This is a new review of Richard Dawkins’s The God Delusion. My first review was superficial.

In the preface to his book, Richard Dawkins introduces us to his four consciousness raising messages:

1. ‘You can be an atheist who is happy, balanced, moral, and intellectually fulfilled.’ (23)
2. ‘Far from pointing to a designer, the illusion of design in the living-world is explained with far greater economy and with devastating elegance by Darwinian natural selection.’ (24)
3. A child is not a Christian child, a Muslim child etc. A child is a child of Christian parents, a child of Muslim parents etc. (25)
4. Atheists must come out of the closet and be proud. They do not have to apologise for their understanding of reality. (27)

Dawkins wants people who read his book to know that the god concept is a scientific hypothesis and, therefore, subject to proof. Faith is not proof. The proofs that people offer for the existence of god are not convincing as they depend on miracles and other such events, which again depend on faith rather than empirical evidence.

In chapter one, Dawkins, explains what an atheist is:

An atheist in this sense of philosophical naturalist is somebody who believes there is nothing beyond the natural, physical world, no supernatural creative intelligence lurking behind the observable universe, no soul that outlasts the body and no miracles – except in the sense of natural phenomena that we don’t yet understand. If there is something that appears to lie beyond the natural world as it is now imperfectly understood, we hope eventually to understand it and embrace it within the natural. As ever when we unweave a rainbow, it will not become less wonderful. (35)

In chapter two, Dawkins considers various forms of theism: deism, polytheism, monotheism and the concept of God in Abrahamic religions but it is not any particular conception of God, but the very notion of God, the existence of a supernatural intelligence, that he questions:
I decry supernaturalism in all its forms. (57)
I am not attacking any particular version of God or gods. I am attacking God, all gods, anything and everything supernatural, wherever and whenever they have been or will be invented. (57)

When he states ‘or will be invented’ he refers to our propensity for creating gods to alleviate fears of our existence in a vast universe and our desire to reduce its scale. He quotes from Carl Sagan’s *Pale Blue Dot* a passage that makes clear the foolishness of such fear:

> How is it that hardly any religion has looked at science and concluded, ‘this is better than we thought! The Universe is much bigger than our prophets said, grander, more subtle, more elegant’? Instead they say, ‘No, no, no! My god is a little god, and I want him to stay that way.’ A religion, old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the Universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths. (33)

For Dawkins, there is no God, only a God Hypothesis.

I am not attacking the particular qualities of Yahweh, or Jesus, or Allah, or any other specific god such as Baal, Zeus or Wotan. Instead I shall define the God Hypothesis more defensibly: there exists a superhuman, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it, including us. This book will advocate an alternative view: Any creative intelligence, of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution. Creative intelligences, being evolved, necessarily arrive late in the universe, and therefore cannot be responsible for designing it. God, in the sense defined, is a delusion; and, as later chapters will show, a pernicious delusion. (52)

The belief in God prevents people from taking responsibility for their lives.

There is something infantile in the presumption that somebody else (parents in the case of children, God, in the case of adults) has a responsibility to give your life meaning and point. It is all of a piece with the information of those who, the moment they twist their
ankle, look around for someone to sue. Somebody else must be responsible for my well-being, and somebody else must be to blame if I am hurt. Is it a similar infantilism that really lies behind the ‘need’ for a God? …The truly adult view by contrast, is that our life is as meaningful, as full and as wonderful as we choose to make it. And we can make it very wonderful indeed. (403-4)

Dawkins rejects the Creationists’ view of the world and the belief in intelligent design.

What is it that makes natural selection succeed as a solution to the problem of improbability, where chance and design both fail at the starting gate? The answer is that natural selection is a cumulative process, which breaks the problem of improbability up into small pieces. Each of the small pieces is slightly improbable, but not prohibitively so. When large numbers of these slightly improbable events are stacked up in series, the end product of the accumulation is very very improbable indeed, improbable enough to be far beyond the reach of chance. It is these end products that form the subjects of the creationist’s wearisomely recycled argument. The creationist completely misses the point, because he (women should for once not mind being excluded by the pronoun) insists on treating the genesis of statistical improbability as a single, one-off event. He doesn't understand the power of accumulation.

Natural selection is the tool of development and progress. Dawkins describes development through natural selection as a very gradual process that builds in tiny steps that lead to monumental achievements. Because we encounter these achievements as end products, we believe they were redesigned in one preconception, that of a god. Development, however, is a natural process not a supernatural process; it is continuous and depends on natural selection, which includes natural intelligence and adaptation to the environment. Though it may look like it, the end product is not the result of design; it represents the last, as we know it, stage in a work-in-progress that has taken thousands, millions of years to put together. The human being began as a chemical element about three and a half billion years ago. It is only towards the end of that period that animal form began to take shape. With the recent archaeological discovery of Australopithicus Sediba in South Africa, two skeletons that were buried for two million years, we may have that stage in the development that provides the link between apes and humans. This discovery indicates that development to the almost human stage took three billion, four hundred and ninety-eight million years.

Because the end products of the evolutionary process seem irreducibly complex, Creationists believe they have been designed. But according to Darwin:
If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down. But I can find no such case. Darwin could find no such case, and nor has anybody since Darwin’s time, despite strenuous, indeed desperate, efforts. Many candidates for this holy grail of creationism have been proposed. None has stood up to analysis. (151)

We speak a good deal about change these days and we may even pity those who have difficulty accepting change but we don’t automatically associate change with the evolutionary process. It is mostly in the world of technology that we are conscious of change, because of the speed at which it occurs. But to what extent are we aware of how we are evolving as a result of technological changes. Technology gives us as individuals more freedom and independence. And we are beginning to see ourselves differently. We speak of believing in ourselves, of taking responsibility for our lives, of envisioning and designing our paths. Consciously or unconsciously we are adopting an understanding of our existence that is not dependent on an external supernatural power.

The language of religion is symbolism and symbolism removes us from the natural world into an otherworldly reality and fixes us in past modes of thinking and behaviour. But as physicists and scientists make us aware of an expanding universe in which, as far as they can determine, the only life, as we know it, is on the Earth, the notion of God is changing and perhaps even receding into the past.

Despite the preaching of peace and love, much of religion’s contribution to the world has been divisiveness, conflict, war, terrorism and hate. The one advance that religion has made is that it no longer persecutes scientists, the purveyors of truth in our world. That is a small sign of religion’s evolution; a sign that it may eventually forego the fear and superstition that originally gave birth to it.

Modern advances in terms of human rights such as the repudiation of discrimination against the disabled, women, gays and lesbians, the recognition of children’s rights, the relinquishing of capital punishment and the right to abortion, have come about despite religion. Our morality, therefore, is not dependent on religion. Our sense of right and wrong exists independently of religion and has been passed on through the evolutionary processes of setting up relationships, families and communities.

Religion, faith and belief in God give us notions of a cramped and petty existence but in The God Delusion, we are given a wide-ranging, magnificent view of life on earth and in the universe. And we get the impression of Richard Dawkins as a human being with a great sense humour and joie de vivre, rejoicing in his intellectual freedom to roam through ever unfolding vistas:
I am thrilled to be alive at a time when humanity is pushing against the limits of understanding. Even better, we may eventually discover that there are no limits. (420)

And he puts a proper value on life.

As many atheists have said better than me, the knowledge that we have only one life should make it all the more precious. The atheist view is correspondingly life-affirming and life-enhancing, while at the same time never being tainted with self-delusion, wishful thinking, or the whingeing self-pity of those who feel that life owes them something. Emily Dickinson said,

That it will never come again
Is what makes life so sweet.

(404-5)