MCDSARE: 2021
International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on the Dialogue between Sciences & Arts, Religion & Education

TWO RESEARCH PARADIGMS, WITH OR WITHOUT „GOD HYPOTHESIS": C.S. LEWIS AND RICHARD DAWKINS

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Abstract

In this present paper we try to learn something about how to cope with analytical investigation of reality, by comparing the ideas of two iconic Oxford figures. On the one hand, the renowned atheist Richard Dawkins, and the Christian apologist C.S. Lewis, on the other. It is more than interesting to know how two great thinkers of the 20th century can raise and answer to questions of life, such as Reasoned belief, the so-called „God hypothesis" or concerning our place and purpose in this world. Both Dawkins and Lewis see intellectual reflection on the big questions as natural and significant. Both insist that their beliefs – atheism and Christianity respectively – demand and deserve intellectual seriousness and are capable of being developed into larger systems. Lewis's apologetic approach generally takes the form of identifying a common human observation or experience, and then showing how it fits, naturally and plausibly, within a Christian way of looking at things. For Dawkins, there is no room for faith in science, precisely because the evidence compels us to draw certain valid conclusions. He proposes an absolute dichotomy between 'blind faith' and the 'overwhelming scientific evidence. Dawkins contends that a supernatural creator, God, almost certainly does not exist, and that belief in a personal god qualifies as a delusion, which he defines as a persistent false belief held in the face of strong contradictory evidence.
An inevitable conclusion is that both Dawkins and Lewis are men of faith, in that both hold committed positions that cannot be proved right, but which they clearly regard as justified and reasonable. We must learn to live with a degree of rational uncertainty about our deepest beliefs and values.

Keywords: investigation of reality; Richard Dawkins; C.S. Lewis; God hypothesis;

1. INTRODUCTION

Many a time man has faced the difficulty of understanding his limits in front of the attempt to unravel the mysteries of the reality he lives in. As such, he came to experience the awareness of the limits

of science and, consequently, of human knowledge in his endeavor to defend either the positivist knowledge or the faith in God, which appeals to what we call „God hypothesis".

Therefore, in the present paper we try to learn something about the way we cope with analytical investigation of reality, by comparing the ideas of two iconic Oxford figures. On the one hand, the scientific popularizer, and the renowned atheist Richard Dawkins, and, on the other, the literary scholar and Christian apologist C.S. Lewis. It is so fascinating to understand how these two great thinkers of the 20th century can answer the questions of life, such as Reasoned belief, "the God hypothesis" or concerning our place and purpose in this world.

Dawkins is an evolutionary biologist who moved from a nominal Anglicanism to a committed atheism; Lewis is a literary scholar who moved from atheism to what he named 'mere Christianity', a form of Christianity that overlooked its denominational aspects. Both Dawkins and Lewis see intellectual reflection on the big questions as natural and significant. Both insist that their beliefs – atheism and Christianity respectively – demand and deserve intellectual seriousness and are capable of being developed into larger systems.

One could raise the question: what we might learn by engaging with both Dawkins and Lewis on some big questions in life, including issues of meaning and faith, or the relationship of the natural sciences and the arts.

The term 'big questions' is widely used to refer to ways of thinking about ourselves and our world that help us make sense of things. Psychologists tell us this thinking is natural and that it helps us manage with the riddles of life. Some of these big pictures are religious, some are not. Christianity is a good example of a faith that both tries to make sense of our lives and shows how they can be transformed and renewed. Marxism is a good example of a non-religious – many would say anti-religious – world view that aims to explain our world.

Some think the answer might lie in our evolutionary past. Others suggest that we have homing instinct for God as our creator, which makes us search for signs of transcendence or significance. Yet whatever explanation we offer, there's little doubt about how important this sense of meaning can be.

Meaning is often connected with 'world views' – big pictures of reality that link individual aspects of life together into an interconnected whole. Religious belief is widely acknowledged as affirming the intelligibility and coherence of our world. The American Christian philosopher Keith Yandell († 2020) suggests that a religion is a 'conceptual system that provides an interpretation of the world and the place of human beings in it'. These world views act like lenses, allowing us to see our world and ourselves more clearly by bringing things into focus. Yet some of these world views are non-religious or even anti-religious, as in the case of the two major secular ones of our age: (Neo-) Marxism and Darwinism.

2. BIG PICTURES: WHY MEANING MATTERS

2.1. Dawkins's big picture: universal Darwinism

Dawkins (1941-) uses the term 'Darwinism' to designate both Darwin's theory of the origins of biological diversity and a broader world view based on this theory. He introduced the term 'Universal Darwinism' in 1983 to refer to an expanded vision of Darwinism, which he subsequently developed beyond the realm of biology to include explan¬ations of cultural phenomena, including religious belief and the question of purpose in life. (Richard DAWKINS, 1983, 403–25). Dawkins's The God Delusion (2006) developed the suggestion that religion is an 'accidental by-product' of the evolutionary process, a 'misfiring of something useful'. (Richard DAWKINS, 2006, 188). He also uses the metaphysical framework of this Universal Darwinism to reject any notion of purpose – a view summarized in his well-known statement that the universe has 'no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference'. (Richard DAWKINS, 1995, 133).

Dawkins attributes his loss of any religious faith to two factors. The first was his growing realization that 'Darwin provided the magnificently powerful alternative to biological design which we now know to be true.' (Richard DAWKINS, 2013, 141). This is a recurrent theme in Dawkins's later writings: Darwinism offers an explanation of what is observed in the biological world that is superior to belief in a creator God. The second factor is his belief that there is an 'elementary fallacy' within any

argument from design, in that 'any god capable of designing the universe would have needed a fair bit of designing himself'. (Ibid, pp. 140–141). Darwin's idea of gradual complexification from a 'primeval simplicity' seemed to make a lot more sense to him.

Ironically, Darwinism does not – and cannot – explain everything. It deals with how life evolves. Some of the most significant events in the history of the universe – such as the Big Bang and the origins of life – lie beyond its scope. Nonetheless, Dawkins sees in Darwinism a framework for reflecting on human meaning in general and not simply on biological development.

The Moral Landscape, a book by the New Atheist writer Sam Harris, is perhaps the stand-out manifesto for scientism, arguing that science is able to determine human moral values – in effect, putting moral philosophy out of business. However, moral philosophers have dismissed Harris's overstatements: it is not exactly difficult to point out that he has merely co-opted a position within moral philosophy, namely a form of utilitarianism that holds that the 'good' is defined in terms of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. (Sam HARRIS, 2010,79).

That is one of the reasons why it is so interesting to engage with Dawkins. It forces us to think about the place of science in developing a big picture of life. Can science answer all our big questions about the meaning of life? Or does it really deal with the quite different question of how the universe and human beings function? For Dawkins, science tells us all we can hope to know; for others, it has limits that are to be respected, so that we look to other intellectual disciplines or undertakings to answer other questions – including questions of meaning. (Alister MCGRATH, 2019, 15).

The noted biologist John Maynard Smith, for example, declares that scientific theories have nothing to say "about the value of human beings" – or indeed about moral values in general. For Maynard, biological theories "say nothing about what is right but only about what is possible", leading us to draw the conclusion that "we need some other source of values". (John Maynard SMITH, 1984, 10-24).

Clearly there is more that needs to be said about Dawkins's approach, and we shall pick this up later. But we now need to introduce our second dialogue partner – C. S. Lewis (1898-1963).

2.2. Lewis's big picture: mere Christianity

Lewis's initial atheism was hardened by his experience as a soldier in the British Army during the First World War. How could God allow such pointless suffering and devastation? Although Lewis was aware that there were some logical flaws with being angry with a non-existent God, he saw atheism as the default position of any right-thinking person.

During the 1920s, however, Lewis changed his mind. Although he remained convinced that atheism was probably his best option, he found it intellectually uninteresting and came to see it as stifling the life of the imagination. The world of the logically provable was inadequate and unsatisfying: he became convinced that there had to be more to life. He set out this view by contrasting two forces that seemed to be at war within his soul: a plausible yet dull rationalism and a risky yet potentially exhilarating faith.

"On the one side, a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other, a glib and shallow rationalism. Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless". (C. S. LEWIS, 2002, p. 197).

As an atheist who became a Christian, Lewis came to see himself as an apologist for the Christian faith. However, he was always clear that rather than defending any particular kind or style of Christianity, such as Anglicanism or Methodism, he was commending a basic consensual Christian orthodoxy – what he termed 'mere Christianity': 'You will not learn from me', he informed his readers, 'whether you ought to become an Anglican, a Methodist, a Presbyterian, or a Roman Catholic.' (C. S. LEWIS, 2016, viii).

Yet Lewis was not suggesting that his readers should avoid individual Christian denominations, such as his own Church of England. Nor was he suggesting that the Christian life was to be seen as individualist, without any sense of attachment to or involvement in a Christian community. Rather, each such denomination was to be seen as a distinct embodiment or manifestation of something more fundamental – mere Christianity:

"[Mere Christianity is] like a hall out of which doors open into several rooms. If I can bring anyone into that hall, I shall have done what I attempted. But it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there

are fires and chairs and meals. The hall is a place to wait in, a place from which to try the various doors, not a place to live in. (Ibid., p. xv).

Lewis came to see God as both the ground of the rationality of the world, and the one who enables us to grasp that rationality. For Lewis, the truths of the Christian faith lie beyond the reach of human reason; yet when those truths are presented and grasped, their rationality can easily be discerned. And one hallmark of that rationality is the ability of the Christian faith to make things intelligible. This basic belief is set out with particular clarity in what has come to be one of his best-known maxims:

'I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else.' (C. S. Lewis, ed. Lesley WALMSLEY, 2000, 21).

As an atheist turned Christian, Lewis was convinced of the apologetic need to set out the intellectual and imaginative appeal of Christianity to our wider culture (Michael WARD, Andrew DAVISON, ed., 2011, 59–78; Alister E. MCGRATH, 2013, 129-46) – something that required intelligent reflection on the content and practice of faith. His point is that an informed understanding of Christianity provides both clarification of what we ought to be doing and a motivation to do it. As Lewis argued in his discussion of the 'Christian hope', what might be seen by some as theological escapism turns out to be empowering:

'The Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.' (Lewis, 2016, 134).

2.3. Reflecting on Dawkins and Lewis

Dawkins and Lewis both see intellectual reflection on the big questions as natural and significant. Both insist that their beliefs – atheism and Christianity respectively – demand and deserve intellectual seriousness and are capable of being developed into larger systems. We would agree with them both on the importance of critical and constructive reflection on our beliefs, and regularly commend such a 'discipleship of the mind' to the Christian readers. (Alister McGrath, 2018).

Dawkins, like many within the New Atheism, holds a view of religion determined by the myth of the warfare of science and religion – a view that emerged during the late nineteenth century, for social reasons, but has long been discredited by historical research. (Peter HARRISON, 2015, 172–176, 191–198) . So if, as this controlling myth dictates, science and religion must be seen as at war with each other, what does that imply about the many active scientists who are religious believers? This myth has only one answer to give, and we fear it is a rather thin and unsatisfying one: such people are traitors who collaborate with the enemy. This leads Dawkins to suggest that scientists who believe in or contribute to a positive working relationship between science and religion represent the 'Neville Chamberlain' school. (DAWKINS, 2006, 66–69).

Lewis also helps us think about the dangers of controlling myths, which lead us to demonize others. He found a persuasive answer to his concerns in a long conversation with his Oxford colleague J.R.R. Tolkien (John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was an English writer, poet, philologist, and academic, best known as the author of the high fantasy works The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. He was a close friend of C.S. Lewis) in September 1931. Tolkien argued that human beings tell stories that are unconsciously patterned on the Christian grand narrative of creation and redemption. For him, one of the great strengths of that narrative was its ability to explain why we tell stories of meaning in the first place. The Christian gospel enfolded and proclaimed 'a story of a larger kind', which embraced what was good, true and beautiful in the great myths of literature, expressing it as 'a far-off gleam or echo of evangelium in the real world'. (J.R.R. TOLKIEN, 2001, 71–27).

Lewis came to see that the story of Christ was a 'true myth' – that is to say, a myth that functions in the same manner as other myths, yet really happened. Christianity possessed the literary form of a myth, which for Lewis meant a story with deep imaginative appeal, conveying a set of ideas. Yet there was a critical difference between Nordic myths (so much prized by the young Lewis) and the Christian myth: only the latter was true. (Alister E. MCGRATH, 2013, 55–82). Pagan myths represented an imperfect grasping towards the truth, a goal finally attained in Christianity.

It seems that Dawkins's view of science is shaped by an unnecessary and distorting metaphysical naturalism, as well as a dogged commitment to a discredited myth of the 'warfare' of science and faith, which blind him to the ways a theological framework might illuminate and enrich our appreciation of science. Happily, there are sections of his writing in which he seems to set such dogmatic assumptions to

one side and reflect joyfully on science's ability to help us appreciate the beauty and complexity of nature. Lewis, unfortunately, does not engage with science in depth, (Michael WARD, 2013, 3–16) so that his readers must develop their own approaches to science based on his general outlook. Yet this is not difficult to do – and turns out to be ¬profoundly worthwhile.

3. REASONED BELIEF: FAITH, PROOF AND EVIDENCE

It is often said that we live in a post-truth world in which we just make up our beliefs. We decide what we would like to be true, then live as if it were true – hoping nobody will come along and ask us difficult questions about our reasons for holding these beliefs. Religious people are often accused of 'wish-fulfilment' – a term used by the atheist psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud in the early twentieth century to refer to the need felt by some to console themselves in believing in a non-existent God. Yet atheism can also be seen as a form of wish-fulfilment.

But then, how can we show that our beliefs make sense? Can we prove that they are right? Or if we can't prove them, what's the next best thing? These are important questions. Just about all of us hold certain beliefs, be they religious, ethical or political. Is there a God? What is the good life? Nobody is really certain about the answers to these questions, but we can still offer good reasons for what we believe. So how do Lewis and Dawkins help us to think about these questions? Let's begin by looking at Lewis's approach.

3.1. C. S. Lewis: fitting things in

During the twentieth century, Lewis was one of the most out¬spoken defenders of the rationality of the Christian faith. Lewis's apologetic approach generally takes the form of identifying a common human observation or experience, and then showing how it fits, naturally and plausibly, within a Christian way of looking at things. (Alister MCGRATH, 2013, 129-46). He holds that Christianity provides a big picture of reality, an intellectually capacious and imaginatively satisfying way of seeing things, one that helps make sense of what we observe or experience.

Lewis' approach to the rationality of religious belief emphasizes its capacity to enfold our experience of the world and help us discern what it means. But some objections need to be considered. For example, Lewis suggests that we judge a set of beliefs by their capacity to make sense of things. But then we ought to ask what evidence might lead us to adopt those beliefs in the first place, rather than simply taking them as given and then proceeding to evaluate them?

It is a perfectly fair point. Yet the issue is more commonplace than might be expected. As Ludwig Wittgenstein pointed out, one and the same propos¬ition or idea may at one point be treated as something to be tested and at another as a rule of testing. (Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN, 1974, p. 98).

Lewis himself is quite clear that Christianity does not offer us a totally clear view of reality, and readily concedes that there are certain things that do not fit comfortably – for example, the problem of pain and suffering, the subject of two of his books. (C. S. LEWIS, 1940).

His counterargument would be that we should compare possible approaches and see which makes the most sense of a complex and fuzzy reality.

Lewis himself uses this approach in Mere Christianity. He notes that many people have known a 'desire which no experi¬ence in this world can satisfy'. After exploring this observa¬tion, he offers three possible explanations for such a sense of emptiness and lack of fulfilment. First, this frustration might arise from looking for its true 'object' in the wrong place; we therefore need to keep searching. Second, it might be that there is no true object to be found. If this second explanation is true, there is no point in any further searching, which will only result in repeated disappointment.

Lewis, however, suggests there is a third approach, which recognizes that these earthly longings are 'only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage' of our true homeland. Since this overwhelming desire cannot be fulfilled through anything in the present world, this suggests that its ultimate object lies beyond this world. Lewis concludes that this third is the 'most probable' explanation. (LEWIS, 2016, 136–137; Alister E. MCGRATH, 2016, 395–408).

3.2. Richard Dawkins: science and evidence

Dawkins is suspicious of religious beliefs because they seem to involve a retreat from critical thinking and a disengagement from evidence-based reasoning. His commitment to a scientific assessment of evidence leads him to adopt a strongly critical attitude towards any beliefs inadequately grounded in the observable: 'As a lover of truth, I am suspicious of strongly held beliefs that are unsupported by evidence.' (Richard DAWKINS, 2003, 117). For Dawkins, religious faith is 'blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence'. (Richard DAWKINS, 1989, p. 198).

Scientists regularly must confront the problem of the 'underdetermination' of theory by evidence. (Thomas BONK, 2008). In other words, the evidence is often insufficient to compel us to accept one theory over another, in that each theory has some evidential support.

For Dawkins, there is no room for faith in science, precisely because the evidence compels us to draw certain valid conclusions. In The Selfish Gene he proposes an absolute dichotomy between 'blind faith' and 'overwhelming, publicly available evidence':

But what, after all, is faith? It is a state of mind that leads people to believe something – it doesn't matter what – in the total absence of supporting evidence. If there were good supporting evidence, then faith would be superfluous, for the evidence would compel us to believe it anyway. (DAWKINS, 1989, 330).

Dawkins overstates the ease with which scientists navigate their way from observations of our universe to theories about it, conveniently overlooking the serious intellectual difficulties raised by the underdetermination of theory by evidence. Yet he is entirely right to highlight the importance of evidence-based thinking in science, and to raise concerns about those who simply demand we accept their ideas or ask us to ignore evidence or avoid serious thinking about our universe or the meaning of life.

The difficulty is that science does not always deliver simple judgements. For example, consider the following question: 'Which is the best approach to quantum theory?' A recent survey of experts in the field showed a wide range of commitments to the ten major interpretations – again showing the importance of personal judgement in these decisions. (M. SCHLOSSHAUER, J. KOFLER and A. ZEILINGER , 2013, 220-30). As these interpret¬ations are inconsistent with one another, this raises some difficult questions for the simplistic 'science proves its beliefs' outlook.

Dawkins often seems to make an illegitimate logical transition from 'this cannot be proved' to 'this is false'. During a 1999 debate entitled 'Is Science Killing the Soul?' a member of the audience asked whether science could offer people consolation similar to that offered by religion – for example, after the death of a close friend or relative. Dawkins's response was puzzling: "It's a moot point whether one wishes to be consoled by a falsehood.' He here slides effortlessly from saying that consolation does not make religion true to saying that religion is false. Now while this might seem to be an entirely natural inference for Dawkins, it is not a logically valid conclusion. It does not follow that since A has not been proved, A is false.

3.3. Reflecting on Dawkins and Lewis

Dawkins's emphasis on providing good reasons for what we believe is appreciable. But one can legitimately wondered, why do so many theoretical physicists love super-string theory – put forward by Edward Witten in 1995 –, when there is no evidence to support it and it makes absolutely no predictions? Many scientists regard it as pure fantasy and wish that colleagues enamoured of the theory would rediscover their experimental roots. (Roger PENROSE, 2017). Lewis is a good example of a religious thinker who sets out a reasoned case for faith.

Lewis, however, is more cautious than Dawkins at this point, emphasizing that philosophical and existential attempts to make sense of our world and our lives lack the precision of mathematics and logic. We must make judgements about how well our world views fit with what we observe and experience. Lewis does not try to prove the existence of God on a priori grounds. Instead, he invites us to see how what we observe in the world around us and experience within us fits the Christian way of seeing things, almost as if we were trying on a hat or coat.

So how do Dawkins and Lewis cope with things that do not seem to fit their world views? In Dawkins's case, the stand-out inconsistency within his scientific atheism is the existence of so many people who believe in a God or gods. While he offers a Darwinian debunking argument against such belief, his dominant strategy – especially in The God Delusion – is to assert the idiocy of religious

believers, who are dismissed as deluded or perhaps even mentally ill. Believing in God is just like believing in the Tooth Fairy or Santa Claus – an infantile illusion that is abandoned when one grows up. Religious people, however, remain locked within a childish mentality, their intellectual growth stunted and impaired.

On the other hand, at Lewis, the most obvious inconsistency would seem to be the existence of suffering. He was aware of this concern and addressed it in two of his works: The Problem of Pain (1940) and A Grief Observed (1961). Though his case is not intellectually watertight, there is no doubt that he takes the force of such concerns seriously, leading him to show how an incarnational faith can accommodate the existence of suffering and even offer a way of coping with its trauma. (Ann LOADES, 1989, 269-276).

Many people hold social, political, ethical and religious beliefs that go beyond the available evidence but help us work out what is good and how we ought to live. We may note three examples of influential and important beliefs that cannot be proved true:

1. There is no God.
2. There is a God.
3. Democracy is the best form of government.

Each of these views commands some degree of support in today's com-plex and multifaceted world. But none of them can be proved to be true. If we followed Dawkins's criteria and accepted only those beliefs that can be proved to be right, we would have to turn our backs on all three of these beliefs – and many others drawn from the worlds of religion, ethics and politics. But we don't used to it. Why not? Because we realize that things are a lot more complicated than Dawkins allows. You can prove shallow truths such as $2 + 2 = 4$. But our really significant beliefs lie beyond proof, and we have to learn to live with this. It is interesting to note how often Dawkins's New Atheist colleague Christopher Hitchens makes criticisms of theism that often rest on unproved moral values.

The moral values, like theism itself, turn out to be unproved and unprovable. This problem is widely recognized. Bertrand Russell, for example, self-defined as an atheist, was in fact an agnostic, who knew that the question of whether God existed could not be proved one way or the other. (Bertrand RUSSELL,1960), 20). His atheism was basically a lifestyle choice, a decision to live and act in a certain way, knowing it ultimately involved an act of faith. Dawkins describes this position as 'de facto atheism' and summarizes it as follows:

'I cannot know for certain but I think God is very improbable, and I live my life on the assumption that he is not there.' (DAWKINS, 2006, 50-51).

Dawkins sets out rational and evidential criteria by which he chastises religious beliefs. So, the inherent or ineluctable question is: why does he not apply those same criteria to his own beliefs? This rational asymmetry represents a significant vulnerability within the New Atheist movement as a whole and has often been challenged by its critics. Dawkins is haunted by the fear that his own committed form of atheism cannot be sustained in the light of the criteria of rationality he uses in his criticism of religion. These criteria can too easily be turned against him by his critics.

Judge yourself by the standards by which you judge others! At times Dawkins comes close to facing up to this major difficulty with his approach. In a debate with Rowan Williams, hosted by Oxford University (in February 2012. https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/nature-human-beings-and-question-their-ultimate-origin),Dawkins was perfectly clear about this point: he could not prove there was no God. In a sense, he was therefore an agnostic.

C.S. Lewis similarly recognizes the limits placed on the human quest for certainty. He saw God as the best way of making sense of our world and inhabiting it meaningfully. But he also knew this belief could not be proved in the way someone could ¬provide, say, mathematical proofs of Fermat's last theorem.

Religion is often framed solely in terms of beliefs about God, overlooking its equally significant beliefs about the dignity and destiny of human beings. Faith is not simply a set of doctrines about the transcendent but a set of commitments about how we understand and respond to our fellow human beings. Anyway, is religion really just about ideas? What about the practices, attitudes and values entangled with religious beliefs?

Dawkins and Lewis, in their different ways, help Christians reflect on the nature of faith. Dawkins often overstates his concerns, and by doing so limits his appeal to the more uncrit¬ical fringes of

atheism. Faith, he suggests, is: 'blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence'; (DAWKINS, 1989, 198) a 'process of non-thinking'; 'evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument'. (DAWKINS, 2006, p. 308). One cannot help but feel that Dawkins really ought to read more Christian writers before making such muddled overstatements about something he does not understand.

Lewis has concerns as well. One of the more important relates to an over-emphasis on rational arguments for faith. As a result, some Christians are preoccupied with showing the truth of their faith, often echoing the 'glib and shallow ration¬alism' of their critics, and thus fail to bring out its important emphasis on meaning and its capacity to transform life. Lewis holds that stories are a far better way both to explore the reasonableness of the Christian faith, and to express Christianity's capacity to transform life. (Gilbert MEILAENDER, 1981, 222–230). Faith is not about evading human reason; it is about recognizing and transcending its limits rather than remaining trapped within the austere 'iron cage' of rationalism (Max Weber). But ultimately, the biggest question that separates Dawkins and Lewis is whether there is a God.

4. IS THERE A GOD?

The major question is that concerning the belief in God; how reasonable is this? Both Dawkins and Lewis give this question extended discussion.

III.1. Dawkins: God as an unevidenced delusion

Dawkins takes the view that God is a good – perhaps the best – example of an unevidenced belief, a delusion. People believe in God because this belief has been hammered into them by aggressively religious families or schools, or because they have failed to think seriously about superior scientific understandings of the world, which make belief in God both unnecessary and implausible. No good reason can be given for believing in God. It is irrational for a modern person to believe in God, which must be seen as a throwback to an earlier pre-scientific age in which such beliefs seemed credible. (Richard DAWKINS, 2006, 111-59).

Christians take the view that believing in God helps us make sense of the world, offering a larger framework or big picture into which fits what we observe and experience. Dawkins argues that this involves adding an unobserved and intrinsically complicated entity – God – to the inventory of the universe. Science is about keeping things as simple as possible – which is one reason why Dawkins prefers atheism to Christianity. It seems a simpler and neater idea.

Now this seems a fair point. If someone is to decide which of several possible scientific explanations of an observation was the best, then, one criterion, unreservedly, is that of simplicity. The philosopher Richard Swinburne focuses on this and argues that theism is the most elegant and simple explanation of our world. (Richard SWINBURNE, 1997, 83). Some atheists argue that it is easier to believe in no God than in one God. Yet although some philosophers of science have argued that the simplest theory is always the best, the history of science just does not bear this out. (Hauke RIESCH, 2010, 75–90).

Yet Christians do not see God as a physical object within the universe, analogous to a new moon orbiting the planet Neptune. God is rather the ground and cause of all things, who stands behind and beyond the universe, while also choosing to self-disclose in human form. As William Inge (1860-1954) pointed out, rationalists try to 'find a place for God' in the world. Christians, however, think of God not as part of a painting or diagram but rather as 'the canvas on which the picture is painted, or the frame in which it is set'. (William Ralph INGE, 1910, p. 197).

Dawkins, however, has another point to make that needs to be taken very seriously, namely the moral character of God. God, for Dawkins, is intellectually superfluous and morally repugnant. God is a tyrant, an oppressor who imprisons humanity within a constricted and constraining intellectual strait¬jacket. The God Delusion speaks eloquently of a 'nasty god' who 'stalks every page of the Old Testament'. This god is elsewhere described as a 'psychotic delinquent' and a 'cruel ogre (DAWKINS, 2006, 108). Some might see this as a prejudicial stereotyping of Judaism; others, however, would see Dawkins's focus on the Old Testament as a necessary tactic to discredit any form of monotheism, given the New Testament's rather attractive emphasis on divine love and compassion.

Scholars of the Old Testament fault Dawkins for his wooden and uncomprehending reading of this text, particularly his failure to do justice to the complexity of its vision of God,(Katharine DELL, 2017) or to realize that Christians interpret the Old Testament in the light of Jesus Christ, seen as the fulfilment of Law and prophets. This is one of the reasons why so many have criticized Dawkins for ridi¬culing a concept of God that seems to bear little relation to the Christian God – an idealized (or demonized?) invention designed with the needs of atheist apologetics in mind, playing on dark cultural suspicions of religion and exploiting a diminishing general knowledge of Christian beliefs and practices.

III.2. C. S. Lewis: God as the heart's desire

Lewis's transition from atheism to Christianity proceeded in stages. Initially he realized that the concept of God offered both an explanation and a confirmation of human moral values. Yet this essentially philosophical idea of God gave way to the notion of God as a living reality – someone we could know, not just know about. Lewis thus came to see God as the source and goal of human longing. His grounds for believing in God were not that this would make him a happier human being but because the Christian vision of God was true and trustworthy and brought joy and fulfilment in its wake.

For Lewis, God is neither an object within our universe nor a mere abstract philosophical idea. Although our quest may begin with rational arguments or take these in along the way, the goal of that quest is a personal reality:

[The existence of God] is a speculative question as long as it is a question at all. But once it has been answered in the affirmative, you get quite a new situation. You are no longer faced with an argument which demands your assent, but with a Person who demands your confidence. (C.S. LEWIS, ed. Lesley Walmsley, 2000, 213-214).

The point Lewis is making is that religious belief is grounded on rational norms that are not the same as those governing scientific theories. The former are governed by the 'logic of personal relations', the latter by the 'logic of speculative thought'. To have faith in God is not primarily to give intellectual assent to an idea, but to step into a greater picture of our world and become part of it.

'Each of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance (God seen by him in terms of dance). There is no other way to the happiness for which we are made.'(LEWIS, 2016, p. 176).

But which God are we talking about? Lewis is quite clear about this: it is the God made known and available through Jesus Christ, whose significance is to be grasped through both reason and the imagination. Belief in this God allows us to make sense of our world, so that we see it truly; yet it is also about the discernment of what we and our universe mean and how this informs the way we live. For Lewis, 'reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning'. (C. S. LEWIS, ed. Walter Hooper, 1969; repr. 2013, 265).

Like a scientist, Lewis aimed to evaluate the reliability of his beliefs by checking them out against observations. This helps us understand why he called himself an 'empirical theist': he assessed Christianity – especially its understanding of God – by asking how well this 'fits in' with what he experienced. (Readers of Mere Christianity will be familiar with his reflections on the human sense of moral responsibility, and the deep and elusive sense of yearning – which he termed 'joy' – that was such an integral part of his world of experience.).

Yet Lewis's approach to belief in God raises questions. One of the most obvious is this: he does not establish the existence of God by evidence-based reasoning. His approach seems rather to be assessing the Christian idea of God by seeing how well it makes sense of experience. But surely, he should prove the existence of God on the basis of the evidence? It is an important question, but not easily answered. Lewis seems to have adopted a binary solution during the late 1920s: either a recovery of belief in God or a confirmation and consolidation of his atheism. His was thus a comparative judgement, in which he set two already familiar positions side by side, considering how well they 'conveyed' or rendered actual human experience.

It is interesting to set Lewis alongside Dawkins at this point. As we already noted, for Dawkins's view – that the universe has neither design nor purpose, we need to look at this passage more closely and note the method he uses in drawing this conclusion:

'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.' (Richard DAWKINS, 1995, 133).

Dawkins here argues that there is a congruence or convergence of our actual observations of the universe and what we would expect if it is devoid of any intrinsic purpose, meaning or value.

Although Dawkins and Lewis reach quite different conclusions, their lines of argument are surprisingly similar. Each is asking which way of thinking seems to fit in better with our observations. The question is resonance or consonance between theory and observation, not proof of theory by observation. In the end, these two thinkers reach different judgements about God, yet by similar intellectual trajectories; neither of their positions is proved or provable. Sometimes the best theory is complicated and needs to be judged by its empirical adequacy; in other words, its ability to make sense of what we observe and experience. And Alister McGrath notes down: 'That's one of the main reasons why I moved away from atheism to Christianity. It seemed to me that atheism didn't really help me make sense of the complexities of our world or human experience, whereas Christianity did. (In Richard DAWKINS, 2019, 51-52).

5. CONCLUSION

Perhaps one obvious conclusion is that both Dawkins and Lewis are men of faith, in that both hold committed positions that cannot be proved right but which they clearly regard as justified and reasonable. We have to learn to live with a degree of rational uncertainty about our deepest beliefs and values.

To his critics, Dawkins's views on faith and proof seem to be philosophically thin, characterized by a narrow account of the capacity of human beings to know what really matters and live out their lives on its basis. It is instructive to compare Dawkins's shallow account of proof with the more realistic reflections of poets such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892). His poem 'The Ancient Sage' provides a concise summary of the dilemma of human beings as they try to make sense of our world and live meaningfully within it: 'For nothing worthy proving can be proven, / Nor yet disproven.'(Howard W. FULWEILER, 1983, 203-216).

In terms of their intellectual precariousness, both atheism and Christianity reflect the epistemic limits of human beings, who show a tendency to want to believe more – whether that belief is religious or secular – than the evidence actually warrants.

We find that setting Lewis and Dawkins side by side illuminates both the human condition and the inevitability of some form of faith in living a meaningful life. Yet many would suggest that the existence of suffering calls into question whether life can be said to be 'meaningful' in any sense of the word.

A similar theme is found in The God Delusion, where Dawkins clearly believes there is no intellectual case for the existence of any kind of God; he is severely critical of the moral character of the Old Testament's deity:

'The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.' (R. DAWKINS, 2006, 31).

This uncomfortable outpouring of contempt is illuminating, for it indicates that we cannot separate the question of 'belief in God' from that of 'What God are we talking about?'

Christopher Hitchens, Dawkins's fellow New Atheist, points out that from an atheist perspective, human beings create a God who is like them: 'God did not create man in his own image. Evidently, it was the other way about.' (Christopher HITCHENS, 2007, 8). Both God and religions must be recognized as 'man-made'. Human religion illuminates human nature. This issue is central to the writings of the German atheist philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, who influenced both Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. In his Essence of Christianity (1841), Feuerbach argued that human beings invent gods, and in so doing disclose their true natures, aspirations and fears. The study of religion thus offers a way of understanding human nature. (Josef WINIGER, 2004).

If, as Dawkins asserts, God is a 'bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser', what does that say about the people who invented this God? Dawkins doesn't seem to have grasped the significance of this question.

Within an atheist perspective, a repulsive deity is the mirror image of the repulsive human beings who invented this idea of God. So what does this tell us about human nature? Given the human moral fiascos of the 20th century, few would now echo the naive moral optimism of the Victorian atheist

poet Algernon C. Swinburne († 1909): 'Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things.' (Algernon Charles SWINBURNE, 1871, 124). The sheer irrationality of the two total wars of the twentieth century reduced many – such as Bertrand Russell – to despair:

'Man is a rational animal – so at least I have been told. Throughout a long life, I have looked diligently for evidence in favor of this statement, but so far I have not had the good fortune to come across it.' (Bertrand RUSSELL, 1996, 82).

These lines of thought move us away from the question of God to the perhaps more troubling one of human nature. Why troub¬ling? Because any good theory of human nature is like a mirror: it shows us how we really are rather than how we would like to be.

The great questions of life remain debated and discussed precisely because they are so important and because they transcend the evidential and rational capacities of human beings. We ought to know how we and our universe work; yet we also need to know what they mean. For Lewis, the Christian narrative allows us to hold together the functionality and meaning of our universe.

But how can we meet Dawkins's demand to show that our beliefs are justified, like those of the natural sciences? Or Lewis's concern that we do not limit ourselves to what the natural sciences can disclose? For Lewis, 'reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning'– and we need both if we are to find our way to something both true and trustworthy on the one hand, yet capable of helping us find meaning on the other.

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I want to have a final look to a personal history that highlights the main points of our paper. Paul Kalanithi (1977–2015) was a promising neurosurgeon who died of metastatic lung cancer at the age of 37 (before he could ever practice as a fully qualified surgeon). Once he knew he was dying, Kalanithi reflected hard on the meaning of life, the importance of the practice of medicine and the place of science in human culture. His bestselling book, When Breath Becomes Air, was written during his final illness and published posthumously.

Kalanithi loved science but found that it failed to engage with some of the questions that both really mattered to him and increased in importance as his illness progressed:

Science may provide the most useful way to organize empirical, reproducible data, but its power to do so is predicated on its inability to grasp the most central aspects of human life: hope, fear, love, hate, beauty, envy, honor, weakness, striving, suffering, virtue. (Paul KALANITHI, 2017, 170).

Literature, however, illuminated experience, providing a way of confronting the 'messiness and weight of real human life'. Kalanithi found writers such as T. S. Eliot helpful in exploring life's more complex questions, where other approaches were as 'dry as a bone'.

Science, he argues, is not really about explanation but about reducing phenomena into manageable units. By its very nature it cannot engage with the 'existential, visceral nature of human life, which is unique and subjective' (Paul KALANITHI, 2017, 170). There is nothing wrong with science; it is simply that its answers are important in some areas of life but not in others. To deal with the complexity of life we need more than science.

As a neurosurgeon, Kalanithi clearly affirms the importance of the natural sciences as a way of understanding how our world works, and as a means of developing new approaches to diagnosis and therapy. Yet he refuses to exalt science into a world view that establishes meaning and value. Those must come from other sources. He nods here in the directions of both Dawkins and Lewis, even if his more significant inspiration comes from the position represented by Lewis.

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