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# WHEN PARTISANSHIP REPLACES LOGIC

## A REPLY TO BILGILI'S CRITIQUE OF DAWKINS

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### Abstract

In this paper I analyze Bilgili's critique of Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, showing that almost all of the logical fallacies supposedly identified by Bilgili are in fact valid arguments. I further show that Bilgili's paper is severely biased toward one position of the debate and lacks the objectivity required to discuss important metaphysical issues such as the existence of God. The paper is structured into three main parts. In the first part I identify a number of general problems existing in Bilgili's paper, namely the perpetration of the hasty generalization fallacy, the creation of straw man arguments through the constant misrepresentation of Dawkins' positions when they target issues which are not directly related to the existence of God and the *ad hominem* arguments brought by Bilgili against Dawkins. In the second part I analyze Bilgili's claims of uncovering thirteen logical fallacies in Dawkins' book and show that twelve of the claims are unfounded, with only one of the claims being partially justified. In the third part I analyze the only argument presented by Bilgili in favour of the existence of God, which I term *the argument from stronger implications*, and I show that it belongs to a sub-class of Pascal Wager's type of arguments, going on to discredit both of them by following Oppy's line of reasoning.

*Keywords:* Dawkins, existence of God, logical fallacy

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### 1. Introduction

In an article published previously in this journal, Alper Bilgili [1] formulates a critique against Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* [2], in which the author claims that he has revealed "the flawed logic in Dawkinsian thought" [1, p. 40] by uncovering a set of logical fallacies presumably committed by the author. (For more ample critical positions of Dawkins' book see for instance McGrath and McGrath [3], Cornwell [4] or Berlinski [5].) In this paper I will argue that Bilgili's criticism misrepresents the views of Dawkins by using straw man arguments and other logical fallacies such as the *ad hominem* argument, quoting him out of context and making causal inferences unsupported by Dawkins and undefended by Dawkins' work.

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In an effort toward full disclosure I do not adopt any views regarding the existence or non-existence of God (in this paper I refer to the existence of God, as Dawkins does, only in a theistic sense, excluding variants of pantheism or deism from the discussion) and I do not try to bring arguments (except for section 4) to justify the position of either side. My main objective is to illustrate a number of theoretical and methodological flaws found in Bilgili's argumentation, which taken together amount to a refutation of almost his entire paper. Thus, I will also attempt not to bring arguments which are external to the debate between Bilgili and Dawkins, however in certain situations for a better clarification I will be forced to do this.

From a structural standpoint I proceed in the following manner: first I will present a set of general flaws of Bilgili's paper, focusing on three of them: the fact that he commits the hasty generalization fallacy by deriving general propositions from isolated cases, the fact that he uses straw man arguments by attempting to depict every position assumed by Dawkins as related to the existence of God and lastly, that the work is severely biased toward one of the positions in the debate. Secondly, I individually analyze every accusation which Bilgili levies against Dawkins' reasoning, showing why almost all of them (12 out of 13) are completely unfounded and one is only partially founded. Thirdly, I analyze the argument constructed by Bilgili as a response to Dawkins position regarding the existence of God, which, for a lack of a better term, I term *the argument from stronger implications* and show that it is a sub-class of Pascal's Wager and therefore discredited.

## **2. General problems in Bilgili's 'An Introduction to Logical Fallacies'**

The first major problem of Bilgili's article relates to his claims that he has "revealed the flawed logic in Dawkinsian thought" [1, p. 40] and that Dawkins "misrepresents virtually everything about religion" [1, p. 44]. Even assuming that all of the arguments presented by Bilgili are sound (although the case is in fact the opposite as I show in the next section), the simple idea that this conclusion could be reached by appealing to a few carefully selected samples from a considerably complex work suggests Bilgili commits the logical fallacy of hasty generalization, by claiming that Dawkins "preferred to base his arguments on weak reasoning and oversimplifications" [1, p. 46]. Specifically, Bilgili extrapolates from a few isolated examples to derive a general proposition about the entire 'Dawkinsian thought'. But the enterprise which Bilgili assumes, i.e. to analyze a number of deficiencies or logical flaws in Dawkins' book (which is undoubtedly commendable on its own), is fundamentally an inductive enterprise and the conclusions drawn can only be applied in the theoretical universe analyzed. Bilgili however does not conclude by stating that he uncovered a number of problems in Dawkins' work but proceeds to criticize the entire book, an unmistakably deductive undertaking, which raises serious questions about the objectivity of the author.

The second general issue raised here concerns a frequently encountered position of Bilgili in which he argues that certain assertions made by Dawkins are flawed because they are useless in the debate about the existence of God. Instances such as this are abundant in the text: “Even if Dawkins is right in his superficial claims, this would not show that God is a delusion” [1, p. 41], “Obviously, the benefits and harms of atheism or theism are irrelevant to the argument against God” [1, p. 42] as well as others. But Bilgili’s critique is void of an actual target in this respect since at its root, Dawkins does not unilaterally approach the problem of God’s existence in his book, but, *inter alia*, the moral systems derived on religious basis [2, p. 209-309], the social and psychological roots of religion [2, p.161-209] and the effects which religion has on children [2, p. 309-345]. The parts in which Dawkins actually discusses the existence of God are chapters 3 and 4 [2, p. 75-161], but aside from these (and to a certain extent chapter 5) there are limited incursions into the foundation for belief and extensive incursions into the effects of holding beliefs. To present Dawkins’ entire book as limited to a metaphysical justification of religion is to misrepresent the actual work and to minimize its merits, a straw man position, as the real arguments presented by Dawkins against the existence of God are avoided by Bilgili and arguments used in support of other positions are falsely considered as supporting the non-existence of God thesis.

Another issue, this time not a substantial but a formal one, also appears throughout the book. It relates to Dawkins’ image as Bilgili depicts it: “a dedicated warrior of his case who wants to convince his readers to share his faith by using any weapons available, whether just, right, fair or not” [1, p. 39] or “Dawkins’ venomous anti-religious attitude” [1, p. 39]. At best, this characterization can be accused of lacking aesthetic worth and of academic impoliteness but at worst it can be accused of intentionally trying to induce to the reader an image of a dogmatic and hateful individual who is, in Bilgili’s own words on “a mission” [1, p. 46], and will not care if his arguments are not sound, rational or logical. But this clear type of *ad hominem* argument, whereby the author carefully disqualifies *ab initio* his opponent, cannot be accepted in a paper on logic, where complete detachment from any partisan position should be its cornerstone.

And this brings me to the final and most important (since it is incorporated into this paper’s title) general argument against Bilgili’s paper. The entire work seems to be driven by partisanship allegiance instead of objective logical reasoning. The powerful bias of the author results both from the arguments presented above and from other arguments as well. The fact that he claims to disprove an entire book based on a just few isolated cases, the fact that he avoids the bulk of actual arguments against the existence of God and focuses on marginal or misrepresented arguments and the fact that he attacks his opponent *ad personam* are powerful elements which support the partisan allegiance idea but the following instance is much more illustrative in this respect. In an attempt to underline the weakness of Dawkins’ reasoning and the fact that he chooses easy targets such as the ‘argument from non-belief’ or the

‘argument from sheer will’ which are rejected by atheists and theists alike, Bilgili condescendingly directs Dawkins to read Leslie’s [6] firing squad analogy and try to explain it rather than concentrating on finding arguments from internet comedy sites [1, p. 45]. Let us leave aside for the moment the fact that Dawkins does indeed discuss many of the powerful arguments for the existence of God, such as Thomas Aquinas’ *Quinque Viae*, Anselm’s ontological argument, Pascal’s Wager and others, and his argumentation is not directed toward the positions considered ridiculous by both atheists and theists alike, but toward arguments defended by Christians for hundreds of years, up to and including the present day. Even so, Leslie’s analogy of the firing squad does not only briefly appear in Dawkins’ book, but is explicitly stated by Dawkins and further, even answered by him [2, p. 144-145]. This immediately prompts the question: was Bilgili not aware of Dawkins’ response, although it is placed right in the middle of the chapter where Dawkins makes his case against the existence of God? Or is it the case that Bilgili knowingly avoids to present the situation in its true form? Taking into consideration the arguments presented in the previous paragraphs and the fact that the Leslie discussion is extremely difficult to overlook I would argue that the latter case is the correct one.

### **3. Bilgili’s account of Dawkinsian logical fallacies**

I will proceed in the same order in which Bilgili presents his criticism of what he considers to be Dawkinsian fallacies, avoiding only the arguments made in Section 2.3. [1, p. 42-43] as in this section Bilgili not only criticizes Dawkins but introduces an argument of his own for the existence of God and I consider that this analysis requires a special section.

The first fallacy which Bilgili claims to identify is a genetic one, “committed when the arguer focuses on the source of the argument to evaluate the validity of the argument” [1, p. 40]. He states that Dawkins commits this fallacy when discussing Einstein’s belief, as he is trying to prove that if Einstein, who is a world renowned physicist does not believe in God, then God clearly does not exist. In Bilgili’s words, “whether Einstein was a believer or not, Dawkins was wrong in implying that Einstein’s religious views undergird the non-existence of God” [1, p. 40]. The sentence is perfectly correct, in the sense that Einstein’s views on religion are indeed irrelevant to the actual existence or non-existence of God, but Dawkins makes no attempt to suggest such a thing. The reason why Dawkins discusses at length *Einsteinian religion* [2, p. 19] is because, as he explains, he knows that the pantheistic belief which Einstein held could have the “capacity to confuse” [2, p. 20] and by illustrating the specific difference between theism, deism and Einsteinian religion he removes the latter two types of positions from his analysis, leaving only theism, in the sense of a literal interpretation of the Bible and other sacred texts as its object. Bilgili’s assertion in this respect is not supported by a single thread of evidence, since there is no passage where Dawkins suggests that Einstein’s view on the

existence of God should be transposed to replace the solid arguments made in this respect, and discussed by him in the following chapters.

The second fallacy raised by Bilgili refers to Dawkins' position toward winners of the Templeton Prize. Bilgili claims that Dawkins is committing the *ad hominem* fallacy, by attacking "the personality of his opponent to denigrate his views" [1, p. 40]. I believe two responses are appropriate. First of all, Dawkins would indeed commit this fallacy, *if* all the scientists who are included in the category of Templeton Prize winners would automatically be subjected to Dawkins' criticism, irrelevant of any other factors. Dawkins, however, specifically affirms that "there are some genuine specimens of good scientists who are sincerely religious in the full, traditional sense" exemplifying with the cases of Peacocke, Stannard and Polkinghorne, all three of them Templeton Prize winners [2, p. 99]. Secondly, however, I believe that Bilgili's assertion that "Dawkins is very skeptical about this reward and does not try to hide his suspicions about the objectivity of these scientists" [1, p. 40] may indeed be correct but, by itself, cannot generate the *ad hominem* accusation. Implicitly, what Dawkins is doing goes, in my mind, no further than applying a classical cost-benefit analysis to the behavior of individuals. He does not argue that the beliefs and argumentation of *all* Templeton Prize winners regarding religion should be considered null and void, but only that *some* may be biased because their proponents stand to gain a significant level of benefits without incurring significant costs, if they support religiously favourable views. Few would disagree with the view that in philosophy and metaphysics, as in science, the identification of potential sources of bias to all the positions involved in the debate is important: unless this is done, one is likely to misrepresent certain arguments and proofs. Dawkins does exactly this by questioning the objectivity of *certain* individuals, who if we start from an instrumentally rational assumption *could* have strong incentives to be biased toward one side of the debate.

The third aspect which Bilgili identifies as flawed in Dawkins' work is his claim that religion may be merely a by-product of psychological factors and thus an argument against the plausibility of God. Here Bilgili does not dispute the fact that religion may indeed have psychological roots (or at least no such objection is visibly formulated in his article), but that by itself, this would not have any effect on the plausibility of God, since "it is logically possible to argue that God created human psychology and programmed human beings to search for a meaning in their lives" [1, p. 41]. Although Bilgili is correct in his statement that it would be theoretically possible for the psychological roots of religion to be created by God, this is a paradigmatic example of claims which are empirically baseless and consequently can generate an infinite number of possible scenarios, which I treat separately in the next section. For the moment however I would like to disagree with the view that the identification of psychological roots for belief in God is without relevance.

Thus, if we agree that religion has psychological roots, two cases may be hypothetically conjectured. In the first case if the causal link between psychology and God is determinative, in the sense that belief in the existence of God is solely generated by psychological factors and nothing else, then the identification of such a connection would not only be relevant, but it would be of paramount importance in trying to elucidate the problem at hand, since it is the sole driving force behind it. In this case, accepting that psychological factors determine belief in God basically annuls all other arguments regarding his existence, since the single source of the belief has already been identified. I do not believe however that this is the view of Dawkins and I am confident that this would not be the view of Bilgili, but the illustration is important because it shows that there are examples where psychological factors are definitely important in philosophical debates.

In the second case (which is, I believe, the one in which Dawkins chooses to frame religion) psychological factors are conducive, but not determinative, to the belief in the existence of God. Although here belief is generated by an aggregation of factors (psychological, social, ontological, etc.), to argue that any of them would be redundant is in my view a mistake, since each of them could potentially be a source of bias and thereby generate false views. The following analogy may be useful: for thousands of years human beings believed that the geocentric model is the correct depiction of the Universe. This belief was indeed (at least after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century A.D. in Europe) based on the calculations of Claudius Ptolemaeus but in turn both Ptolemy and the subscribers to the theory were severely biased in their perception by the location in which they were standing. If the location from which they saw Earth would have been exterior to it, the source of the bias would have disappeared and a correct theory could have thus been elaborated. Ptolemy's model was therefore accepted on a false premise, constituted by a bias in one of the factors which generated it. Clearly, the present problem is not one of perception, as in the example described, but of psychology; however, I consider that the analogy is valid. In both cases, the biases were/are overcome since Copernicus, Galileo or Kepler did not need to take a position exterior to the Earth in order to propose the heliocentric model and in spite of a potential psychological bias there still are a significant number of atheists, but the biases are of major significance if they have explanatory power for the acceptance or rejection of a theory, either physical or metaphysical. The removal of such biases is therefore crucial in order to collectively move toward a better understanding of the phenomena which surround us.

The next set of fallacies which Bilgili claims to identify are appeals to elements which are external and irrelevant to the actual debate on the existence of God. The unnecessary appeals identified are: the appeal to pity (*argumentum ad misericordiam*), the appeal to popularity (*argumentum ad populum*), the appeal to authority (*argumentum ad verecundiam*), the appeal to antiquity (*argumentum ad antiquitatem*) and the appeal to consequences (*argumentum ad consequentiam*) [1, p. 41-42].

In the case of the appeal to pity and the appeal to consequences, Bilgili's error consists of insisting that all the arguments brought forth by Dawkins in his book refer to the existence or non-existence of God, when in fact this is discussed in a mere two chapters of the book. Both the references to the Crusades, witch hunts, 9/11 attacks, which Bilgili claims are instantiations of the appeal to pity fallacy and Dawkins' claim that religion is "time-consuming, wealth-consuming, hostility-provoking rituals, anti-factual and counter-productive" [2, p. 166], are not supposed to justify belief or disbelief in God but are in fact supposed to exposit a part of the consequences of religion, irrespective of its metaphysical validity. Bilgili's position that "obviously, the benefits and harms of atheism or theism are irrelevant to the argument against God" [1, p. 42] is correct but the accusation that Dawkins is appealing to the consequences of religion to disprove it is false, especially as in his project he considers to have done this in the previous chapters.

The *argumentum ad populum* is easily contradicted, partially by a Dawkins quote which Bilgili himself illustrates. Bilgili's accusation is that Dawkins claims the existence of God is disproven by the fact that educated people, and later on scientists do not hold the belief that God exists. While it is true that the *argumentum ad populum* is one of the most frequently used fallacies in religious disputes, it could not possibly be employed by the atheist side since Dawkins himself acknowledges that in America for instance, "more than 90 per cent are believers in some sort of supernatural being" [2, p. 100], a quote which also appears in Bilgili's article. The appeal to popularity is however, *ex definitio*, indiscriminate toward contingencies such as sex, race, age, level of education, etc. so Bilgili's accusation that Dawkins is appealing to popularity when in fact he acknowledges that the general impression contradicts his own is a misuse of the *argumentum ad populum*. What could in principle stand as a logical fallacy here would be the *appeal to authority* which Bilgili also uses to characterize Dawkins' claims that scientists overwhelmingly deny the existence of God [1, p. 41-42]. A clear epistemic line is however drawn between the appeal to popularity and the appeal to authority and by not distinguishing between them, Bilgili already puts his critique on the wrong foot.

Although the accusation that Dawkins *appeals to authority* by basing his claims about the existence of God on the opinions of educated people and scientists would be legitimate if true, this is not what he intends at all in the respective section [2, p. 97-103]. The stake for Dawkins in the section titled 'The Argument from Admired Religious Scientists' is twofold: a) to oppose the theistic appeal to authority, met through the claims that because scientists like Newton, Galileo and Kepler were religious, then Christian religion must be correct and b) to refute the purportedly theistic claim that at present a large number of scientists are religious. Nowhere in this section does Dawkins pretend to derive a conclusion regarding the existence of God from the beliefs of scientists and in fact it would have been counter-productive to do so, since as Dawkins himself acknowledges "Newton did indeed claim to be religious. So did almost everybody until - significantly I think - the nineteenth century" [2, p.

98], “We have no reason to doubt Michael Faraday's sincerity as a Christian even after the time when he must have known of Darwin's work” [2, p. 98], “The experimentalist Faraday's theorist counterpart, James Clerk Maxwell, was an equally devout Christian. So was that other pillar of nineteenth-century British physics, William Thomson, Lord Kelvin.” [2, p. 98] Alongside other examples, these quotes clearly show that Dawkins' position regarding the existence of God is in no way related to the positions which scientists, even of the magnitude of Newton, Faraday or Kelvin, adopt on the matter, since an appeal to authority in this case would actually work to his disadvantage, or at least nullify the debate since the opinions of scientists are divergent on the matter.

In the case of the accusation that Dawkins commits an appeal to antiquity fallacy (a type of fallacy where the truth of claim is based on its tradition and endurance through time) the issue seems to overtake the simple theoretical confusion from the previous paragraph. Here, Bilgili expounds a gross misrepresentation of Dawkins' view by quoting him out of context. In Bilgili's own words: “Dawkins adds ‘Appeal to Antiquity’ to his fallacy collection when he argues - based on James Haught's 2000 Years of Disbelief: Famous People with the Courage to Doubt - that there were atheists before Darwin” [1, p. 42]. The claim is that, because there were atheists before Darwin, and atheism is time-enduring Dawkins would infer that it must be correct. First of all, as in the case with the appeal to authority, to use the appeal to antiquity fallacy would at best nullify the debate since religion itself is time-enduring and perhaps even more-so than atheism. This is why any atheist, including Dawkins would carefully avoid using this fallacy even if presented with the opportunity. Secondly, and most importantly, by reading Dawkins' original text we can be unequivocal of his intention: “There have been exceptions, of course, in both directions. Even before Darwin, not everybody was a believer, as James Haught shows in his 2000 Years of Disbelief: Famous People with the Courage to Doubt. And some distinguished scientists went on believing after Darwin.” [2, p. 98] The reason why Dawkins mentions the fact that there were atheists before Darwin is not to bolster the number of arguments for the non-existence of God by appealing to its endurance but to show that it is ultimately irrelevant if scientists are religious or non-religious, since *both* types can also be found before Darwin's introduction of the evolutionary theory and after it. Such a misrepresentation of Dawkins' intentions is in my mind strongly correlated to the accusation of partisanship which I levy against Bilgili in the second section of the present paper.

The next fallacy supposedly identified by Bilgili is the *No True Scotsman* fallacy. Although this time Bilgili does not claim that the fallacy relates to the existence of God the case identified by him as a fallacy is in fact only a perceived incompatibility between two intellectual positions. In the No True Scotsman fallacy the perpetrator makes a claim about a set of elements and after the claim is refuted for a few of the elements he proceeds to artificially exclude them from the set, although through their properties they are in fact still included in the set. The claim is that Dawkins reasons that religious believers cannot also

believe in the theory of evolution and that those who do believe that evolution is accurate are not in fact ‘true believers’, exemplifying with the case of John Paul II [1, p. 44]. I think that this view of Dawkins is correct, but this does not result in him committing the No True Scotsman fallacy. What Dawkins in fact does is notice an incompatibility of views in cases where individuals claim that they believe in God, *in a theistic sense*, and they also claim that they believe in the theory of evolution. Dawkins argues that both these beliefs cannot be simultaneously possible since the theory of evolution logically excludes belief in God, as this belief is represented in the Bible. The set of believers therefore does not contain the subsets of ‘true believers’ and ‘non-true believers’, as is the case of Flew’s [7] original recount of the fallacy (where the set of Scotsman includes both Scotsman sex maniacs and Scotsman who are not sex maniacs) but the ‘true believers’ form a distinct set from the supposed ‘believers’. The distinction is represented by the fact that the former believe in the existence of God in the Biblical sense, which in Dawkins’ view is assimilated to creationism and the latter are not in fact believers in the Biblical sense, because they hold views which are in opposition to the principles and image of the universe advocated in the Bible. Whether Dawkins’ view on this matter is justified is a question of debate as there are a number of authors who would disagree with the perspective that ‘true believers’ are necessarily opposed to evolutionist theories (see for instance Miller [8], Lamoreaux [9] or Brown [10]) since there are several methods of interpreting the Bible outside of the literal sense, the argument from the Dawkinsian side being that since the Bible is the actual word of God any adherence to an interpretation outside of the literal sense would be heretical.

The penultimate discussion raised by Bilgili refers to Dawkins using straw man arguments on a multitude of occasions. In fact, Bilgili states that “it is difficult to select a few straw men out of dozens Dawkins builds up” [1, p. 44]. It is curious therefore that out of the three supposed straw man arguments identified and discussed by Bilgili two of them target the morality of religion, and not the existence of God although it seems clear that this is Bilgili’s main objective in the article and one of them is the claim that Dawkins does not discuss serious arguments for the existence of God (including the one composed by Leslie which Dawkins actually discusses).

The first straw man (a fallacy in which the perpetrator replaces the position of the opponent with an artificially created position that actually misrepresents his view; for exemplification, Bilgili’s article is riddled with such arguments as I have shown above) is the “description of religion with references to the misanthropes who call themselves ‘religious’” [1, p. 44]. Firstly, Dawkins does not mention that the cases of religious extremism should be considered the mainstream of religious behaviour, a situation in which he could have been accused of straw man tactics. Beyond this, Bilgili is correct in stating that to use the extremist behaviour of individuals in a certain group as an argument against the entire group is “not more sophisticated than showing the deadly actions of atheists like Stalin to argue against atheism” [1, p. 44], but this is exactly the point which Dawkins also tries to convey. Starting this enterprise with the

observation that “many religious people find it hard to imagine how, without religion, one can be good, or would even want to be good” [2, p. 211] he goes on to justify why moral behaviour is not monopolized by religion as it can also develop outside it, in the same way in which religious people can develop an immoral behaviour. The necessity of religion can indeed be discussed from this starting point on an ethical basis, since morality is not necessarily generated by religion, but, as Dawkins puts it: “even if it were true that we need God to be moral, it would of course not make God's existence more likely” [2, p. 231] and I would add that the reverse holds as well.

Before approaching the second purportedly straw man argument I believe that a short detour defending the rationality of religious behaviour is in order. Bilgili correctly notices that Dawkins argues that there is no “rational justification” [2, p. 23] for religion, a position which I consider inaccurate. Although Dawkins’ account of rationality may differ from the instrumental rationality (for a comprehensive discussion see for example Sugden [11]) employed in economics and instances of economic imperialism, religion is interpreted as rational behavior in a wide array of studies beginning with Azzi and Ehrenberg [12], Stark and Bainbridge [13] and continuing with Iannaccone [14] and the entire branch of the economics of religion which has been increasingly growing in dimension and impact in the last twenty years. Bilgili’s account that “charity, humanitarianism, honesty, modesty, love, peace” [1, p. 45] may also have at its root an instrumentally rational behavior and not necessarily the intrinsic moral virtues professed by religions (for one such example see Kwilecki and Wilson’s [15] study on the behaviour of Mother Teresa).

Returning to the substantive discussion at hand, the second straw man argument is poorly constructed and seems to rather be only intended as the foundation for Bilgili’s position according to which there is no criterion outside of religion which can judge morality. Dawkins’ view is once again misrepresented, as Bilgili claims that he considers that “moral values like kindness, *altruism* [my emphasis], generosity, empathy, pity are just misfires and illusionary since they have no value for natural selection as Dawkins declares” [1, p. 45], although Dawkins, a specialist in evolutionary biology, specifically mentions that “humans lived under conditions that would have strongly favored the evolution of all four kinds of altruism” [2, p. 220], “genetic tendencies towards altruism would have been favoured in early humans” [2, p. 220] and “natural selection [...] programmed into our brains altruistic urges” [2, p. 221] and further, regarding the illusionary component: “do not, for one moment, think of such Darwinizing as demeaning or reductive of the noble emotions of compassion and generosity” [2, p. 221]. But aside from this obvious perversion of facts, Bilgili’s following question: “how can we judge or blame religions that force their followers to do violence?” [1, p. 45] is baffling as the implication derived from this could be that there is no moral compass exterior to religion. Such a view would practically overturn every ethical system conceivable which is not based on religion, from Aristotle’s virtue ethics to Mill’s utilitarianism, to Kant’s deontological ethics, to the contemporary

feminist or environmental ethics, all of which prescribe criteria of morality outside of the religious realm.

Finally, the last fallacy supposedly identified by Bilgili is the slippery slope fallacy, in which the perpetrator “asserts that a certain action will end up with a series of other actions that are unwanted” [1, p. 45]. Not surprisingly, Bilgili once again misrepresents Dawkins’ position, as he states that “his favourite is the assertion that once anyone embraces a moderate version of religion, he will end up being an extremist” [1, p. 46], when Dawkins makes his view clear by stating that “my point in this section is that even mild and moderate religion helps to provide the climate of faith in which extremism naturally flourishes” [2, p. 303]. Although Dawkins does not commit a fallacy here, as he distinguishes between moderates and extremists and does not make any claims which could lead us to suggest that there would be a necessary conversion of the former category into the latter, I would state that on this point Bilgili’s accusation is partially correct (if we look beyond his misrepresentation of Dawkins) in noticing that Dawkins does make the case against the immorality of religion as a whole and not just religious extremists, by stating that “the take-home message is that we should blame religion itself, not religious extremism” [2, p. 306].

#### **4. Bilgili’s argument from stronger implications**

Aside from the above mentioned arguments, which Bilgili wrongly identifies as fallacious, there is one more supposed fallacy, the weak analogies fallacy [1, p. 42-43], which Bilgili not only claims to identify but which he claims will provide an appropriate response as an argument in favour of the existence of God.

In constructing his argument for the existence of God, which I term here *the argument from stronger implications*, Bilgili criticizes Russell’s celestial teapot analogy against the existence of God as incorrect. In its original version, Russell’s position is the following: “If I were to suggest that between the Earth and Mars there is a china teapot revolving about the sun in an elliptical orbit, nobody would be able to disprove my assertion provided I were careful to add that the teapot is too small to be revealed even by our most powerful telescopes. But if I were to go on to say that, since my assertion cannot be disproved, it is intolerable presumption on the part of human reason to doubt it, I should rightly be thought to be talking nonsense. If, however, the existence of such a teapot were affirmed in ancient books, taught as the sacred truth every Sunday, and instilled into the minds of children at school, hesitation to believe in its existence would become a mark of eccentricity.” [B. Russell, *Is there a God?*, 1952, available at [http://www.cfpf.org.uk/articles/religion/br/br\\_god.html](http://www.cfpf.org.uk/articles/religion/br/br_god.html)] Bilgili brings three arguments to counter the analogy which Dawkins makes, i.e. that just as in the case of the teapot we move from agnosticism to a-teapotism because of practical reasons we should also move from agnosticism to atheism. The first argument brought by Bilgili simply states that Dawkins should not

confuse practicality with reality since “despite the absurdity of the existence of a teapot between the Mars and the Earth, our intuitions may be wrong” [1, p. 43]. The third argument states that Russell is deliberately using a man-made object such as a teapot in order to induce an absurd scenario and that the existence of God would be more like the existence of another planet between Earth and Mars, not a teapot. The second and I would say central argument states that the problem is related to the implications of the object of existence. The implication of our rejecting the possibility of the existence of a teapot is basically irrelevant, according to Bilgili, but if we have a scenario where you are phoned in the middle of the night and told by a person claiming to be a doctor that your daughter just had an accident, you will not turn from agnosticism into a-accidentism (the denial of the fact that your daughter had an accident) because this situation has much stronger implications, just as in the case of the existence of God.

Although all three of the arguments will be disproven by the argument which I present in the following paragraph I would like to firstly underline two basic mistakes in Bilgili’s analogy. First of all, the example provided is poor as the problem presented by him is not in fact analogous to agnosticism. While a-accidentism would indeed mean the denial of the accident and would be analogous to atheism, agnosticism in the case of the accident would mean that the respective individual would have no idea about the accident and an admission that he cannot possibly know if the accident occurred or not. If he is: a) informed that an accident may have occurred involving his daughter and b) in a position to call the hospital and find out if it is true or not, then we are not discussing a situation characterized by the impossibility of obtaining information, which is the mark of agnosticism, but simply a situation of uncertainty. To make the transition from agnosticism to uncertainty you would require an extra element which I will introduce in the following paragraph. Secondly, the example provided is not only poorly constructed through its misrepresentation of agnosticism but also through the analogy between the situation and the existence of God. While the existence of God is not supported by relevant empirical proofs, and thus there is no increase in the likelihood of his existence, the situation presented by Bilgili contains numerous empirical references which would enhance the probability that the story is indeed true: a) the person calling knows his phone number, b) the person called has a daughter and the caller knows this, c) the daughter has a car and the father as well as the caller know this, d) the daughter was supposed to return home and the father as well as the caller know this. If any of these propositions are false, for example the called person has a son not a daughter, it is clear that the story is false. However, if all these elements are correct, then it would be sufficient to increase the likelihood of the event up to the point where the person should call the hospital. But the analogy fails because the situations are completely different since for the existence of God there is no empirical evidence which could enhance the likelihood of the story.

Returning to the argument from stronger implications itself, however, and not the faulty example given in its defence, we can observe that it walks on the same theoretical line as Pascal's Wager. This argument basically states that even if there is a very small chance that God exists you should behave as if it is true since the benefits gained by his existence are infinite if you adopt that belief and the costs incurred would also be infinitely negative if you do not and it turns out that God exists. The argument is also approached by Dawkins in his book but not given careful consideration since Dawkins is of the opinion that Pascal was joking when he promoted the argument [2, p.103-105]. I consider however that Pascal's Wager deserves a careful analysis because it encompasses a whole subclass of arguments which basically start from the same premise, that the probability assigned to God's existence is irrelevant and the only relevant element is the benefits or costs attached to his existence. The argument from stronger implications is in my view such an argument since it completely avoids the probabilistic problem, making no reference to the plausibility of the claim but only to the fact that it would be a more relevant issue than others. On this respect I agree with Bilgili and I believe that it would be *the* most important issue, changing its title to the *argument from the strongest implications*. But this however is in no way a proof that it is true, only that it is vitally important and deserves our consideration.

Regarding Pascal's Wager and consequently the argument from stronger implications, the spatial constraints of the paper do not allow me to elaborate the various problems encountered, so I would direct the readers to Hajek's article [16] where he discusses various responses at length. The response which I will give here, following Oppy's [17] line of reasoning, refers to the mistake made in the decisional calculus when we ignore probabilities attached to outcomes. Classical decision theory [18] teaches us that the rational individual will adopt the following calculus in the case where the outcomes are known and directly connected to his decision:

$$U(x) = b - c \quad (1)$$

where  $U(x)$  = the individual's utility for choice  $x$ ,  $b$  = the benefits obtained and  $c$  = the costs incurred through this decision. This is the decisional calculus employed by Pascal in his argument. Let us consider that  $x_1$  represents the individual's behaviour as if God would exist and  $x_2$  the behaviour as if God would not exist. Pascal argues that  $U(x_1) = +\infty$  if God exists and  $U(x_2) = -\infty$  in this case; while if God would not exist  $U(x_1) = -c$  and  $U(x_2) = 0$ . Now, combining all four results, it is clear that  $+\infty$  strictly dominates all other payoffs and should be chosen.

But the existence of God is, *ex definitio*, a case of uncertainty; otherwise the game would not be played at all. And in cases of uncertainty it is once again decision theory which teaches us that the rational individual will introduce a probability estimation in his calculus as such:

$$U(x, e) = bp - c \quad (2)$$

where  $p$  = the probability that event  $e$  will occur. But as I mentioned in the previous paragraph, there is a distinction between agnosticism and unresolved uncertainty, which still stands. If we cannot estimate probabilities regarding God's existence it is rational to assume an agnostic position, this in fact being the main argument coming from the agnostic side of the debate. But let us examine this claim. The existence of God, as understood in a theistic sense, is one of the possible scenarios for the description of the world. The existence of God is unfounded on empirical claims however since the matter is one of *faith* not *scientific proof*. Even so, it cannot be rejected as one of the possible scenarios, as in Bilgili's words "our intuitions may be wrong" [1, p. 43]. But another scenario based on faith, not scientific proof, is the existence of Allah, in the Quoranic sense. It may be argued that the two deities are different sides of the same coin but without a lack of evidence the scenarios of the Norse mythology found in Snorri Sturluson's sagas or the Egyptian, Indian, Greek and Roman pantheons can also be theoretically plausible, with the same probability as the Christian God scenario. By aggregating all the religious beliefs from the past thousands of year we may be able to amass a few hundreds or even thousands of scenarios. But based purely on faith, with no empirical evidence, we would be mistaking if stopping here. Russell's celestial teapot is another scenario as would be the belief in the supernatural qualities of every object in existence or even in the existence of our imagination alone. The upper boundary here would therefore not exist, or in any case would have to be considered infinite since every small alteration to a scenario would generate a multitude of other scenarios. Now, after having established this, let us re-examine the decisional calculus with respect to the existence of God: this would have to be

$$U(x,e) = b \lim_{n \rightarrow +\infty} \frac{1}{n} - c \quad (3)$$

In this case the utility payoffs (only two profiles are available since probabilities are embedded in the calculus) would be:  $U(x_1,e) = -c$  and  $U(x_2,e) = 0$ . In this case not acting in accordance with a belief in God strictly dominates acting in accordance with believing in God, since there would be several costs incurred in the second option, both opportunity costs and costs involving time and resources. However, if we include the consumption of secular goods in a religious framework in the payoff matrix, as Iannaccone [14, p. 245-246] and theorists in the economy of religion frequently do, then the rational choice may differ on a case-by-case basis. But this does not damage the argument presented since neither Pascal's Wager nor the argument from stronger implications appeal to anything else than religious good consumption.

Bilgili's addition (this is only an extrapolation based on his argument as Bilgili does not actually propose this) to the argument is in my view a weight parameter which increases or decreases the utility according to the importance of the theme discussed, thereby making the belief in God commensurable to other issues of debate. But this parameter has no influence over the outcomes since 0 is not susceptible to amplification and costs will always exist in the process of following a religion, regardless of the importance attached to it. Bilgili's

argument from stronger implications therefore lacks the capacity to improve the argument made by Pascal and is just as easily discredited by appealing to basic probabilistic concepts.

## **5. Conclusions**

To conclude, I consider that I have shown the weaknesses of Bilgili's attack against Dawkins' *The God Delusion* and that I have refuted his claims of revealing the "flawed logic in Dawkinsian thought" [1, p. 40]. In his criticism Bilgili commits several logical fallacies of his own while incorrectly assuming that he has uncovered the logical fallacies of Dawkins, of which we can in fact find none in Bilgili's article. Further, Bilgili seems to either misunderstand or deliberately misrepresent several of Dawkins' positions, constantly attacking Dawkinsian arguments for their lack of relevance in the debate on the existence of God, when in fact Dawkins does not employ the respective arguments in the mentioned debate, but in other discussions on religion (most frequently on its morality).

Also, starting from Bilgili's perpetrating of numerous fallacies and misrepresentations of Dawkins, but mostly driven by the fact that he frequently quotes Dawkins out of context and he directs Dawkins to the lecturing of a position which is already in his book, I contend that Bilgili adopts a partisan position in the debate and thus is incapable of constructing valid, objective arguments, raised from a no particular point of view [19].

What I hope for though, is that the present paper will not be the end of the debate on the existence of God in this journal and other similar journals (starting from the position of Dawkins or not), but that it will foster further debates, as in spite of the vast literature already elaborated in his field interesting arguments can still be brought from both positions provided they are constructed on logical and objective grounds rather than partisanship allegiance.

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