

The God Question—*for Starters*

Science, God and the Search for Truth



Three programmes, with ten short excerpts in each, setting an agenda to test the case for the existence of God.

Author: Iain Morris,

Producer, The God Question series

Welcome to The God Question for Starters!

The word 'starters' is important in two ways. First you might be new to the whole debate about God and science. This is a good place to begin your journey! But secondly, this is a starter package in that we have prepared for you some significant excerpts from the longer 'Exploring the God Question' series. In time you might wish to view the whole series. You can find it at www.thegodquestion.tv/explore

The material, in its full and shortened form, helps you learn about, and investigate, the popular idea that scientific explanations are progressively making God redundant. It is perfectly feasible to select even a single extract for use in context such as a school assembly or as illustration of a specific point for any audience.

The Topics

The starters production, like its parent series, puts this idea to the test in the context of three important topics: **the cosmos, life on earth, and the human mind and brain**. When we look closely at the wonder of our existence—much of it revealed through science—does the evidence point to the intention of a creator or ultimately the lucky combination of chance forces? *That is the God question*.

Each of the topics has 10 short excerpts for you to view and discuss. In this guide you will find helpful notes on each excerpt as well as the title for the item and a key question for reflection and discussion. It will likely be helpful for you to make your own notes of interesting content as you view. There is space on the back page to write notes.

Hearing it from Both Sides

In each of the programmes there are advocates of both points of view. Although it will be mostly obvious which of our contributors are theists and which are atheists, an extra pointer is given whenever you see the person named: the text appears on a coloured band. Where it is purple, the contributor is a theist; a green band signifies an atheist contributor. Where the band is white, the interviewee is providing some objective information and is not giving a personal perspective on the God question.

Over to You

It is important that you hear the evidence from both sides of the debate and, suitably informed, can make up your own mind. Whatever conclusion you reach on the existence of God, we hope that having experienced The God Question content you will have clear reasons for reaching it.

If at any time you have comments or questions you would like to communicate to the producers, write to info@kharisproductions.com

And with that, let your three part journey begin!

EPISODE ONE: THE COSMOS

ITEM	TITLE	DURATION	ONSCREEN QUESTION	FURTHER INFORMATION
1	Introduction	52 secs	There is no specific question given but you might wish to discuss any statements that you found particularly interesting.	A scene setting introduction to the contributors and themes. Be ready to note any statement you find interesting and could be worth discussing.
2	The Wonder of the Cosmos	2.25	Does science offer any evidence of a God behind the cosmos?	Take note of some characteristics of our amazing universe that have been observed. The big question is why should such a special universe exist?
3	Hotly Debating God!	1.32	Why are these prominent atheists so eager to be rid of God?	This item introduces New Atheism. Reflect on why its spokespersons are so hostile to religion.
4	Testing the God Question	2.31	How do you think most people form a view on the existence of God? How important is science in the debate about God?	This extract begins with members of the public giving their views on whether God exists. But the question is too important to be left to instinct alone. Take note of the arguments made by two opponents in a public debate about God.
5	Mythological Gods	3.20	How might the Christian God differ from the mythological gods of ancient cultures? How is it feasible for a scientist to believe in God?	Ancient Greeks and Romans invented gods to explain natural phenomena. Is the Christian God in the same category? Look out for the arguments and counter arguments in this extract.

ITEM	TITLE	DURATION	ONSCREEN QUESTION	FURTHER INFORMATION
6	The Cosmos: The Scientific Story of its Beginning	2.20	If the scientific story of how our universe began happens to amaze you, which aspects of it create a sense of wonder?	As we begin to unravel the scientific story of the Cosmos, note the mystery surrounding the Big Bang and the question of how order could come from a cosmic explosion.
7	The Cosmos: Foundations for Life	5.11	How do you react to the view that, based on such scientific discoveries, there is convincing evidence of a mind behind the universe?	Take note of how the laws of physics produced chemical elements vital for life. And the timing (3 minutes) was crucial. Getting just the right balance between the elements was vital too. Then, out of gas and dust, stars and planets began to form! Some argue that this suggests a purposeful mind behind it all.
8	A Finely Tuned Universe	3.54	How weak or strong an argument, for the existence of a creator, is the fine tuning of the universe?	There are very delicate balances in the universe necessary to support life. You might wish to note some of them. The question is how can the existence of this spectacular fine tuning be best explained?
9	The Multiverse Idea	3.10	How convinced are you by the multiverse argument?	If there is no God, how is it possible to have such a finely-tuned operational universe? In response, the idea of ‘multiverse’ has been proposed. It is a form of ‘chance’ explanation for our universe. It assumes that if there are billions of ‘trial’ universes eventually there will be one that works as well as ours does.
10	In Conclusion	1.51	Whose opinion best expressed your view? Do you think our existence is better explained by ‘chance’ or ‘intention’?	In this extract you’ll find a range of conclusions from the expert contributors—atheists and theists. Their views are worth noting.

EPISODE TWO—LIFE AND EVOLUTION

ITEM	TITLE	DURATION	ONSCREEN QUESTION	FURTHER INFORMATION
1	Introduction	1.24	There is no specific question but you might wish to discuss any statements that you found particularly interesting.	A scene setting introduction to the contributors and themes. Be ready to note any statement you find interesting and which could be worth discussing.
2	Being Human	1.45	Are you impressed with the way in which human beings are 'put together'? Why/ why not?	The way in which human beings are 'put together' can be a source of astonishment, raising the question about how this can be.
3	Darwin vs God?	4.25	Some atheists, as well as some theists, see God and evolution as irreconcilable alternative explanations; other theists choose both. Which view do you find more convincing?	Are evolution and God alternative explanations of our existence? Opinions are divided. Atheists believe evolution removes the need for a 'God explanation'. Although some theists see evolution as a threat to God, others—including some eminent scientists—see no conflict between evolution and religion, concluding that evolution is the scientific discovery of God's creative plan.
4	The Darwin Story	5.50	How much do you think that Darwin's explanation—of how a wide variety of species has developed—poses a threat to God?	This is Darwin's story, in brief, about how he undertook a five year voyage around the world as a ship's naturalist. Darwin took with him a question that he eventually answered with what is now a world famous concept: 'evolution by natural selection'. He also reached the conclusion that all living things must have emerged ultimately from a single original cell. It appears that many clergy accepted this theory.

ITEM	TITLE	DURATION	ONSCREEN QUESTION	FURTHER INFORMATION
5	Interpreting the Evidence	2.25	What is the basic difference between the two sets of opinions expressed? Where do your sympathies lie?	Some claim that evolution is a comprehensive explanation that makes God redundant. Others argue that the discovery of a scientific process does not remove the need for a designer of that process. This is a crucial difference of interpretation in the science/God debate.
6	The Problem of Suffering	3.13	How much of an obstacle is the problem of suffering to belief in a good and loving creator?	For many, the existence of suffering is a major obstacle to a belief in God. Often the natural world is a place of pain and suffering. Can this be consistent with there being a caring creator?
7	The Wonder of DNA	4.12	Some theists claim that DNA code is evidence of a creator's handiwork. To what extent do you find this convincing?	Nearly one hundred years after Darwin's famous work was published, there was a major discovery about the wonder and complexity of the human cell. Each one of the body's 32.7 trillion cells is constructed according to a set of instructions contained in 3 billion letters of DNA. The full instruction book is called 'the human genome'. It is digital code, leading some to conclude it is major evidence for a mind behind our existence.
8	The Origin of Life	3.06	Is it significant to realise that Darwin did not explain the origin of life? How surprised are you that life's origin still baffles scientists?	Earth appears to have had the raw materials necessary to give birth to life. However, propagating life needs molecules which can copy themselves to give life to future generations. It is not known how this characteristic could have developed. Nor is it known how all the information, contained in cells, ever originated. Some scientists think the explanation lies in unknown aspects of a mind-less evolutionary process while others are more inclined to see the involvement of a creator as the most convincing explanation.

ITEM	TITLE	DURATION	ONSCREEN QUESTION	FURTHER INFORMATION
9	Uniquely Planet Earth	3.13	Do you think that the variety of ways in which planet earth develops and nurtures life might just be good fortune?	As far as scientists are aware, planet earth uniquely hosts the only known sophisticated life in the universe. The planet has many vital characteristics that contribute. These include its exact position in relation to the sun, the movement of its tectonic plates and the availability of water.
10	In Conclusion	2.43	Is evolution without God 'too good to be true'?	Life on earth, scientifically speaking, is an unlikely triumph. Does it, therefore, point to the intention and involvement of a creator? Contributors provide their varying perspectives. Note any you find especially convincing.

EPISODE THREE—MIND AND CONSCIOUSNESS

ITEM	TITLE	DURATION	ONSCREEN QUESTION	FURTHER INFORMATION
1	Introduction	2.18	There is no specific question but you might wish to discuss any statements that you found particularly interesting	A scene setting introduction to the contributors and themes. Be ready to note any statement you find interesting and could be worth discussing.
2	A Brain of Wonder	5.24	What impresses you about the power of the human brain? How is it different from mind and why might that difference be important?	The brain is at the centre of our lives. Its components are linked together by 10 billion neurons and it is immensely powerful! It is common for scientists to distinguish between the brain and the mind though the two are obviously integrally linked. Although scientists essentially understand how brain cells work, it remains a mystery how our consciousness results from what happens in the brain. There is no obvious mechanism. Note that the words 'mind' and 'consciousness' are generally accepted as being 'the same thing'.
3	The Big Question of Origin	4.41	Could a mindless process produce mind? Might the existence of our minds indicate a mind behind the universe?	So where does such a complex organ as the brain—and mind—come from? Can evolution by natural selection be the whole story? Opinions are divided. You might find it helpful to note points made on both sides of the argument.
4	Spiritual Consciousness: Make-Believe or Real?	3.53	Is religion more than just a form of wishful thinking? How can we scrutinise our beliefs as objectively as possible?	There are different levels of consciousness—including the human sense of the spiritual. This is expressed in a variety of ways by human beings, no more dramatically perhaps than in the design of grand religious buildings such as cathedrals. A priest from Ely cathedral explains. But might this be part of a grand delusion, even a form of superstition?

ITEM	TITLE	DURATION	ONSCREEN QUESTION	FURTHER INFORMATION
5	Hard Wired for Religion?	2.20	Why do you think religion is so widely practised across the world even in the modern era?	Ninety percent of the world's population believes in God. Even when authoritarian regimes—such as the Former Soviet Union—tried to annihilate belief in God, it proved unsuccessful. Might it be that human beings are hard wired to believe?
6	Explaining Religion?	3.02	Cultural influence or divine reality? Which is the better explanation of religion?	Could cultural influence be the chief factor in determining what a person believes? It is obvious that specific religions are associated with certain geographical parts of the world. Nevertheless religions have basic similarities and that may be very significant. If we are, in reality, created by God, perhaps we should expect that we are designed to make the connection. It appears that is what religions have in common.
7	The Question of Morality	3.40	Where does our sense of morality come from?	Human beings appear to share a sense of what is right and what is wrong. Where does this ability to make the distinction come from? Are we just being intelligent and sensible in our moral choices—or are we reflecting an in-built moral code which originates outside of ourselves? Note the main arguments on both sides.
8	Transformed Lives	5.12	Do these accounts provide credible evidence that people can have a personal relationship with God that transforms lives?	We hear accounts from prisoners in a Texas jail about how they believe new-found faith in God has brought major attitude and life changes that have been transformative, despite the prisoners having long custodial sentences to complete.
9	90 Minutes in Heaven?	2.30	How do you react to the Don Piper story?	Don Piper was a casualty in a near-fatal road accident. He was pronounced clinically dead at the scene but was successfully resuscitated 90 minutes later. During that time, he believes he had an out-of-body experience of heaven.
10	In Conclusion	2.36	How does the topic of mind and consciousness impact The God Question debate?	Contributors express what they believe is 'the bottom line' in their thinking about human consciousness and God. You might wish to note points you think are especially relevant.

Programme and Excerpt

Your Notes

The God Question series is produced by Kharis Productions Ltd in Scotland.

The series is owned by Search for Truth Enterprises Ltd (Company No: SC344477), a subsidiary of Search for Truth Charitable Trust, a registered charity and private limited company registered in Scotland. (Charity No: SC039465. Company No: SC340300)