Psychology has many theories about the mode of brain functioning; the three most prominent have been behavioural, structural and gestalt. But whereas the first two of these are largely based upon how external stimuli affect brain function, in terms of its responses to them, gestalt is about how the brain orders information in patterns from within, as a jigsaw is recognised as 'fitting' or not fitting, an building up of patterns. Science has often been seen as a deductive exercise. It is, in fact, inductive, a form of logical conclusion which lacks the ending "QED" which would, for example, end a mathematical deductive proof. Induction is "analysis towards the best available explanation<sup>6</sup>", not towards a bedrock of unassailable, isolated truth. It provides, at most, the best workable theory about what has been investigated. For example, the early criticisms by Adam Sedgwick and Herschel<sup>7,8</sup> of Darwin's work on evolution were along the lines that Darwin's claim to have discovered a "natural law" was false because it failed to conform to the four 'vera causa' principles which were then the established rules for any form of explanation to be seen as a 'natural law'. It was only later, when evolution was shown to be demonstrable, when a genetic segment in its

explanation 9 was rediscovered and examined mathematically and shown to fit the evidence from the field 10 that biological evolution became a generally acceptable framework of biological understanding. By then the 'vera causa' principles had been abandoned and forgotten. Hence although the power to explain is a massive part of scientific theory it is nonetheless always, in some measure taken in faith.

For these reasons, the power of scientism whittles away, losing its seemingly absolute and isolated power and objectivity and becomes at least in part a construction of the human mind as well as a 'discovery'. This in no way denies the power of science to show and to explain mechanisms in nature, but it does remove its image as an isolated and overruling set of laws with an importance which transcends all other understandings.

### **Complementarity**

This term was introduced by Neils Bohr 11 to refer to the apparently independent properties of subatomic particles (eg mass and momentum, versus charge and polarity). It so happened that if one of such a pair was measured it then became impossible to measure the other (Heisenberg 12) A part of the 'new atheism' is often assumed to be that two such different and independent principles cannot have a meaningful relationship, e.g given nature there cannot be super-nature. Most notably it has been said that there is no way in which a supernatural God can interact with a natural world 13. Certainly, many have searched vainly for what Peacocke called the 'causal joint' 14 by which divine agency could occur in a physical universe. However, this in no way disproved its existence. A fuller discussion of this by Polkinghorne has now been given in response to a paper by Silva 38,39. But first consider a simple mathematical analogy of this. Take two variables which are 'independent' (x and y) and represent them by two coordinates which are perpendicular to one another; x and y vary independently. But despite their independence they can be combined to give a useful measure of a third variable., as in a vector, or with rotating or oscillating variables, a phasor. Of course, all mathematics merely represents a real physical or a theoretical variable, but it can describe the properties of real objects 13. The variables, x,y, are complementary. Donald Mackay 16 took this property to describe any two independent, but real factors, which can combine to affect the natural universe in whole or in part, such as natural and supernatural agents. Though the two are 'independent' they do, in combination, affect one another. That we cannot measure, predict or detect divine agency in no way diminishes its reality. One cannot expect to do 'science' with God. purely human example the fact that our brain function is seen to be physical or natural in no way removes the puzzle of the so-called 'Mind-Brain' problem. Nor does it remove the possibility of my thought. I have a brain which is demonstrable and is related to that thought, but these facts do not solve the puzzle of how this 'causal knot' functions. Polkinghorne rightly limits the relevance of complementarity, but this should not diminish its relevance to several areas, not least

the contentions of atheism. The issue of divine agency is described elegantly in Isaiah ch.5 5;8-11, one of the 'seven pillars of creation' discussed by Brown 19 .

### **Mindsets of reductive analysis and of concordance**

James stated 20 'come near to God and he will come near to you'. It is remarkable how much a scientific framework of thought has changed our culture. From the time of Descartes, who fought successfully to implant a philosophy in which it was proven to be possible to know something, by observation and measurement, using mathematically dimensional reasoning, the whole culture of the first to the seventeenth centuries was changed. It is now our stuff of thinking, of living. But dimensionally it was not a novelty, it was in common usage in implicit forms from the Bronze age to the New Testament, as Ephesians chapter 3 amply illustrates. Why it receded only to be revived in explicit terms in the seventeenth century is not the debate of this paper, but it is very clear that there are two polar and mutually divergent attitudes which colour everyone's thought. Some accept complementarity of explanation, others reject it. There are some "both – and" thinkers , and many "either-or" people who will have none of that but insist that ' either-or' must be the true view of everything. Consider, for example, the 'evolution or creation' argument which has boiled on from the time of Darwin to the present. Many still argue that it must be one or the other, that both arguments cannot exist, or that one argument renders the other 'redundant' 21 Both evolution and creation are in fact well evidenced, but by different criteria, so that some state that to say that both coexist is seen to be an category error. Both , in fact, are how we, and indeed the universe, came into being and now persist. So demonstration is not lacking, it is belief that creates the problem. Today's atheism argues that faith has no place, only physical demonstration carries reality. But the truth is that "both-and" exists, not the reductionist "either -or" solution of the problem of our existence. As Polanyi showed, reductionism cannot account for origins, for initial conditions, or for growth in complexity, beyond a small margin. Nor can it handle design, for purpose, for 'knowing by indwelling'. Note that this is not saying that we do not have the evidence now, though someday it may be found. That leads directly to the 'God of the gaps' hazard. No, Polanyi showed that scientific method, by its inherent nature can never reveal these things, nor should it deny their existence. As he wrote, "theories of evolution must provide for the creative acts which brought such theories into existence" It is remarkable how emphasis upon knowledge gained by reductive analysis, and that gained by constructive 'knowing' has swung to and fro over time. But three reflections are more salutary. First, the 'new' atheism is an idolatry, according value and reality status only to demonstrable natural facts and to ideas based upon them. Second, the assumed ineluctable nature of scientific demonstration is false 22. Thirdly, the denial of God is indeed 'folly' in the Old Testament meaning of that word.23 That is not that it is stupidity, but is rather the willed rejection of all that is not a person's ideas, of anything that might give cause for alternative thought to teach or to control that person, that denies their full

independence of behaviour, of belief and of devotion. An idolator worships his own creation <sup>24</sup> without realising the manifest incongruity of his behaviour. This is a self-made delusion.

### **Miracle and prophecy**

At times within recorded history it has seemed to have been almost a convention to assume that miracle and prophecy are discounted as implausible, even impossible <sup>25</sup>. Alternative explanations are given for records of miracle and prophetic fulfilment. Our situation is in that phase today; the church has moved in part towards such views, often in a vain effort to regain lost credibility or respect amongst those outside of it. This current phase began some two centuries ago <sup>25</sup>. The scriptures show clearly that God's ways of communicating with man are not of this genre, as Paul declared they include even seemingly 'foolish' things <sup>26</sup>. The risen Jesus gently chided the walkers to Emmaus, "O foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken". The word he used for 'foolish' was 'anoetoi', senseless, not understanding, not applying the mind, a word often used elsewhere in scripture. It implies an unworthy lack of understanding, a failure to apply the mind. It is often associated with a moral view, as of ungoverned desire. Paul boldly states that it is by the 'foolish' things of this world that God chose to put the wise (sophous) to shame, his reason being that even the seeming foolishness of God is wiser than men. Other similar phrases are frequent in Paul's argument. The argument that these statements about supernature are unreal bears all the marks of its real misunderstanding.

### **Faith and 'the Faith'**

Atheism often dismisses Christian belief as based solely on unevidenced faith, as against evidence which stands firmly on scientific demonstration of, well, nearly everything. The person, words and works of Jesus are belittled or ignored. But it is the person of the Son of God, <sup>27</sup> faith in him and in the power of his death and resurrection that are the focus of faith. This is where the 'lifting up' of Christ, the well witnessed wounds of the living Christ, his conversations with Mary, Peter, John, Thomas and the food shared and eaten in the upper room, at the lake, the prophecies of death, of resurrection, of ascension all count for so much as evidence. Often this has become obscured in parts of the church, where emphasis is shifted from a saving faith in Jesus to adherence to 'the Faith'<sup>28</sup>, that is the dogmas, teachings or practice of the church. But debate about God, his nature and existence are all alike rendered incompetent by the Son of God, his life, works, words, his death and resurrection which opened a window in the previously impermeable barrier obscuring God from human search.<sup>29</sup> Denial of the reality of the supernatural holds man down to only the evidence for his own evolution. By being God in man Christ gave the evidence for the existence of God. He said, "He that has seen me has seen the Father"<sup>30</sup>. This is the paramount example of the 'indwelling', which can be seen in constructionist philosophy but never in the inward looking reductionist analysis upon

which atheism depends and which ties man down only to the evidence for his own evolution. C.S.Lewis has a remarkable mathematical picture of this difference of approach <sup>32</sup>, quite remarkable for a classicist and philosopher to envisage. He describes man as looking inwards, at his own image, unless that self-isolating sphere breaks open and inverts to change into a reflector of the light and image of God.

It seems especially interesting that over the last three hundred years the wind that has filled the sails of atheism has changed markedly. The first phase was driven by the problem of theodicy.<sup>33</sup> In fact it was this that unseated Darwin's slender faith, taking him into agnosticism, never full atheism, as his German friends might have wished. The next phase <sup>36</sup> was driven by rejection of a God who was a false construction of metaphysics, not the God of Scripture or of Christendom <sup>35</sup>. The third phase was about the idea of evolution as randomly determined not a Divinely directed mechanism <sup>36</sup>. This last phase has now hardened into scientism, with the notion that reality resides only in scientific demonstrations, a belief that supernature is redundant as a part of any explanation of natural events. There has then been a changing pattern for unbelief. The simplest point to see is that if there is no scientific explanation for supernature, that is exactly what we should expect. If there is a veil between nature and supernature, permeated only by God in the work of Christ, then there are only five ways in which supernature can work within nature; by revelation, by creation, by miracle, by prophecy, or by indwelling, and these are the only things that the Scriptures discuss.

This paper is concerned only with Dawkins' current and newest book. The arguments of his earlier books have been answered admirably and in detail by the McGraths.<sup>37,38</sup>

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## Christian Apologetics – A Review Essay

**Reg Luhman**

**Douglas Groothuis** *Christian Apologetics. A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith.* 2011 Nottingham IVP Academic 749 pp.hb. £24.99 ISBN 978 1 84474 639 5

Christian Apologetics is central to the work of the Victoria Institute. The objects of the Institute were set out in 1865 as, “It will be the business of the new Philosophical Institution to recognise no human science as ‘established,’ but to examine philosophically and freely, all that has passed as science, by individuals and in other societies; whilst its members, having accepted Christianity as the revealed truth of God, will defend that truth against all mere human theories by subjecting them to the most rigid tests and criticisms” A recent book on the subject, which also seeks to critique science, is therefore warmly welcomed. My intention in this extended review

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is to critically evaluate his thesis and to determine whether he has successfully achieved his objectives.

Douglas Groothuis is a professor of philosophy at Denver Seminary and writes primarily for an American readership. The aim of the book is to present a defence of the Christian Worldview as “objectively true, rationally compelling and existentially or subjectively engaging.” It is intended to respond to the doubts and denials of non-Christians and to fortify believers in the faith. After a lengthy introduction (apologetic preliminaries) of 140 pages he deals with the classical case for Christian Theism by evaluating the philosophical arguments (ontological, cosmological, design, moral, religious experience and cognition). Then follows a detailed consideration of the significance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Finally he looks at religious pluralism (giving particular attention to Islam) and the problem of evil. The book has two appendices one on the subject of hell and the other on apologetic issues in the Old Testament. There is also a useful glossary of technical terms used and a full bibliography.

The author is fully aware that many fellow evangelical Christians would reject the whole enterprise either by asserting that faith is a divine gift and opposed to reason (fideism) or that the Christian worldview must be presupposed and not argued for (presuppositionalism) or that the Christian Faith is self-authenticating and cannot be proved to be true (reformed epistemology). Groothuis claims biblical support for his use of logic to make a defence (Greek *apologia*) of the Christian Worldview. Such a worldview must be intelligible and internally consistent as well as coherent, factually accurate and culturally and intellectually creative. To be true the Christian Worldview must also be superior to rivals and making the most sense of the world we inhabit. The issue of truth is of major significance and he devotes considerable space to argue the case for the correspondence theory of truth over against the coherence theory and the post-modernist view that truth is subjective and culture bound. For him the Christian worldview is true because it is a revelation from a truthful God mediated by an inerrant Bible and through Holy Spirit inspired writers and illuminating interpreters.

Before embarking on his philosophical overview he sets out the pragmatic case for believing in Christianity using ‘Pascal’s Wager’. Groothuis is particularly fond of Blaise Pascal and in a later chapter entitled ‘Deposed Royalty’ relates Pascal’s argument from the creation and fall of humanity. The Wager argues that anyone who puts their trust in the Christian God has much to gain and little of importance to lose but anyone who does the opposite stands to lose everything. Pascal wrote, “Let us weigh up the gain and the loss in calling heads that God exists. Let us assess the two cases: if you win you win everything, if you lose you lose nothing.” Groothuis defends what seems a mercenary and selfish act by claiming that the Bible offers incentives to those not fully committed and that Pascal recognised that this is just the

first step to faith, which will also involve a change of lifestyle. The wager only works if one believes that God destines some to eternal bliss and others to eternal punishment, which both Pascal and Groothuis believe. If, however, God more respects someone who sincerely holds to agnosticism and lives a moral life rather than a mercenary manipulator this would not apply, anymore than it would if universalism is true and that ultimately everyone will be saved.

The chapters relating the traditional arguments follow the usual course adopted by philosophers of religion. I am not so sure, as Groothuis is, that he has successfully answered Kant's objection that saying that something exists (his example is the Loch Ness Monster) adds anything to the imagined description of it. Surprisingly when dealing with the cosmological argument the author neglects Aquinas' 'Five Ways' presumably because its language is difficult for modern people to understand and concentrates on the much more difficult Kalam Argument. He concludes that the argument establishes that the universe must have a cause because it is not possible to have an actual infinite. God is excluded from having a cause, because God is a necessary being who has always existed. He recognises that there is a problem with demonstrating how an infinite God can relate to a temporal universe. He argues that the Big Bang Theory supports this argument and that, if we reject it, the only alternative is to follow Bertrand Russell and accept the existence of the universe as an inexplicable brute fact, a view he believes leads to nihilism. Similarly he argues that Christianity predicts that there will be evidence of design in nature but that this will not reveal a perfect world because the world has been corrupted by human sin. The 'fine tuning' argument points to an intelligent designer, which cannot be negated by the positing of a multiverse.

In his treatment of the moral argument Groothuis looks exclusively at the objectivity of morality. No mention is made of Kant's moral argument for God's existence. He argues that morality cannot be simply what an individual or society agree on because within societies there are individuals who disagree with the consensus and because we cannot evaluate what is right or wrong without some objective criteria. In fact there seems to be general agreement on certain moral issues such as that torturing innocent people, rape, and murder are wrong and that truth telling is right. He claims that rejecting objective morality leads to nihilism and creates the dilemma that is at the root of existentialism. He concludes that it is possible to argue from morality to God by positing (1) If a personal God does not exist then objective morality does not exist (Nietzsche, Sartre) (2) Objective moral values exist. (3) Therefore a personal God exists. One could argue, as Michael Ruse does, that morality has developed in humans as a biological adaptation to aid survival and reproductive success. This is rejected without argument. Similarly with reference to Plato's 'Euthyphro Dilemma' - "Is what is holy, holy because the gods approve of it, or do they approve of it because it is holy?" - he argues that there is no dilemma because God is the source of all goodness based on his changeless character. Does this mean that morality cannot

exist without God? Can a sincere atheist not be moral? Groothuis thinks that the atheist would not do good to please God nor to fit into a moral plan for the universe nor because he believes good will ultimately triumph and therefore he has no motivation to be moral. Is this really the case?

In his section on the argument from religious experience he relies heavily on the work of Richard Swinburne. He also considers and rejects psychological and sociological explanations for religious experience such as those of Feuerbach, Freud and Marx. Equally he takes issue with those who argue that because religious beliefs are associated with particular brain events they can be explained scientifically. He argues for substance dualism maintaining that soul/mind are not properties of the brain but interact with it. He consequently rejects monism and other theories of mind such as epiphenomenalism, panpsychism as well as emergentism that is favoured by many Christian neurologists and psychologists. There are many problems with substance dualism, such as the location of the mind and the difficulty of conceiving of how the mind can interact with the brain. The alternative monist theories, which claim that only the physical brains exist leads inevitably to the problem of determinism and so dualism still offers the best explanation of human freedom and accountability and of the Christian doctrine of immortality. John Turl ends his excellent article on this subject by stating, “ If dualism is true, or might be, there is no good reason why Christians ought to believe in monism. If monism is true, this article has argued that there is no ‘ought’ about it. They will do what they are physically determined to do anyway.”<sup>1</sup>

The apologetic for Jesus is left in the capable hands of the New Testament expert, Craig Blomberg, who surveys the historical evidence for Jesus’ life, miracles and resurrection as well as evidence for the textual accuracy of the Gospels. Groothuis adds extra material regarding the virgin conception, the incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus contrasting it with the (less likely) teachings of other religions.

In a chapter devoted to objections to Christian Theism he discusses religious pluralism, especially the views of John Hick, which he rejects as being contradictory because it makes God both personal and impersonal and ultimately unknowable. He believes that Christianity is uniquely true and therefore claims that only Christians are ultimately saved but believes that the fate of the unevangelised, who have the benefit of general revelation, is in the hands of a just and loving God. Nevertheless he believes that more will be saved than lost. The ultimate fate of the lost is addressed in an appendix on the subject of hell. How does he deal with a doctrine described by John Hick as scientifically fantastic and morally revolting? It is scientifically fantastic if hell is a place of eternal punishment by fire and resurrection bodies are physical bodies because these would be quickly consumed and could not be punished for ever. Groothuis doesn’t say whether he believes hell is literal fire. He rather speaks of this as one of several graphic reports that, “...disclose the stark reality of eternal

separation from God.” Hick believes it to be morally revolting because it is unjust to punish finite sins with an eternal punishment. Groothuis disputes this, siding with Aquinas and Jonathan Edwards, by claiming that because God is infinite the sinner deserves an infinite punishment. He does, however, seek to soften the blow by insisting that the emphasis of Jesus’ teaching was compassion and forgiveness and that it is a doctrine that must be taught with tears. He does not discuss alternative views put forward throughout Christian history such as annihilation and conditional immortality.

The problem of evil is tackled in the traditional way using the free will defence, the greater good argument and the triumph of God over evil in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus. He rejects the teaching of eastern religions and atheism that seeks to answer the problem. What is lacking is any attempt to understand the role of an omnipotent, all loving God in ‘natural evils’ such as those brought about by earthquakes and volcanoes, or the suffering of animals or those born with severe congenital conditions. In an appendix Richard Hess briefly deals with the accusations of the new atheists, such as Richard Dawkins, who claimed that, “What makes my jaw drop is that people today should base their lives on such an appalling role model as Yahweh – and even worse, that they should bossily try to force the same evil monster (whether fact or fiction) on the rest of us.”<sup>2</sup> Hess gives an adequate defence although he claims the brevity of the treatment is due to lack of space. For a more detailed reply to the new atheists’ criticism and a defence of the Old Testament one should consult the book edited by William Lane Craig and Chad Meister entitled ‘God is Good. God is Great (IVP 2009)’. Similarly the brief treatment of the historical accuracy of the Old Testament should be supplemented by the monumental study by K.A.Kitchen (On the Reliability of the Old Testament [Eerdmans 2003]).

The most disappointing section of the book is that dealing with evolution. The author seems to have abandoned the criteria he set for himself to provide a defence of the Christian worldview that is objectively true and rationally compelling. He attacks Darwinian evolution because he claims it is committed to naturalism and also theistic evolution (or evolutionary creation) because he believes it is committed to the view that God created the universe and “...let the inherent properties of the universe produce the first life and subsequent species naturally, without any direct evidence of a designing intelligence.” Both of these statements are only partially true. Proponents of theistic evolution in fact argue that God is intimately involved in the whole process because he is both creator and sustainer of the universe and, unlike certain secular evolutionists, they claim that evolution is ordered and goal-directed. This is particularly highlighted by Simon Conway Morris in his work on convergence. Groothuis says that evolution suffers from evidential and logical flaws and discusses what he calls icons of evolution, some of which have been discarded by evolutionists themselves. He refers to the list of some 900 world scientists who are sceptical of evolution’s claim to account for the complexity of life. While this seems a large

number it is less than 0.023 % of scientists and critics have pointed out that many of these scientists were from disciplines unrelated to the natural sciences and that the questions were 'very artfully phrased' and the responses contained a diverse range of opinions.

Groothuis' spin on the matter is to adopt a progressive creationist account in which God created each 'kind' of animal e.g. 'dog' and 'cat' kind, which then were able to diversify and adapt to the environment (micro-evolution). The problem with the word 'kind (Heb.*min*) is that it is too general and can fit a broad range of scientific taxonomy from phylum down to species as in the case of mankind.<sup>3</sup> He denies that there is evidence for macro-evolution, which is not true. Nor is it true that there are no transitional fossils. In fact there are numerous examples of transitional fossils represented most of the major groups including a series showing the modification of the reptilian jawbones to serve as bones in the inner ear of mammals. The famous transitional form *archaeopteryx* is regarded by the author as definitely that of an ancient bird. I wonder how he would classify the dinosaur fossils discovered in China with bird-like feathers? There are in fact now eight different specimens of *archaeopteryx* and 18 reptilian characters have been identified. Part of the problem is that 'creationists' like Duane Gish, whom Groothuis seems to depend for his information, demands an unscientific and unrealistic definition of a transitional fossil, for instance that it must have features they lie half-way between the two groups, whereas in fact one expects to find, and does actually find, a mosaic of features in particular examples. I fail to see why progressive creation with God intervening continuously in the process is more biblical than evolutionary creation. After all, the Bible presents God as intimately involved with his creation all the time. The Psalmist praised God for knitting him together in his mother's womb, yet we know that God does not intervene throughout each pregnancy to specifically order each stage of development. The information encoded in the mother's DNA determines the development of the embryo. Why cannot God have initiated the blueprint for the unfolding of life on earth and let it work out through time? (I owe this illustration to Denis Lamoureux)

He devotes a chapter to Intelligent Design (ID), which claims that there are specific biological systems, that could not have arisen by chance because they are characterised by 'irreducible complexity'. An example of such a system is the bacterial flagellum. Besides this being an example of a 'god of the gaps' (an example of something that cannot presently be explained but one day probably will be) it does not really aid the author's overall objective because the proponents of intelligent design say that ID does not point to the Christian God as designer or even require that there be a god! Also, as Denis Alexander has pointed out, the favourite example of the bacterial flagellum poses a problem for belief in an omnipotent, all loving God. Bacteria kill millions of people every year and they are made more effective as killing machines if they swim about in blood streams and tissues with the help of the

specially designed flagella! In the light of the publication of all the extant published letters and papers Denis Lamoureux has shown that far from being committed to a materialist and atheist doctrine of evolution, Darwin in fact gave valuable insights into intelligent design and evolutionary creationism. Darwin admitted that he was constantly in a muddle regarding the role of God in evolution but declared consistently that he was never an atheist and could be better regarded as an agnostic.<sup>4</sup>

Has Groothuis succeeded in his objective? He concludes the study by claiming that, "In a fairly comprehensive way, I have defended Christianity as objectively true, rational and significant for life. I have critiqued its leading rivals, namely, naturalism. Pantheism and Islam." (647) In his critique of Islam he begins by referring to the war on terrorism and says, "It is a simple truth that while all terrorists are not Muslims and that most Muslims are not terrorists, it is nevertheless also true that the majority of terrorists worldwide are Muslims, who wage jihad in pursuit of punishing infidels – principally Jews and Christians – and establishing Islam globally." (599) His critique of Islam consists of an exposition of its basic belief and its denial that Jesus is divine or that the Bible is the Word of God. This hardly amounts to a critique. Rather it assumes the truth of Christianity and judges Islam for failing to agree with the Christian worldview. Is this not the same as the Islamic approach to Christianity, which he derides? Perhaps he will end up fortifying believers in their faith, but only believers who accept his very conservative, even fundamentalist, brand of evangelicalism. However I doubt if it will compel doubters and deniers to accept his Christian worldview

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### Book Reviews

**William P. Brown** *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science and the Ecology of Wonder* 2010 Oxford University Press hb. \$29.95 (ISBN 978-0-19-973079)

This is a remarkable book for several reasons. The text is eloquent, evocative, readable, imaginative and of a pure literacy, at times even poetic. It is an argument

for complementarity between the seven pillars, between creation and evolution, between theology and science. Nancy Murphy remarked, "... this is the most creative book on creation that I have ever read". The scientific understanding is clear and relevant despite the fact that the author is a professor of Old Testament, he has spared no pains to listen to and to learn from scientists.

After a long introduction, arguing the case and approach for the book, the seven pillars are described. They all have a chapter with a similar structure for each. They are Genesis 1:1 – 23, Genesis 2.4 to 3:24, Job 38 -41, Proverbs 8:22-31, Psalm 104; Ecclesiastes 1: 2-11, and Isaiah ch.40-55. For each of these a new translation is given with comment on the Hebrew, a presentation of the theological meanings of the passage and an account of the relevant scientific data and theories. These are then drawn together. In most cases adjunct meaning appears between the two, if only in the deeper levels of understanding. Evolution is an aspect of creation, at a deep level of complexity. It is a part of the "upholding" scheme of the Creator. The argument is wholly "bottom up", it is "emergent" and not reductionist. The shortcomings of reductionist presentations are argued elegantly, especially those of Richard Dawkins.

There are four apparent omissions from the account. The most perplexing is the absence of reference to the New Testament discussions of creation whether by Jesus, Paul, Peter, James or John or in Hebrews. It would seem right that the view of creation stated by Jesus himself, the only man who is God but who entered flesh that he might be not only its author but its inhabitant, should take a focal place. Surely the author cannot have felt so confined by his chair that he could not discuss the New Testament account of the eighth and last pillar of creation?

The second perplexity is perhaps easier to understand. The 'imago dei' doctrine has long been given a paramount place in separating man from his fellow animals. It is discussed at length in chapters 1 to 3, and again in chapters 7 to 10. It is curiously missing from chapters 4 to 6 where it would seem to be most relevant. Chapter 4 is about 'the ground of being' which includes Genesis 2 and 3, Job's account and Psalm 104. A crucial reason to include imago dei there is the creation of woman, her equal status within humanity with man. The most likely reason for its omission is that scripture omits it here also, but it is so crucial a concept that it might have been expected in an account that draws the "pillars" together unhesitatingly.

The third perplexity is that on page 110 it is said that at that stage "man had been given a job, but not a moral awareness". But he had the garden to care for; if one's job is to care then surely one must be morally aware of carelessness?



A fourth perplexity is that in stressing the importance of entropy the author, characteristically emergent", stresses the forward flow of an increasingly complex creation but omits the backward look to the Big Bang, the start of creation, the "let there be". This is probably merely a textual artefact, since all these matters are fully discussed elsewhere in the book.

This work presents a remarkable achievement, showing how each of the seven Old Testament accounts link to contribute to a global understanding of a most complex, multilayered body of truth. It shows alongside this how scientific understanding of the same areas is also now complex in depth, similarly layered. The notorious "causal link" or "knot" of divine agency in a physico-biological cosmos is also discussed, and its nature opened to understanding. Anyone who sees conflict between these two accounts has a simplistic or partial understanding. This layered truth is present in all of the different accounts, whether Biblical or scientific, ranging from God's joy through the details of animal and plant design, endosymbiosis, mutual interdependence of species; or in physics, the realm of the subatomic and probabilistic, through atomic and molecular chemistry to stellar interactions, black holes and the galactic cosmos.

The impossibility of the survival of life on a partly hostile planet is reflected in God's seventh day of rest, giving the biosphere limited freedom as emergent life opens ever more widely, making adaptation possible. This is an aspect of his sustaining and upholding 'creatio continua'.

The author deserves congratulation for a most profound and lucid composition. Perhaps he would consider a second volume on the eighth chapter of creation, the New Testament?

Reviewed by Professor Duncan Vere

**Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, Thomas R. Schreiner (eds.)** *Understanding Scripture* 2012 Nottingham IVP 203pp. pb. £8.99 ISBN 978 1.84474.564.7

**Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, Thomas R. Schreiner (eds.)** *Introducing Scripture* 2012 Nottingham IVP 159pp. pb. £8.99 ISBN 978 1.84474.568.5

These two companion books consist of a series of articles of varying lengths, written by experts in their fields, to introduce the Bible. The first volume treats the background of the Bible by introducing the reader to the topics of textual criticism, the canon, the apocrypha and biblical archaeology. The last topic gives examples of how archaeologists interpret finds and what bearing these have on understanding the culture they represent and what they can contribute to verifying the historical

accuracy of the Bible. Two chapters are devoted to the Biblical languages. The one on Hebrew and Aramaic is particular good at giving a simple explanation of how these languages are constructed and how they differ from the languages most of us are familiar with. The second part of *Understanding Scripture* is devoted to the way the Bible should be read in different contexts, for example as literature or theology or in preaching and in private devotion. The book requires no previous knowledge of the subjects covered and the material is delivered at a fairly basic level.

The second volume contains longer articles and goes deeper into the subject matter. There are useful articles on the theology of the two testaments as well as introductions to the Pentateuch, the historical books, the wisdom literature and the prophetic books. I was particularly impressed by David Reimer's section on the wisdom literature. After chapters on the intertestamental period and the background to the Graeco-Roman and Jewish world of the New Testament, there are chapters on reading the Gospels and Acts, the Epistles and Revelation. Dennis Johnson is to be particularly commended on his masterly overview of Revelation and his summary of the conservative interpretations (preterist, historicists and futurist) as well as the various millennial views .

Much of the material in these books can be found elsewhere. Indeed the material for the second volume first appeared as articles in the *ESV Study Bible*. The books contain no illustrations, although they do contain useful charts. The publishers suggest that the target readership should be pastors, church leaders and students of the Bible. The first volume contains little to instruct pastors and church leaders although they might find some new insights in *Understanding Scripture*.

Reviewed by Reg Luhman.

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| 1921 -1923  | The Very Revd. H. Wace, MA, DD, Dean of Canterbury.                           |
| 1927 -1941  | Sir Ambrose Fleming, MA, DSc, FRS.  |
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| 1946 -1952  | Sir Frederic Kenyon, GBE, KCB, D.Litt, LLD, FBA.                              |
| 1952 -1965  | Professor F.F. Bruce, MA, DD, FBA.  |
| 1966 -1976  | Professor Sir Robert Boyd, CBE, DSc, FRS.                                     |
| 1977 -1985  | Professor Sir Norman Anderson, OBE, QC, MA, LLD, DD, FBA.                     |
| 1985 - 2001 | Prof. D. J.E. Ingram, CBE, DL, MA, D.Phil, DSc. (Oxon),<br>C.Phys, F. Inst.P. |

## **PUBLICATIONS**

|   | <b>Volumes Concluded</b> |      |
|---|--------------------------|------|
| Journal of the Transactions of The Victoria Institute | 1-89                     | 1957 |
| Faith & Thought                                       | 90-114                   | 1988 |
| *Science & Christian Belief                           | First Volume in 1989     |      |

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