

Who really 'created'? Psalm 19 and Evolutionary Psychology in Dialogue¹

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ABSTRACT

The beauty and awe that the natural world evokes lead humans intuitively to believe in an all powerful creator as is convincingly exemplified by Psalm 19. The author allows both nature and law to communicate elatedly about this god, who is believed to exist objectively. This ease with which human beings conceptualize counter-intuitive beings ('gods'), has lately been confirmed by Evolutionary Psychology as well. The 'Theory of Mind' mental tool especially, plays a primary role in this regard. To 'think up' a god(s), responsible for the world and its functioning, comes naturally and intuitively. Evolutionary Psychology, however, differs from Psalm 19, namely therein that 'god' is a subjective construct. Bringing Darwinian evolution into the conversation, the problem of the 'existence of god' becomes even more critical, as evolution does not need a creator god. But god(s) persists. In reaction to the personal 'god' of theism and the no-god of atheism, seeking the 'godly' (atheism) becomes quite attractive.

A INTRODUCTION

What the literary artist or poet of Psalm 19 does is what artists in general do, namely an interpreted experience of our world in such a way that it satisfies our deepest intuitions about the meaning of life. Psalm 19 does this in religious terms, assuming an intentional creator god who created both nature and law for the well-being of human beings. The human mind seems to find it difficult to interpret the world other than that it is meant for us, specifically designed for us. The ancient Greeks believed that the many constellations of stars that they were aware of, were created to teach humans mathematics. Is that really what they are there for, or is it us humans, this very latecomer on the evolutionary scene, who discovered the beauty of numbers? If we hear the birds singing at dawn we think they are singing for us. How would a natural scientist, an ornithologist, react to this? The singing is non-anthropological and most probably nothing else than the birds' battle cries, proclaiming their territorial boundaries. The examples can be multiplied that natural scientific explanations do not easily satisfy the human mind, our intuitions seem to need more.

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What is the human mind and where does it come from? How does it utilize god and religion to explain life in a meaningful way? The Cognitive Science of Religion and especially Evolutionary Psychology of the past two decades or so have offered some stimulating theories on the origin of religion. In his evaluation hereof Gregersen (2006:313) rightly situates its roots broadly in G. Lakoff and M. Johnson's 'embodied scientific realism' (1999), the way we subjectively conceptualize the world we live in. It is not some objective reality 'out there' that gives us 'our world' but our bodily experiences inform (and constrain) primary metaphors that are extended into all kinds of metaphors and concepts, even the most abstract ones with which we 'have a world' (Johnson 1987:102).² Gregersen (2006:313) encapsulates: '...imaginative concepts reflect ways of coping with the world, a world with which we are already interacting as cognitive participants, who are bound to understand the world from the perspective of bodily-mental metaphors and concepts'. The idea of embodied knowledge finds expression in the theory of the brain-mind as consisting of specialised interacting mental modules (Fodorian modular view of human cognition), in opposition to the (Chomskian) idea of a content-free, general-purpose brain (Gregersen 2006:314).³ There is not a specific module for religion but religious notions are naturally conceptualised along with others by the different modules to interpret the mass of environmental stimuli. A psychological explanation of religion has been met with resistance as many are convinced that this is the domain of social and cultural methods. Lawson (2000:340), however, points out that similar to a commonality in language (e.g. Universal Grammar) in spite of the diversity of languages, there is also a specifiable commonality in religion across cultures, which Evolutionary Psychology has set itself the task to explore and explain. Structure and cause and not only meaning and significance need to be attended to in studying religion (Lawson 2000:342). Gregersen (2006:323) has indeed pointed out the limitation of Evolutionary Psychology in regard to the meaning of religion, that evolutionary roots do not necessarily explain contemporary validity. However, the focus on the origins of religious thought has at least exposed the indefensibility of objectivistic views in this regard. Gregersen (2006:321) also criticizes Evolutionary Psychology's explanation of religion by reductively focusing only on the hunter-gatherer era of human history and neglecting the following agricultural era's possible influence. He also points out that a naturalistic explanation of religion as Evolutionary Psychology presents itself, requires proven links between mental modules and brain modules especially when it

² Apart from the works of Lakoff and Johnson already mentioned, see also Vorster for the indefensibility of objectivism (1997a; 1997b; 1998).

³ For a thorough, interdisciplinary discussion of the notion 'mind' see Carruthers, P. & Chamberlain, A. (eds) 2000. *Evolution and the Human Mind: Modularity, Language and Meta-Cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, with contributions from Anthropology, Paleo-Anthropology, Archaeology, Psychology, Philosophy and Linguistics.

claims 'hardwiring' in the brain of these mental modules, but admits that research in neuroscience in this regard is continuing. Despite criticism, Evolutionary Psychology is an important voice among many in the explanation of religion.

In what follows a dialogue on the so-called 'creator' is forged between Psalm 19 and Evolutionary Psychology. Psalm 19 is first closely read to determine its literary thrust. The choice of the well-known Psalm 19 was not intended as a contribution to psalm research as such, but to scrutinize its metaphysical claims, namely the unproblematic, spontaneous acceptance of a 'creator god';⁴ in order to create a framework for a dialogue with the latter claim, an exposition of the 'theory of mind' mental tool and its conceptualization of counterintuitive beings is consequently necessary. After establishing what the psalm says about 'god' we now have a view on 'god(s)' from Cognitive Psychology as well; hereafter Psalm 19 is briefly revisited in light of these cognitive insights, and its close reading thus far, expanded and complemented. This furthers the problem of this article, namely who really 'created'?; hereafter and lastly the problem of the 'how' of the existence of god is highlighted, followed by a conclusion.

B PSALM 19: THE CELEBRATION OF ORDER IN COSMOS, LAW AND INDIVIDUAL SUPPLICANT

Kruger (2002) wrote a short but convincing article to capture the unity and thrust of Psalm 19. He regards it as a wisdom psalm, part of the torah-psalms (Ps 1, 119) underlining God's order ('will') in life as manifested indirectly in nature, more directly in the torah and there for humans to contemplate on in finding meaning: '...dat hierdie psalms gelowiges oproep tot nadenke oor die vastheid, sekerheid, helderheid, onwrikbaarheid en krag van die Goddelike Woord' (Kruger 2002:122).

As is noted by most commentaries, the psalm progresses from the general to specifics, from the cosmos to the torah to the individual supplicant and herewith clearly demarcating the psalm into three parts, verses 2-7, 8-11 and 12-15. At first glance the three parts seem to be loose units, for what have the heavens and especially the sun, the torah and a worried individual about his transgressions have in common? A close reading of it, however, suggests otherwise. And whether the psalm was extended over time or composed as a unity from the beginning, the final, post-exilic author (editor)⁵ clearly seems to have

⁴ This is obviously true of most Bible texts, and any other text which does not question the idea of a beneficial 'creator god' could have done service for the broad purpose of this article.

⁵ Kraus (1972:154) voices a historical-critical viewpoint: 'Während Ps 19A alle kennzeichen eines hohen Alters trägt, ist Ps 19B wohl nicht in die Zeit vor Ezra anzusetzen'.

intended it to be read as a whole. Kruger demarcates the poem into four stanzas (2a-5b; 5c-7c; 8a-11d; 12a-15c) with the first two and last two closely aligned, similar as older commentators usually demarcated the psalm in these two halves (revelation in cosmos and in law; e.g. Weiser 1962:197-204). He points out that a colometric analysis consisting of consonant and word counts (Kruger 2002:113-117, following Loretz & Kottsieper, Korpel & De Moor) confirms a definite balance in the choice of poetical cola: a colon of four words usually has a matching number of 12-18 consonants, three words 10-14 consonants and two words 6-10/11 consonants, throughout the poem. Balance or patterning is also notable in verse 2 which forms a *chiasm* (‘heavens’, ‘declare’, ‘the glory of God’, ‘the work of his hands’, ‘proclaim’, ‘the skies’) and followed in verse 3 by what Kruger (2002:117) refers to as a grammatical parallelism (subject, prep., indirect object, impf. verb, object – e.g. ‘one day’, ‘for’, ‘the other’, ‘pour forth’, ‘speech’, etc). There is also another *chiasm* in verse 7 describing the sun’s path (‘at one end of the heavens’, ‘its rising’, ‘its circuit’, ‘to the other end’) creating an *inclusio* in the first half (see Vos 2005:101). Another kind of patterning is continued in verses 8-10 (the genitive construction of torah or synonym with Yahweh, followed by a predicate, followed by a participle and noun: e.g. ‘the law of the Lord’, ‘is perfect’, ‘reviving’, ‘the soul’, etc). Kruger does not comment on anything specifically in stanzas 2 or 4 in this regard. Describing the contents of the different parts of the psalm in terms of figures of style it is clear that verses 2-7 exhibit especially *synonymous parallelism* (e.g. v. 5a: ‘Their voice⁶ goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world’; includes the two chiasms), 8-11 mostly *synthetic parallelism* (e.g. v. 9: ‘The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart’) and likewise 12-15 (e.g. v. 14: ‘Keep your servant also from wilful sins, may they not rule over me, then will I be blameless...’). Kruger (2002:118) is quite correct that this linguistic signalling of balance is a subtle indication of the order of god’s creation and law. There is also the repetition of certain words throughout the psalm adding to its coherence (Kruger 2002:115-116): אֵין (4a, 7c), יצא (5a, 6a, 7a), קצה (5b, 7a and b), בהם (5c, 12a), חמם (8a, 14c) and notably סתר (7c, 13b). It is especially the latter that links the first half of the psalm to the second (Schaefer 2001:47), also in terms of contents. The sun symbolism of the first half becomes the lens through which the law in the second half should be viewed. Just as nothing can be hidden from the sun’s rays, likewise nothing can be hidden from the law and its divine author, of knowing hidden sins (v. 13b). The law is the means (a godly presence) by which everything is revealed, both that which is good as a trustworthy moral guide or code and that which is bad and should be avoided. The law, here portrayed and elevated in an encompassing way through synonym and hyperbole, functions in a sun-like manner (‘sun of the

⁶ The NIV used here correctly follows the Septuagint and Symmachus instead of MT, emending קוּם (‘their measure’) to קוּלָם (‘their voice’) which makes good sense within the parallelism of v. 5a.

soul' - Eaton 2005:110) to throw light on life. Kruger (2002:116), within the psalm's context, made a motivated choice for the translation of the word זָהָר (12a), the law's capability to 'enlighten' instead of 'warning', confirming its link with the directly preceding exposing sun. בָּרָה (v. 9), the law as 'clear/radiant', also subtly signals to the sun symbolism in the first part, as well as the law being עָמִיד, 'sure/steady', hinting at the permanence of heavenly bodies (Kruger 2002:120 following Fisch). Although the psalm does not comment directly on the well-known sun mythology of Israel's neighbours but seems to be rather a commentary on Gen 1-3,⁷ allusions or echoes of the sun god in his glory and judicial capacity, seem to be part of the inspirational background (Kruger 2002:119-20; see also Ps 84:12). And finally the poet ties together the whole psalm with an *inclusio* as well as *closure*: Craigie (1983:183) indicates that the psalm starts with the speech of heavens and ends with the poet's own speech, the words of his mouth (and thoughts of his heart) presenting it as an offering to god. God as his rock and his redeemer (v. 15), subtly hints at the sphere of nature in the first half and the judiciary/moral sphere in the second.

To summarize: The poet of Psalm 19 portrays the heavens, day and night as persons who silently but comprehensively testify to god's creational capabilities and knowledge. Nature here communicates just like wisdom does in Proverbs and elsewhere (e.g. Prov 1:21; 15:2; 23: 9). The sun as a vibrant young bridegroom or athlete confirms this as he does what he is supposed to do, bringing light and life to earth as he follows his pre-designed path and exposing (as judge) all that is hidden. They all do this in a silent and indirect way, god is not seen but his works, as his creations, are. The same almighty creator god is also the author of the torah, bestowing on it an authority and stature that should evoke an even greater awe as that for nature. The torah becomes a more direct way of knowing god or his solicitous will (Schaefer 2001:47), it acts as a divine medium for the benefit of humans and other than silent nature it becomes a word in many forms (Mays 1994:98, 99). Although not personified in the psalm as such it becomes an extension of god himself – his will, his commands, his precepts, his wishes in order to bring a full and abundant life for his followers. As nature to a certain extent resembles wisdom in her calling out in public (vv. 2-5), so the law also becomes similar to wisdom and is praised likewise (Prov 8:1-21; 4:20-23; 6:23). And therefore the psalm can indeed be described as a wisdom torah-psalm (Kruger 2002:120 – 122). It testifies to order, security and predictability in both the natural as well as the moral sphere. The introspection of the supplicant in verses 12-15, '...bid vir "orde" in sy eie lewe' (Kruger 2002:119), is an acknowledgement by the poet that sin destabilizes order, and can even upset the natural order as is common in

⁷ Clines (1974:12-13) argues that the second part of Ps 19 interacts with Gen 2-3, indicating the superiority of the law to the tree of knowledge, and deduces that the first part of the psalm comments on Gen 1.

folkloric beliefs. Whereas wisdom earlier was the reflective way of contemplating and mastering life and adhering to its order, the torah has now become the means to accomplish this end, to find one's place in the universal scheme of things (Craigie 1983:183).

Psalm 19 is indeed a consoling and much loved psalm for probably all of its life span, attending to believers' needs for security and stability. But what if god does not exist and is neither the designer of nature nor the real author of the torah? What if psalm 19 does what all religions do '...not primarily a search for truth; it is overwhelmingly a search for security' (Spong 205:220). What if there is no god or god's word to contemplate on as Kruger (2002:122) foresees after having read Psalm 19? Kruger's close reading of this psalm does not question the problem of 'god' at all, the psalm's claims are accepted unproblematically. But can the modern reader sidestep this, living in a modern scientifically informed world where the 'existence of god' is not accepted *ipso facto*? Before answering these and related questions, however, it is first necessary to determine where god(s) comes from, notably so from a cognitive psychological point of view.

C THEORY OF MIND AND GOD(S)

Barrett (2004:3-6) describes the functioning of the mind as similar to that of a workshop. It consists of different tools or mental templates (cf. Boyer 2001:40, 78, 107) all working together to help us interpret our world and find our place in it. There are three groups, namely *categorizers* (object detection device, agency detection device, face detector, animal identifier, artefact identifier), *describers* (object describer, living-thing describer, theory of mind, artefact describer) and *facilitators* (social exchange regulator, social status monitor, intuitive morality). The *categorizers* detect the different kinds of things in our immediate environment that matter to us, the *describers* fill these detections with applicable tried – and – tested contents and the *facilitators* regulate our social relationships as befit accepted human socialization. These tools all operate instantly and automatically; they function non-reflectively so as to inform our reflective judgments and consequently our meaningful behaviour. It is important to note that the mind and its tools are not empirically verifiable but only our behaviour is, which can then be interpreted by means of these theoretical constructs (Barrett 2004:96). For belief in god(s) to become very likely the more mental tools that are operative the better but it is especially the agency detection device and its close partner 'theory of mind' that pioneers the conceptualization of a god. The agency detection device is hypersensitive (therefore called HADD by Barrett 2004:32) to intentional or purposeful agency in our surrounds and easily identifies people, animals or artefacts⁸ that

⁸ These categories are the ones mostly used cross-culturally to embody gods (Boyer 2001:40, 78, 107).

violate our intuitive expectations of them as possible candidates for gods. These detections are passed on to ToM (Barrett's acronym for 'theory of mind') that details the agents' probable thinking, beliefs, desires, emotions, perceptions and attitudes. This 'mind-reading' of others happens continuously – it is nearly impossible when thinking about others not to think what they are probably thinking unless you are autistic. But what most probably gave rise to these tools equipping us to live meaningful lives?

Anthropologist Stewart Guthrie's eloquent 1993 book, *Faces in the Clouds*, has become an inspiring source for Barrett and many others in laying bare the cognitive foundations for religious thought. In his theory of religion Guthrie (1993:10) first of all positions himself against the wish-fulfilment group who explains religion as a mechanism to alleviate unpleasant emotions (e.g. Freud) as well as the social functionalist/solidarity group (e.g. Durkheim) for whom religion sustains social order. Religion is not always that comforting and it neither supplies the (only) social glue to keep society together. He finds himself within the intellectualist group (or rationalist, neo-Tylorian, cognitive; Guthrie 1993:21) who sees religion as an attempt to interpret and influence the world rationally. This happens through perceiving and interpreting the world through a humanlike lens or systematic anthropomorphism (Guthrie 1993:3; Barrett 2004). We anthropomorphize pervasively and continuously, since early childhood and throughout adulthood, because other humans matter mostly to us. Infants younger than a year become amazingly focus-fixed on the faces of their parents (Guthrie 1993:83, 104-105; Barrett 2004:4, 101; Johnson *et al.* 2001) and we fare remarkably well with face and voice detection throughout life. We spontaneously anthropomorphize our surroundings, pets, artefacts. We cannot escape personification or pathetic fallacy in the literary or visual arts as we ascribe human characteristics to inanimate things (Guthrie 1993:124) and even in Philosophy and Science the human becomes the measure: molecules are described as left- or right-handed (Guthrie 1993:166), stars are born and die (Guthrie 1993:167), nature becomes a scrutinizing, unerring, selecting person (Darwin) and genes are described as selfish (Richard Dawkins) (Guthrie 1993:171, 173). This in spite of science's endeavour to eliminate anthropomorphism (Guthrie 1993:35).

Where science strives to get rid of anthropomorphism religion is built on anthropomorphism, 'religion is anthropomorphism' (Guthrie 1993:35, 178) as humans create gods in their own image. But first you have to detect them.⁹ Our

⁹ This might sound obvious but religion needs gods, they are central to religion, even a religion seemingly without 'god(s)', e.g. Buddhism! (Guthrie 1993:19-20 *pace* Durkheim). Guthrie (following M. Spiro) acknowledges some atheistic Buddhist (and Hindu) philosophical schools, but argues that even the Buddha of canonical Theravada inclines to a superhuman being, that which cognitive psychologists later on coined as 'counter-intuitive' beings. Local Buddhist communities often have 'gods.'

ability to detect agency and to overestimate the presence of something out there rather than underestimate, probably has evolutionary origins safeguarding our species. If a detection proves to be only an illusion, never-mind because 'Better safe than sorry' (following Pascal's wager) is the name of the game when it comes to survival (Guthrie 1993:4-5, 187). And this competency to scan our environs for agency constantly which Guthrie did not name, has therefore been rightly coined by Barrett as hyperactive – HADD (Barrett:2004:44n2). And it is so fine-tuned that it only needs traces to postulate probable agency, therefore we see more than meets the eye, namely faces in the clouds (cf. title of Guthrie's book). If we discern design around us we immediately look for a Designer (Guthrie 1993:186). The invisibility of gods (mostly so but not necessarily so) neither deters us from seeking them because invisibility is not something unnatural or so strange. Humans have since their early beginnings become quite accustomed to the disappearance tricks of animals through camouflage (Guthrie 1993:48). Belief in an intangible, invisible and inaudible god out there somewhere is therefore not something unnatural or irrational. Gods themselves can be very humanlike or more, '...have animal or other nonhuman forms, or no visible form at all...' (Guthrie 1993:177). If they are too distant from humans they make no sense and too close disqualify them as gods (Guthrie 1993:178, 183; cf. also Armstrong 1993:60). Guthrie's struggling herewith is aptly captured by Barrett (2004:21-30; see also Boyer 2001:56) who circumscribes the identity of gods as minimally counterintuitive beings. They transcend our natural expectations (supernatural) but are comprehensible enough (natural) so as to have inferential potential, the latter neatly confirmed by the anthropomorphic hypothesis.¹⁰ They matter to us very much because we believe that they have unlimited access to strategic knowledge concerning our well-being in general,¹¹ or according to Armstrong they 'work' for us (1993:5). Although the anthropomorphic hypothesis has come under fire that it is too reductionist (e.g. Barrett 2004:76-77) which brings Guthrie (and his appreciation also of Jean Piaget¹²) into the firing line, he is sophisticated and aware enough that gods can be more than human but most importantly, humans always relate to their gods as if they are human. Whether god is constructed as utterly abstract or tangibly humanlike all religions interact with their gods in

¹⁰ The Trinity in Christianity is a typical maximum counterintuitive notion, which might be 'theologically correct' but becomes intuitively incomprehensible and has little inference value (Barrett 2004:87).

¹¹ Apart from safety and reproductive concerns for our well-being, Guthrie also emphasises the necessity of social interaction (1993:187), understandably within his anthropomorphizing frame of thought.

¹² In an earlier article Barrett and Richert (2003:301, following Goldman) spoke on anthropomorphism as follows: 'For Freud, God is a surrogate father needed to diffuse anxiety. For Piaget, God is a parent who fulfills intellectual needs to account for the structure of the world. Both understood children's concepts of God to be based upon anthropomorphism of a "crudely physical kind"'.

human symbolic ways (language, rituals, etc) (Guthrie 1993:193, 197, 199): 'What matters is not so much the physical appearance (*form* HV) of gods as their behavior' (Guthrie 1993:193)¹³ and the latter puts us squarely in the mind of god.

Insights, especially from Developmental Psychology, have shown humans' remarkable intuitive ability to conceptualize a purposeful god, a superhuman agent who plans, designs, desires and thinks very much like we do. The reason for studying the workings of the minds of children gives us an apt grasp on how the mind grows and develops and throws some light on our evolutionary origins as human beings (Boyer 2001:106). Barrett *et al.* (2001) point out the development of an awareness of agency in children in three stages, namely teleological agency, mentalistic agency and representational agency (from birth to about five years). In the first year already infants are aware that humans are 'self-propelled' and inanimate objects are not, which leads to the awareness of teleological or goal-directed agency, for instance babies handing their mothers objects in response to their outstretched hands. Shortly hereafter infants develop the notion of mentalistic agency attributing internal mental states to others ('mentalizing'). They complete for instance the goal-directed tasks of others when the latter fail to achieve them (cf. also Johnson *et al.* 2001). Round about four to five years old children have developed a fully-fledged idea of representational agency or theory of mind¹⁴ being able to 'mind-read' others. Three-year olds are unable to entertain false beliefs or perceptions of others while the older children can.¹⁵

¹³ Barrett & Richert (2003:310) are careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water: 'Our advancing the preparedness hypothesis does not preclude the fact that God concepts in children and adults look strikingly anthropomorphic (Guthrie 1993)' and further: '...Our claim is not that God concepts will never look anthropomorphic, but that they need not be constructed wholly out of a concept of humans'.

¹⁴ Although animals have been denied having a ToM they might be smarter than we thought as confirmed by animal behaviourists. Rob Shumaker has studied Azy, an Orang-utan, for 25 years and is convinced that his cognitive complexity and flexibility indicate him having a ToM (Morell 2008:39). Guthrie (1993:202) referring to Jane Goodall's work on chimpanzees, inclines in a similar direction. Their threat displays at thunderstorms and waterfalls indicate that they detect agency (probable zoomorphic) behind these phenomena, ascribing far more organization to natural phenomena than there actually is. They also exhibit 'awe and wonder' which is part and parcel of 'religion', but both Goodall and Guthrie are hesitant to call them 'religious'.

¹⁵ The kind of experiment usually used to demonstrate this is as follows: a candy box is filled with stones and then closed, in full observation of a group of children in a room. When asked what an adult would think is in the box when entering the room, three-year olds almost unanimously answer 'stones'. Five-year olds, however, are able to entertain that other people can hold false beliefs and answer that the entering adult will certainly be misled by the outer appearance of the box that it contains candy.

The theory of mind mental tool is quite able to differentiate between different kinds of agents, for instance humans, animals and superhuman agents like gods and spirits. When attributing a thinking, purposeful mind to god the following characteristics of god surface (Barrett 2004:76-93): God as *superknowing* and *superperceiving* – children are quite capable of allowing god to know and see more than their parents do which questions Piaget's view of 'crude anthropomorphism' that children think only of god as an extension of their parents, which they outgrow later on to think of god in more abstract terms. ToM is flexible enough to think of god abstractly very early in childhood (Barrett 2004:77; see also Kelemen 2004 :296); god as *immortal* – to overextend immortality not only to gods but to humans also is the work of ToM. When someone dies the living thing describer registers death but ToM keeps the dead psychologically alive (Barrett 2004:55-59). It becomes nearly impossible to terminate wilful thinking in others, dead or alive, as in yourself and this strengthens our bias of being natural dualists. It is interesting to note that immortal souls or ancestor spirits are the most widespread category of gods worldwide (Boyer 2001:227); god as *superpowerful* – here Piaget might be correct that children extend their ideas of their superpowerful parents to god (Barrett 2004:84); god as *creator* – our ever meaning- and purpose-searching minds, from childhood to adulthood, cannot other than intuitively conclude about the purposefulness of nature and an intentional theistic creator. Therefore pointy rocks are there for animals to scratch them on children will answer, even if provided with scientific alternative explanations (Kelemen 1999; 2004). Our own earlier history of being tool-making hominids (*Homo habilis*), developing in sophistication over time (cf. Wynn 2000), probably convinces us unconsciously that things must be made for something. Teleology and theism that arise so naturally and effortlessly let Evans (2000:328) conclude as follows why creationism is here to stay: 'Creationist beliefs are both intuitively attractive and culturally available; evolutionistic beliefs are less so. Availability is determined by cultural or societal processes, attractiveness by cognitive processes'; god as *perfectly good* – although not much researched this notion promises to be intuitively biased as well (Barrett 2004:86). 'Theologically correct' ideas of gods' non-temporality and non-spatiality do not reverberate well with our intuitive expectations. These attributes admittedly sound very Western (Thomistic) and is partly due to experiments with American Christian children (e.g. from Protestant circles). Barrett and his colleagues have, however, experimented also cross-culturally where many of these notions are comparable. Although utilizing Christian theological jargon these characteristics should rather be seen as generic and not culture-specific. At the same time these notions are only limited to a 'major god' (as in Christianity) and many cultures have gods and other superhuman beings who do not have any of these characteristics (Barrett 2004:75-93).

How do these cognitive insights fit Psalm 19? Does the god of this psalm exhibit an intentional 'mind' with which the ancient poet's and our minds today can interact with meaningfully when contemplating on all that is presumed to be his creation, both natural life and moral life?

D PSALM 19 REVISITED

Incidentally Guthrie (1993:124) refers to Psalm 19 as an example in literary art of the human need to anthropomorphize; the heavens, day and night and sun all do duty by pointing silently to the invisible superhuman person who created them. Taken along with the testimony of the torah, looking into god's mind more directly, the poet is convinced of a superpowerful, super-intelligent creator and designer of all life – he started it all and purposefully controls it all.

The designer behind beautiful, awesome and orderly (cf. again Kruger 2002) nature cannot be discerned directly but his works can as verse 2 states explicitly '...the works of his hands', testifying to his superior 'mind'. Vos (2005:115) says that we can virtually see God's fingerprints in the sky and Guthrie and others would speak of traces of the divine. It comes naturally and intuitively for the poet's HADD to pick up these traces and postulate both a superpowerful and superknowing creator behind the wonders of nature. God is not only superpowerful to create these marvellous things which humans obviously cannot, but he also knows their purpose (v. 3 'speech' and 'knowledge'). He after all, for example created the magnificent sun, its home, its path and its function to warm and enliven the earth and expose its darkest mysteries through light. The forever continuing cycles of nature also point to the steadfastness, trustworthiness and immortality of its creator.

'The cosmic and moral orders are complementary spheres of God's design' says Schaefer (2001:45). What nature, however, might lack in its silent mode of convincing of the superior and purposeful mind of its designer, the wordy torah most certainly will accomplish. As has been stated already, it becomes a more direct way of looking into god's mind and discovering life's purpose. God not only knows what is best for nature but also what is best for moral life and therefore his precious gift to humankind, his torah, his will, to order life says the poet in many different ways. Through the torah life becomes full and utterly meaningful (e.g. v. 12)! Adding to the designer god's qualities thus far, the torah also testifies to god's perfect goodness (Barrett 2004:86), of unlocking life for its followers (v. 11 it is '...more precious than gold...sweeter than honey...'), and reiterating more vividly god's goodness also built into the natural world. The torah does not only become a way of knowing god better, but its contemplation markedly becomes a way of two minds (human and superhuman) meeting, sharing and even conflating. The communion with god as another understanding, mindful being, the sociality thereof is also one of the

very important catalysts to conceptualize a god in human terms as Guthrie has indicated (1993:187).

From this brief revisit of Psalm 19 it is clear that the poet attributes 'mind' to god as all humans have always done. God is this superhuman, purposeful designer and sustainer of all life to which ordinary humans should relate to in awe, respect and obedience. The working of this ancient poet's own mind and mental ability to conceptualize god in this way reflects his being part of the human race throughout history as his notions of god are matched cross-culturally, then and now. This is how we all intuitively think up a god or gods.

However, even though teleology and theism, purposeful design by a superhuman personal creator in both the natural and moral spheres, come so naturally and intuitively to satisfy our need for a rational explanation of the world, does that mean that gods really exist? Who or what is god really, an illusion (Guthrie), or delusion (Dawkins), airy nothing put into words (Boyer), or perhaps something else?

E THE PROBLEM OF GOD

To draw a poem like Psalm 19 into the religion : science debate might seem unfair. After all do we not have here a symbolic, metaphorical expression of creation, god¹⁶ and moral life that should not be read literally? And modern readers will partly go along by saying we know from science that the sun doesn't follow a path from East to West every day; this was the poet of then's cosmological view. However, the design or order of which the psalm so clearly testifies (Kruger 2002) is mostly taken literally to point to a Designer (God's handiwork; cf. both creationists and natural theologians) somewhere. And here the magisterium of faith indeed enters the magisterium of science (Dawkins 2006:58 – 59). The following few canvas strokes are only exemplary of some arguments of the 'how' of the 'existence of god' from Biology, Psychology and Religion and Theological Sciences.¹⁷

¹⁶ Dawkins (2006:18) sets the record straight that Einstein was not a believer because he now and then used the word 'god' (similarly Stephen Hawking). The use thereof is purely poetical or metaphorical, when many physicists sometimes slip into the language of religious metaphor.

¹⁷ The 'existence of god' comprises a spirited debate within Philosophy. Alston (1998), for instance, provides a short summary within Philosophy of Religion of the typical arguments in this regard, namely cosmological, teleological, ontological and moral (see also Nakhnikian 2004; Ratzsch 2005).

Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (2006:113ff)¹⁸ is of the opinion you cannot have both, evolution and god. He attacks the argument from design or the teleological argument vehemently and lucidly, the argument that seems to most the 'ultimate knockdown argument' (2006:79) for the existence of god. Darwinian evolution does not need a Designer, although we as humans intuitively feel that the wonder of nature had to be designed by someone very special who put us here on earth for a purpose. Natural selection does not work according to any preconceived design but is simply the gradual and accumulative evolving of simplicity into awesome complexity. We have to change our perspective to where nature started, not where it has evolved up to now and also knowing that evolution is still continuing open-ended. If there was a designer god behind it all such a god would have to be incomprehensibly/impossibly complex. The only god that evolution can accommodate is a very lazy god, one that has detonated the Big Bang and then retired. To imagine a god is a misfiring, a rule-of-thumb mistake to think up imaginary things (e.g. Dawkins' imaginary childhood friend, Binker; 2006:347, 174; cf. also title of his book) whereas we evolved to identify real things. Dawkins is also emphatic about the argument that everything happened by chance. Nature is not a gambler but a meticulous selector, awarding those species that have adapted well with survival. Only in this way can one indirectly speak of 'design' but without a preconceived plan as Van Dyk (2007:856) qualifies. Our purpose here on earth is not what a fictional god (or Bible or other holy book) tells us to do but what we choose to make of life with our fellow human beings (Dawkins 2006:360). The only real gap for those who parasitise on gaps in scientific knowledge without providing alternatives that can stand its own ground, Dawkins admits, is the origin of life (2006:134-141), the evolution thereof is explained satisfactorily. He believes life originated chemically which might be discovered some day, but to postulate a god behind it all says nothing.

The bio-psychological sciences studying religion have also problematised the existence of god. Prominent scholars like Guthrie (1993:viii; 27) regard god(s) as illusory and therefore its claim to truth cannot be accepted. Boyer (2001:4) sees god as nothing more than airy nothing put into words similar as a competent poet brings into existence through language that which does not exist in an objective sense. Barrett in his earlier study (2004:123) expressed his unease already by pointing out how antitheists found support in his work that religion is only in one's head while for Christians like himself he can

¹⁸ When Nakhnikian (2004:595) says 'Evolutionary biology is scientific orthodoxy ...' this obviously applies to Dawkins as well. Timely is the warning of Ruse (2007) against militant atheists (such as Dawkins and Daniel Dennett) that their own views become quasi-religious. The choice of Dawkins in this article was done because he is controversial and well- and outspoken, well read (markedly also in *Evolutionary Psychology*) and in spite of shortcomings is not off the mark in seriously questioning the 'thing'-god (see Armstrong 1993:396) of so many believers.

accommodate a theistic view that god has fine-tuned the cosmos through the Big Bang and evolution. This is developed further (Barrett 2007) where he puts forth arguments that the bio-psychological sciences (e.g. fields of Neurotheology, Group-selection and Cognitive Science of Religion [especially Evolutionary Psychology]) do not necessarily disprove the existence of god, a problem not only in these but in all sciences, the fact that god is neither verifiable nor falsifiable (Dawkins thinks otherwise). He puts forth five arguments to support his case of which only the fifth will be tabled here¹⁹: *error-prone minds* – if we cannot believe our minds in regard to religious concepts we can hardly trust our minds for anything. Mind does not exist objectively, it cannot be proved but we still utilize its 'existence' to have a meaningful life. We would not be able to function socially without it (see how HADD and ToM construe our world). Why not god, who can also not be proven objectively? Barrett's analogy between mind and god is a good and convincing one. Both are theoretical constructs allowing for meaningful explanation. The friendly bow that Barrett, however, makes to theism (2007:70), I find rather disappointing because it confuses more than it explains.

'...theism is not God; it is nothing but a human definition of God²⁰ – and a radically inadequate one at that...' (Spong 2005:63). The idea of a personal god who as a supernatural being that lives outside this world and periodically invades this world in a miraculous way is perhaps the majority view that people hold following the main thrust of the Bible. But 'The God we presume lives above the sky, whose primary vocation is to watch over, guard and protect vulnerable human beings, somehow appears to be frequently off-duty' (Spong 2005:62). And this personal, theistic god should go, creating more problems than solutions as argued by Karen Armstrong (1993:326) as well. The personal god becomes extremely limiting as people, instead of widening their horizons through god as their ultimate horizon (Viviers 2008:452), 'he' (usually) keeps them encapsulated within their 'complacencies' (Armstrong 1993:243). Fundamentalist theism is overwhelmingly intolerant towards dissident views, the latter more than often the more defensible and civilized views. Armstrong (1993:396) points out that especially after the Enlightenment theologians 'seized upon the new science to prove the objective reality of God as though he could be tested and analysed like *anything* (HV) else'. It is clear that Dawkins has especially this god in his firing line. Her own view of god is that of an inspiring human idea that has given meaning to men and women for thousands of years (Armstrong 1993:5, 269). After her monumental journey through 4000 years of god history within Christianity, Judaism and Islam, where god crea-

¹⁹ The other four concern neural substrate, evolutionary by-product, religious utility and inherited belief (see Barrett 2007 for a detailed discussion hereof).

²⁰ One has to retort that so is all god-talk, whether inspiring or demoralising!

tions²¹ fluctuate between incomprehensible abstraction to pantheism,²² she sees some hope in mysticism (1993:454) where god is '...a subjective experience, mysteriously experienced in the ground of being'. And Spong's view of god (2005:298), although he also anthropomorphises as we all do: 'There is no supernatural deity beyond the sky working miracles. There is only God-infused humanity through whom the Source of Life, the Source of Love and the Ground of Being lives'.²³ God is the source of life, the divine life force that animates all (Gen 1:2). And our purpose here on earth is to complete our evolved humanity, '...the way into divinity is to become fully human' (Spong 2005:291). And here he echoes the words of Einstein: 'Strange is our situation here on Earth. Each of us comes for a short visit, not knowing why, yet sometimes seeming to divine a purpose. From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know: that man is here for the sake of other men – above all for those upon whose smiles and well-being our own happiness depends' (quoted in Dawkins 2006:209).

E CONCLUSION

The origin of life or, to use theological jargon, 'creation', remains a mystery. Psalm 19's confident belief in an all powerful 'creator' cannot be read literally. Evolutionary Psychology emphasises that god is 'in our mind', a need that evolved early in human history. More than this is neither verifiable nor falsifiable. Many natural scientists regard the question of 'god' as redundant but are surprised at the persistence of 'god' in human thought. From the above three notions of the 'how' of the 'existence of god' have surfaced, theism, atheism and a-theism.

Theism has become one of the lesser, unsatisfying ideas about god. And it should be reiterated, if not clear from the preceding, that that is all we have to at least conduct a meaningful argument, subjective constructs of god. We create gods and have done that all along as Karen Armstrong (1993) has forcefully highlighted. The thinking up of god(s) has cognitive psychological roots (see above) and a social function. A theistic god soon becomes nothing else than a societal ideologically invested mechanism of power to regulate its adherents authoritatively. God becomes a projection of such a society or group's ultimate values and ideologies and (subtly or overtly) as a powerful symbol, to re-inscribe and prescribe its determining fibre. Therefore the real author of the law of Yahweh, so elevated in Psalm 19, is Judaistic society. And not that flawless

²¹ See how often she uses the word create, each generation creates a new god that works for them.

²² The eloquent Dawkins (2006:18) verbalises as follows: 'Pantheism is sexed-up atheism. Deism is watered down theism'.

²³ The French actress Marion Cotillard who won the 2008 Oscar for the best lead actress in the film *La Vie en Rose*, said something similar in her acceptance speech, when she thanked 'Love' and 'Life' for this prestigious award.

as the psalm would want it to be, especially if one takes feminist critique seriously where its patriarchal bias dooms women to inferiority forever. *Atheism* has laid bare the unconvincing argument of intentional design, celebrated by Psalm 19 and continuing today. We fit our surrounds so remarkably well not because it was designed for us, but because we adapted so well. The attractive and convincing theory of Darwinian evolution, accepted by many Christians and other believers today, has, however, somehow left a void to address human spirituality. Clinical science does not address the human need for transcendence, the urge of the human mind to reach beyond and transcend materiality. Perhaps *a - theism*,²⁴ or put otherwise, seeking the divine in humankind and in life in general, provides a good and worthwhile alternative for the human quest for meaning. The latter has to be constantly negotiated among ourselves, after all, aren't fellow human beings the ones we are mostly interested in as Stewart Guthrie (1993) has pointed out?

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²⁴ I thank colleague Prof Sakkie Spangenberg from Unisa, who mentioned this term in bypassing, as an alternative answer to an indefensible, objectivistic view of god.

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