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**AN OPTIMISTIC CONCEPT OF EFFECTIVE  
CONVERSION TO ATHEISM OR HOW TO GET RID  
OF A PHANTASMAGORIA**

Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*. London: Transworld Publishers, 2007

**Polish edition:** Richard Dawkins, *Bóg urojony*, Warsaw: CiS Publishing House, 2007.  
Translated by Piotr J. Szwajcer

*The God Delusion* is a title which one cannot pass by indifferently – precisely formulated, it leaves no room for doubt that the book concerns an important area of life which, for many, is the most crucial one – namely, the belief in the existence of the Absolute. From the point of view of marketing *calculation* the title is brilliant!

The God delusion! – at last life will become easier – I thought seduced by the title. Finally, I will learn, and not just from any professor but from the Professor of Oxford that there is no God, which is equivalent to the fact – I calculated quickly – that there is no hell, and paradoxically – *I will get away with everything*. I felt a great relief and kept on calculating – how much time I will save if I stop going to church, praying, watching

my actions, minding that I do not, by chance or even consciously, violate the rules of my religion in thought, speech and deed. And if I happen to yield to my innumerable weaknesses, why should I care if there is no hell...

I also thought that if Pascal were alive, and acquainted himself with the works of this Oxford Professor, or, which cannot be excluded, the author himself, he would certainly give up the strenuous philosophical effort he was forced to undertake when formulating his famous Wager.

This handful of hastily assembled thoughts was enough for me to pick the book from the shelf and, disregarding the price, walk briskly towards the cashdesk. On leaving the bookseller's, having grown impatient with the long waiting for the appearance of the thus far remote, unambiguous scientific confirmation of the non-existence of God, I decided to start reading the book immediately. Already the preface foreshadowed what I had expected, namely, that the aim of the author is to turn every religious man who will read the book into an atheist: "If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down" (cf. p. 28). My intuition hasn't failed me – I said to myself – my life will acquire a new dimension, new meaning, and above all, at last it will surely become truly colourful. Immediately, I also understood that it would not be easy, because to achieve the goal set by Dawkins I had to accept his suggestion which meant reading over five hundred pages attentively (!) (cf. p. 28). For a while I had my doubts whether life was really easier for a nonbeliever than for a theist. But I came to the conclusion that reading five hundred pages in order to live with clear conscience (till the end ...) utterly freely in this house of earthly pilgrimage was not too big an effort to make.

Further on, Dawkins convinces us that even a passionate man can change his mind as opposed to a fundamentalist: "(...) passion that can change its mind for fundamentalism, which never will" (p. 18). If I understand it correctly, the book is not dedicated to religious fanatics. Why? Would that be a group of believers who cannot by any means be converted to atheism? Dawkins admits that he will not be able to convince "faith-heads" either (p. 28) because they are "immune to argument" (p. 28). I am not a fundamentalist, but if Dawkins were kind enough to explain what he understands by the notion of a "faith-head", then, assuming that I am not one, I would feel far more reassured that the book will satisfy my expectations. But if the definition of a "faith-head" in Dawkins's understanding proved that I am a "faith-head" myself, I could stop reading right away and save some of my precious, worldly time. Anyway, at this point, that is, unfortunately at the very beginning, my enthusiasm for the Dawkinsian attempt to convert pious readers to atheism waned a little. As it turned out soon it continued to fade with every page I had read. My weakening enthusiasm was gradually replaced by fear and astonishment. The fear that Dawkins could succeed in convincing me, a simple philosopher, to accept the following opinion (the defence of this opinion is, as it seems to me, the second goal which the author wants to accomplish in the book) – "(...) any creative intelligence, of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution" (p. 52). Does the above assumption mean that in the beginning (of the evolution) God is a delusion, and at the end of "an extended process of gradual evolution" He will be not? To play safe, Dawkins does not use the word "God" – God is meant to be a delusion even if He appears at the so-called "end"! The author speaks of "the creative intelligence," what's

more, he uses the plural form, “the intelligences,” which, as he emphasizes, “creative intelligences, being evolved, necessarily arrive late in the universe, and therefore cannot be responsible for designing it” (p. 52). If I understand it well, Dawkins’s “creative intelligences” did not exist at the outset of the evolution process. And if they appear at its end they will not take responsibility for anything because in the process of the so-called complex evolution everything will already (that is, before they appear, and according to Dawkins, they can appear “late”) have been not only designed, but also firmly and ultimately precisely constructed. And one more thing – the author’s hypothesizing about the moment of “the creative intelligences” appearance is particularly unclear – it could be inferred from the passages cited above that “the creative intelligences,” as “the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution (...) arrive late” (p. 52). Therefore, one could ask if the end product of any process appears late (in this process), or rather, as logic dictates – as “*the end* (product)” – means its epilogue. “Late” is not, however, identical with “at the end.”

These are just two unsettling examples. However, there are other innumerable examples which similarly deepened my concern. One could say – but this is only a matter of taste of every inquiring reader, his knowledge of the subject or religious sensitivity – I agree. Therefore, I will not quote any more examples that, in my opinion, content-wise are of little merit. Maybe I will just cite a few sentences characterizing this “solid” Dawkins’s argumentation, from a book-riposte *The Dawkins Delusion?* by Alister McGrath and Joanna Collicutt McGrath.

“Our conclusion is that Dawkins has simply failed to make his case intellectually, forcing him to use highly aggressive and dismissive arguments to cover up the many gaps in his logic and reasoning” (Preface to the Polish edition).

“Curiously, there is surprisingly little scientific analysis in *The God Delusion*” (Introduction, p. X).

“The book is often little more than an aggregation of convenient factoids, suitably overstated to achieve maximum impact, and loosely arranged to suggest that they constitute an argument” (Introduction, p. XI).

“In this book, Dawkins throws the conventions of academic scholarship to the winds; he wants to write a work of propaganda, and consequently treats the accurate rendition of religion as an inconvenient impediment to his chief agenda, which is the intellectual and cultural destruction of religion. It’s an unpleasant characteristic that he shares with other fundamentalists” (p. 6).

Dawkins mentions a few names of well-known figures. Among them one can also find some names of people who, despite their fame, did not go down in history as those who particularly contributed to the humanity’s well-being. Referring to those names in different contexts, Dawkins manipulates the sources in such a way as to prove his conviction that crimes on a mass scale had their origins in religion. And thus, Dawkins *regrets* that Stalin was really an atheist (cf. p. 309) although he instantly points out that he studied for some time in an Orthodox seminary. However, to deprive the reader of all illusions as to the origin of evil, Dawkins debunks the myth of Hitler’s atheism – “Hitler

was born into a Catholic family (...), never formally renounced his Catholicism, and there are indications throughout his life that he remained religious” (p. 310).

While reading *The God Delusion* I had a feeling that I was reading some gossip about famous personalities. In such a gossipy tone Dawkins makes reference to the names of great thinkers – St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Pascal, Kant. Unfortunately, one would search in vain for the quotations from the works of the aforementioned authorities. Consequently, these distinguished philosophers were not included in the bibliography – “Books cited or recommended”. Regrettably so, because when one writes about God, even if He is a delusion, it is worthwhile to offer to the reader at least some excerpts from: *The City of God*, *Summa Theologiae*, *Pensées*, *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, *Critique of Pure Reason* – works, the content of which testifies to the great expertise of their authors in the fields of religion and faith.

As I have mentioned earlier I was astonished if not disgusted by the book, or at least some of its passages. For the sake of decency I will not quote the exact passages, I will only give the numbers of pages where one can find examples demonstrating the author’s loss of all the remaining sense of affinity and relative respect for the potential reader, regardless of who the reader may be – an atheist or a follower of any religion (pp. 59, 102, 287).

Dawkins’s book abounds in controversial statements. Although it seems that the major driving force which gives the book its controversial character is *The God Delusion* itself, as a whole. The book as such resembles a ragbag of ideas that the author poured out thoughtlessly when he was thinking of the conversion of believers.

Over five hundred pages were filled with insignificant arguments and examples (insignificant at least for the purpose of defending the title (theme) of the book) the majority of which have nothing to do with the goals declared by the author. I cannot understand the context of the quoted passages (written by people who, with all due respect, did not go down in history as recognized experts on fundamental issues), the usage of which is neither justified nor elaborated on. Example? Here is the best one! Dawkins writes: “As the distinguished Spanish director Luis Buñuel said, «God and Country are an unbeatable team; they break all records for oppression and bloodshed»” (p. 266). I think that the author, paradoxically, does not identify himself with Buñuel’s remark, and the quoted passage found its way to the book by accident. Otherwise, it would mean that Dawkins denies everything he defined as the foundation of his book; or bluntly speaking – he contradicts himself. (1) The remark uttered by the famous director is not a form of the denial of God’s existence, on the contrary – (2) it rather points to the belief in his presence – God and Country are to constitute “an unbeatable team.” By quoting the above remark (3) Dawkins simultaneously negates his belief in transcendental delusions. Instead, (4) he displays something completely unexpected – an emotional demonstration of anger and rebellion against the Absolute, forgetting that (5) to feel offended means to acknowledge the existence of its cause – the reason for his offence. As I have mentioned before, *The God Delusion* contains five hundred pages of clumsy attempts to prove that God is a delusion. For the reader, this also means five hundred pages of a hopeless quest for the fully justified atheism promised by the author. Is it possible to prove scientifically the non-existence of God, if – here I exceptionally agree with Dawkins – one cannot (scientifically) prove His existence? And perhaps Kant

was right saying that “I had to suspend knowledge to make room for faith.” If the criteria established by faith, and not derived from reason, apply in the speculations on the problem of God’s existence, does *The God Delusion* make any sense? Dawkins claims that “one can abandon faith” (p. 394) but it can be inferred from the book that one should rather trust the rational calculation based on the *sui generis* arguments derived from the utilitarian understanding of the here and now. Yet Dawkins criticizes Pascal’s Wager, as he thinks “that believing is something you can *decide* to do (...), **believe it if I don’t**” (p.130). If it is so, can I freely decide **not to believe, if I do believe?**

I am convinced that Michał Paweł Markowski is right when he says: “I can make everything, except God, the object of my study, and therefore either one believes in God or one believes in nothing” (*Nie wystarczy zamilknąć. Rozmowy o Dekalogu*).

Certainly, every reader of *The God Delusion* will independently come to the conclusion that the goal of the book set by its author is defined by the rejection of faith in the transcendental Absolute. After a meticulous reading, every religious person should undergo a conversion to atheism. Isn’t this assumption excessively optimistic? Interestingly enough, the same doubt is expressed by Dawkins himself: “What presumptuous optimism!” (p. 28).