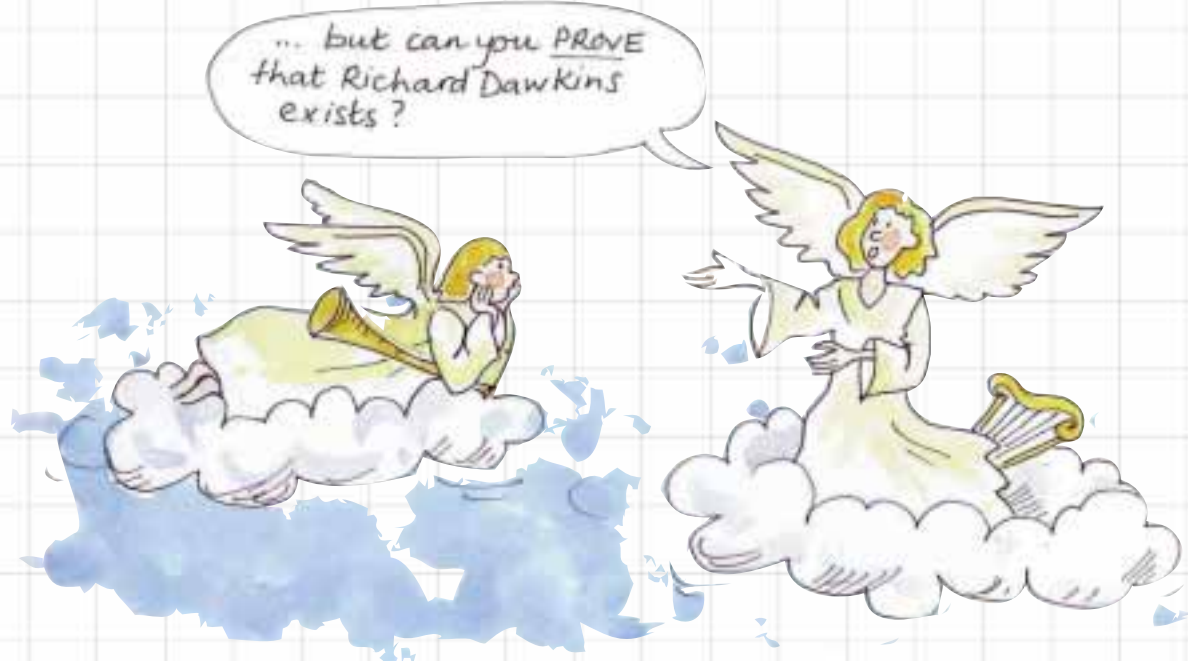


# Reflections of living in a land under judgement



**A**theism rules in Babylon. It's a bit like the Sadducees in Jesus' time: a minority party, but holding the reins of power. So Jonathan Miller has prime time to discuss the psychological reasons for religion – but not the psychological reasons for atheism. Richard Dawkins has a series to prove religion the world's greatest evil, but claiming Jesus as the only way to God risks falling foul of the law.

At the heart of atheism's self-confidence is its claim to have in science the only objective truth, since unlike God, it can be proved. There is a fundamental principle called 'Occam's Razor' that says a simple explanation is preferable to a complicated one: O-positive blood on a knife is more likely to be from an O-positive victim than to have been transformed from A-negative by goblins. If natural phenomena can be explained naturally, then God is superfluous.

The 'God hypothesis', they say, was invented by primitive men to fill the gaps in their knowledge. As the gaps get fewer, the God of the gaps gets smaller, until He disappears altogether. This is exemplified by the way even Christians marginalise God's role in the things they know most about: Christian seismologists tend to doubt His role in tsunamis, doctors in disease, and economists in financial affairs.

But it's interesting that the God of the Bible was never the God of the Gaps at all, but the God even of what was pretty well-understood. The psalmist who praised God for feeding young ravens when they call was well-aware that older ravens stuff their chicks with food to stop them calling. When Naomi praised God for showing her kindness, she wasn't denying that Ruth had chosen to work in a particular field whose owner, Boaz, freely chose to bless her. Every human

knows the methods they use to make decisions, yet Nehemiah happily attributed the favourable decision of his boss, Artaxerxes, to God.

Occam's Razor only applies within a closed material Universe. Even its inventor, the theologian William of Occam, believed in a separate spiritual realm that controlled, and might break into, this one.

In the film, *The Matrix*, humans are plugged into a virtual computer world, which seems like reality. No other world need exist – except that we viewers know there is one. The only inkling of truth comes from occasional program errors, when landscapes disappear momentarily. Call them miracles, or delusions – like Biblical miracles, they can be shrugged off when the rest of the world makes such good sense.

There is a second way to the truth: when a man who has been in the real world tells you about it and offers to take you there – call it revelation. The only way to find that reality is by faith in the man who told you. Even after you've experienced the reality, it's such a separate world that, back in the matrix, you have no proof of what you saw, and may even doubt it really existed. But in the film, an unbelieving rationalist in the matrix would be doomed to be a slave forever. Funnily enough, the same thing is true here in Babylon.

by 'Mishael'