

## Of Paul Davies and *The Mind of God*

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### ABSTRACT

*The misleading title and 'consumer-friendly' text of Paul Davies' book **The Mind of God** have captured the interest of many, including Christian apologists. However, close examination of his arguments for a supposed rationalistic, naturalistic and evolutionary explanation for the universe's origin and existence show them to be seriously flawed. Something cannot come from nothing, as Davies supposes with cosmological speculations that are definitely not physics. God cannot be replaced by laws of physics, and even Davies admits that clear evidence for design exists in nature. Man cannot possess complete knowledge of reality nor understand ultimate things outside of the Creator God of the Bible and the revelation of Himself to us in Jesus Christ, the Logos.*

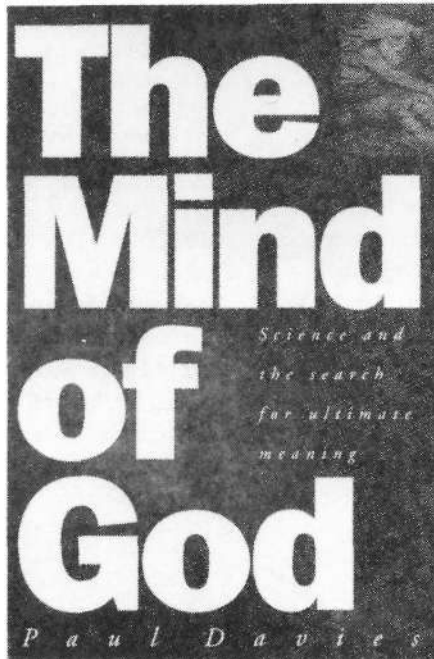
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The epigraph to **The Mind of God** captures the book's essence by borrowing Stephen Hawking's conclusion to his **A Brief History of Time**:

*'If we do discover a complete theory. . . If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason—for then we would truly know the mind of God.'*

If nothing else, this is disquieting for its intellectual hubris and reason's exaltation over revelation.

Davies' books are popular. This arises from being well-marketed, 'consumer-friendly' text, and Davies' ubiquitous appearance in the media. Nevertheless, it is the book's misleading title which contributes most to some evangelicals' endorsement. By some arcane and seldom articulated reasoning, Christians promote the book as though Davies' arguments are inextricably linked to traditional apologetics evidencing the biblical God. This is perplexing given that on the preface's third page Davies admits he '. . . would rather not believe



in supernatural events personally. Although I obviously can't prove that they never happen, I see no reason to suppose that they do.' In one terse sentence Davies has removed God.

### COSMOLOGICAL SPECULATIONS ARE NOT PHYSICS

Recently, Dr James McCaughan, Senior Lecturer in physics at the University of Sydney, released his lecture notes that examine Davies' book.

McCaughan's thrust is that Davies has departed from common-sense and his expertise. Physics should attend the material world and not ultimate questions or unobservable and untestable times and places. McCaughan rightly points out,

*'[Such claims of the universe's spontaneous coming into existence] are the product of highly speculative mathematical theories that elude both the grasp of experimental test and the consensus that the rules of physics from which these speculations are crafted are*

*not viable at the times needed by the theories, that is,  $10^{-43}$  seconds and less after the "big bang" of universal origin.'*

Davies appears uninterested in Truth. He is keen to dispel the possibility that there is a case for the Christian God. Davies sees off the cosmological argument by insisting theoretical physics has vanquished it. He comments that this explanation

*'may be quite wrong. However, I don't think that matters. What is at issue is whether or not some sort of supernatural act is necessary to start the universe off.'*<sup>1</sup>

The cosmological argument asserts that the universe had a beginning, and that it was begun by a necessary being and not another contingent phenomenon. In the 1948 Copleston-Russell debate, F. C. Copleston explained:

*'... I don't believe that the infinity of the series of events... would be in the slightest degree relevant to the situation. If you add up chocolates you get chocolates... and not a sheep... add up chocolates to infinity, you get an infinite number of chocolates... if you add up contingent beings to infinity, you still get contingent beings, not a necessary being. An infinite series of contingent beings will be... as unable to cause itself as one contingent being.'*<sup>2</sup>

Davies requires some mechanism that will fuel his belief the universe came into being 'by itself. He argues quantum fluctuations change the 'rules' because Heisenberg's uncertainty principle establishes that *'This unpredictability implies that the microworld is indeterministic: to use Einstein's picturesque phraseology, God plays dice with the universe. Therefore, quantum events are not determined absolutely by preceding causes.'*<sup>3</sup> Davies makes a malapropian error. McCaughan comments:

*'Unpredictable simply means unascertainable... but to take indetermined (or uncaused) for unascertainable (or unmeasurable) is to give equivocal meaning to these words.'*

R. C. Sproul discusses this:

*'If the explanation is in the things, they are self-moved... what causes them to move is something within... and not a no-cause.... If not to require any cause... they would be God... being things that change and (come and go out of) being, they cannot be God... The presumption of no-cause rests on the presumption of exhaustive knowledge...'*

Quantum phenomena's micro-world existence enforces no imperative for their having operated in the putative 'big bang'. Davies realises this:

*'All of this depends, of course, on the validity of quantum mechanics when applied to the universe as a whole.'*<sup>5</sup>

Quickly passing over this hurdle, Davies then expounds the correct conditions which would permit the 'big bang' to be taken 'seriously'.<sup>6</sup> He relies heavily on the Hawking-Hartle model. Davies writes:

*'... imagine going backward in time toward the big bang, then, when we reach about one Planck time after what we thought was the initial singularity, something peculiar starts to happen. Time begins to "turn into" space. Rather than having to deal with the origin of space-time, therefore, we now have to contend with four-dimensional space...'*<sup>1</sup>

While Davies' eloquence and arguments combine for easy reading, the scientific reality is absent. McCaughan notices this:

*'... the laws of physics are simply not known at times earlier than  $10^{-43}$  seconds after the "big bang"; but it is precisely to this region that the Hawking proposal applies. More importantly, there is no hope of doing experiments with elementary particles in this region. At current accelerator energies  $10^{16}$  cm can be probed, vastly removed from the Planck length ( $10^{-33}$  cm)... This theory needs to probe to distances of  $10^{29}$  cm, somewhat greater than the Planck length. The status of quantum gravity is that it is untested and probably untestable; that is, there are no measurements on nature, nor observations of nature to guide it. That it can be extended from a region where there is confidence in the base laws of physics from which theories of quantum gravity are built—but don't work—to a region where there is no confidence in the base laws from which it is built, yet expected to be valid, is an impressive act of blind faith or bare-faced imposture.'*

Some of modern science's proposals are not too dissimilar to buying a second-hand car: *caveat emptor*. One can sign away one's mind in a Faustian transaction without careful attention to detail. Davies admits that the universe's shape at its origin is established *'... on grounds of mathematical elegance.'*<sup>8</sup> 'Objective' truth is in the eye of the beholder; and as Keats penned, *'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'*.

## SOMETHING CANNOT COME FROM NOTHING

McCaughan, washing his hands of Davies' physics, asks, *'What about the metaphysics?'* He demurs that Davies rides on the back of parallogism:

*'The big bang is an uncaused event (fallacy). Quantum fluctuations are uncaused events (fallacy). When the universe is sufficiently small, quantum fluctuations can be expected to govern its behaviour (unknown). Therefore the universe originated as a quantum fluctuation in an uncaused way.'*

*Ignotum per ignotius.*

Davies asks the reader to swallow an unwieldy idea: something came from nothing. His argument is an exemplary example of *petitio principii*. It is rigged by proposing we assume that 'before' the beginning there was nothing, and since we now have something, then something must have come from nothing. McCaughan remonstrates that this

something-for-nothing argument is unsound because the conclusion is '*. . . based on fallacies, but it can be shown to be fallacious independently of the argument.*' Terry Miethe scathingly attacks this egregious concept:

*'Something cannot come from nothing! . . . From nothing nothing comes . . . that something can come from nothing has been rejected [by] philosophy . . . it is self-contradictory . . . irrational. "Nothing," by definition, does not exist. The dictionary says of "nothing": "not any thing; nothing." It is absurd . . . that "something", a thing that exists, can have as its cause no thing, that which does not exist.'*<sup>9</sup>

McCaughan postulates that Davies' discussing the unknown is out of scientific court:

*'Properties and particles and fields and bodies are all so many beings. All have come into existence at the big bang where before there were none of these. Physics being based on measures, numbering and existing things is powerless till after the big bang. There is no physics of how the universe came into existence, no tunnelling from nothing; it remains a mystery. The price some physicists are prepared to pay not to accept this fact is, on the evidence presented, intellectual vandalism.'*

McCaughan warns us not to take Davies' theories seriously:

*'Mathematical models link measurements into a coherent picture of the physical world. The measure of something should not be confused with the object of that measurement, and pictures that physicists form of the world should thereby not be confused with the world. They are like a scaffolding on reality, a scaffolding that exists in the mind, and not reality itself which exists external to that mind. . . . These schemes are entirely of our own making (not God's), but made to a measure.'*

Davies has a problem of maintaining the link between what is in the mind and the real world. Davies' attempts are at best tenuous, at worst, fideism. He derides the design argument because it is analogical and possesses no logical or actual imperative that the conclusion is true. With Cartesian epistemology Davies declares:

*'Our immediate experiences always refer to our mental world, a world of sensory impressions. We usually think of this mental world as being a reasonably faithful map or model of a really existing physical world "out there" . . . [a] greater leap of faith is required when we conclude that there exist other minds besides our own.'*<sup>10</sup>

McCaughan argues that Davies' ideology is self-refuting:

*'Strictly speaking, since he can't establish the existence of the outside world independent of his mental activity he has no business talking about it.'*

Davies' rationalism raises the same objection directed to Descartes. Germane to a Davies' analysis is Francis

Schaeffer's comment on Descartes:

*' . . . he was supremely confident. . . by human thought alone one could doubt all notions based on authority and could begin from himself with total sufficiency ("Cogito ergo sum") . . . he believed mathematics would provide a unity. . . for all kinds of investigation. He was optimistic mathematics and mathematical analysis, with careful deductions from these, would provide a factor which would give unity to all knowledge.'*

Sound familiar? Davies mirrors Descartes:

*'Any attempt to understand the nature of reality and the place of human beings in the universe must proceed from a sound scientific base . . . We shall see that this cosmic order is underpinned by definite mathematical laws that interweave each other to form a subtle and harmonious unity . . . these same simple laws permit matter and energy to self-organize into an enormous variety of complex states, including those that have the quality of consciousness.'*<sup>n2</sup>

Starting and finishing with oneself leads to solipsism. McCaughan condemns Davies for living 'in the mental world'. Consequently, '*. . . there is nothing in principle to disturb [him] in [his] "ideal" world.'*

The universe's rationality and intelligibility can only be reasonably maintained within a Christian world-view. Davies plunders these presuppositions that science is based on. Since Davies is an evolutionist, presuppositionalist apologetics is right to aver he lives on 'borrowed capital'. Davies recognises this:

*'The entire scientific enterprise, for example, is built upon the assumed rationality of nature. Most theologians also adhere to the principle, because they believe in a rational God.'*<sup>n</sup>

This deference is short-lived, for he follows with, *'Is there sufficient reason to believe the principle of sufficient reason?'*<sup>nH</sup> Asking this question, Davies has inadvertently answered it. If the world lacked rationality and intelligibility, one could not frame such a question. Because the world is 'approachable', the mind can make sense of it and other minds.

## GOD CANNOT BE REPLACED BY LAWS

Davies moots the idea of a necessary being, as opposed to a contingent one. With deft display of logic he persuades the reader that since there exists a case for necessary propositions, it is not inconceivable that there may be a case for the existence of a necessary being. Alvin Plantinga is more effective when he summarily dismisses objections to a necessary being:-

*' . . . the question "Why does God exist?" never does arise. Outside of theism, so to speak, the question is nonsensical, and inside the question is never asked . . . Essential to theism is an assertion that there is a connection between God and all other beings . . . [It]*

is also necessary truth that God is uncreated and in no way causally dependent upon anything else ... To ask that question is to presuppose that God does exist . . . there is no answer to a question asking for His causal conditions. The question "Why does God exist?" . . . is an absurdity."<sup>5</sup>

Given this necessary being, says Davies, there is a *contretemps*. The positivist A. J. Ayer is paraphrased: '... from necessary propositions only necessary propositions follow.'<sup>6</sup> He laments that 'This devastating contradiction has lurked at the heart of Western theology ever since Plato.'<sup>7</sup> Plato's arguments of the world of Forms etc. are expounded. Platonic thought, and the difficulties that it raises for necessity and contingency, somehow, in Davies' mind, discomfited orthodox theism. Sensing error, McCaughan scathingly attacks Davies' use of Ayer:

*The quote from Ayer misses the mark. A conclusion does not necessarily follow from the premises (necessary propositions) if the reasoning is logical. Davies confuses the mental rules of logic for the content of the propositions drawn from the external reality.'*

Notwithstanding his objection to Plato, Davies finds intellectual sustenance in this ancient pagan's world-view: 'I believe that these proposals about laws of initial conditions strongly support the Platonic idea that the laws are "out there," transcending the physical universe. It is sometimes argued that the laws of physics came into being with the universe. If that was so, then those laws cannot explain the origin of the universe, because the laws would not exist until the universe existed . . . But with transcendent laws one has the beginnings of an explanation for why the universe is as it is.'<sup>8</sup>

To this metaphysical succedaneum, McCaughan replies: 'The reason he has given this status to the laws of physics is, having dismissed God as Creator, it is obvious that the universe has come into existence according to a prior law and the law has got to be found somewhere, but not in the universe. God has simply been replaced by laws. Laws are ideas, but there is no evidence that ideas can exist apart from an intellect.'

McCaughan rebukes Davies for not recognising his station:

*'... ultimately physics gets its foundation in philosophy. Physics itself is not a philosophy but a methodology.'*

Davies has strayed from his expertise and entered theology's Brobdingnagian world. His procrustean attempt to sift God's perceived ontological problems through some philosopher-scientists' arguments (Whitehead, Kant, Barrow, Tipler, Swinburne *et al.*) is bereft of wisdom. Davies believes he can, in a few pages, undermine Christianity's God. The problem is, his is a straw-man (or should I say, straw-god!) argument. Davies assigns the Christian God characteristics which are not ascribed to Him in the Bible. Davies proposes

that the Christian God is '... completely timeless, unchanging . . .'<sup>19</sup> Clark Pinnock addresses God's immutability:

*I resisted the Bible's witness to God who genuinely interacts with the world, (responding) passionately to what happens, even changing) his plans to fit changing historical circumstances. Augustine's idea that God knows and determines all things in advance . . . never adjusting) his planning. . . stands in tension with the Bible and yet is fixed in historical Christian thinking. It is due to.. . accommodation made in classical theism to Hellenistic culture.'<sup>20</sup>*

'Why', Davies asks, 'God chose to create this particular world rather than some other? . . . if God's nature is fixed by necessity, could he have chosen to create a different universe?'

To ram home his perceived *coup de grace* he quotes Keith Ward:

*'... if God is really a necessary and immutable being, how can he have free choice; surely all he does will have to be done of necessity and without any possibility of alteration? The old dilemma —either God's acts are necessary and therefore not free (could not be otherwise), or are they free and therefore arbitrary (nothing determines what they shall be) . . .'<sup>21</sup>*

McCaughan rises to the challenge. If Davies' God doesn't know what He is doing, 'God', he writes, 'must be out of his mind!' Targeting Davies' surrogate polemicist, McCaughan quotes Aquinas:

*'As the divine existence is necessary to itself so is the divine will and the divine knowledge; but the divine knowledge has a necessary relation to the thing known, not the divine will to the thing willed. The reason for this is that knowledge is of things as they exist in the knower; but the will is directed to things as they exist in themselves. Since then all other things have necessary existence in as much as they exist in God, but no absolute necessity so as to be necessary in themselves, in so far as they exist in themselves; it follows that God knows necessarily what he knows but does not will necessarily whatever he wills.'*

McCaughan elucidates this Thomist defence:

*'This passage depends on the fact it is not necessary for things to exist outside God, which if they did, would imply a lack in Him; and if a lack, then potency in God. But God is pure act, so things can't necessarily exist outside God. . . . God is pure act because He is the unmoved mover. If there were potency in God something other than God would have to move Him.'*

Davies reviews Anselm's ontological argument — God being something than which nothing greater can be conceived; something existing actually is greater than something existing in mind only; so God exists outside as well as in mind, for if He exists in mind only He would not be something which nothing greater can be conceived. He prefaces his analysis with:

*'One can certainly imagine that neither God nor the universe existed. On the face of it there does not seem to be any logical contradiction in either state of affairs.'*<sup>22</sup>

McCaughan counters Davies' mental thaumaturgy:

*'It is not a question of whether it is logical, following the rules of correct thinking, but whether it is reasonable. One certainly can imagine neither God nor the universe existing, but to what purpose? One can certainly imagine the universe without God but it is unreasonable to do so. Davies makes imagination superior to reason and in so doing "cops out" of reasonable debate.'*

### GOD (EVOLUTION!?) HAS DESIGNED THE UNIVERSE

As a physicist, McCaughan possesses first-hand insight. One prizes his evaluation:

*'In philosophy imagination plays havoc and in my experience, when a physicist (usually of the mathematical variety) attempts to tackle philosophical questions the imagination constantly proposes new "pictures" or constructions that miss the point and renders the discussion frustrating and fruitless.'*

Davies admires Whitehead's Process Theology:

*'Whitehead thus replaces the monarchical image of God as omnipotent creator and ruler to that of participator in the creative process. He is no longer self-sufficient and unchanging, but influences, and is influenced by, the unfolding reality of the physical universe.'*<sup>23</sup>

McCaughan trenchantly critiques:

*'In other words, an evolving God. This is just another version of a contingent God which cannot be God as already discussed. As an evolutionary God he cannot be an unmoved mover. Curiously, to admit an evolutionary God is self-defeating, since without an unmoved mover no change at all is possible. . . . What Davies in effect offers us in this evolutionary God is a kind of cosmic gardener who tends what already is there . . . . The necessity of choice assigned to God cannot be reconciled with the independence Davies claims for the laws of physics. How can this God fix anything independently of what he has been given by the laws of physics? This is some strange being controlling a bit of nature that rides atop the eternal laws of physics. He looks suspiciously like a "god-of-the-gaps". . . This is NO GOD AT ALL but the default choice of physics while it thinks of something better . . . . There is no evidence provided by Davies that God has a mind at all!'*

Although the ideological phenomena Davies describes are seen through the filter of unabashed evolutionism, they impel Davies to admit:

*'The apparent "fine-tuning" of the laws of nature*

*necessary if conscious life is to evolve in the universe then carries the clear implication that God has designed the universe so as to permit such life and consciousness to emerge. It would mean that our own existence in the universe formed a central part of God's plan.'*<sup>24</sup>

Convert to theism? Certainly not!:

*'But does design necessarily imply a designer? John Leslie has argued that it doesn't. Recall that in his theory of creation the universe exists as a result of "ethical requirement". He writes: "A world existing as a result of an ethical need could be just the same, just as rich in seeming evidence of a designer's touch, whether or not the need depended for its influence on creative acts directed by a benevolent intelligence." In short, a good universe would look designed to us, even if it had not been.'*<sup>25</sup>

McCaughan rightly exclaims, 'Poppycock!' He replies that Davies is claiming that, '. . . the evidence of the senses is to be denied!' He continues:

*'There is no other way of knowing about the external world than through the senses. Deny the evidence of the senses and everything in rational discourse is denied including science. Davies might as well say an eternal universe would look created to us even when it had not been. This is the nadir of Davies' book. What the argument attempts to prove is "if good then not designed". Unfortunately, designed and good are not mutually exclusive. Good refers to will, design to intellect. There is nothing to stop a design being good or something good being designed. In the order of course, good refers to final and design to formal. . . . Davies' cavalier attitude to the senses betrays the strength of his idealism. It subordinates his science to the idea to the extent that science may be dismissed.'*

Davies' rationalism trundles inexorably toward the apotheosis of his much-worshipped science:

*'It is conceivable that clear evidence for design exists in nature, but that it is hidden in some way from us. Perhaps we will only become aware of the "architect's trademark" when we achieve a certain level of scientific attainment.'*<sup>26</sup>

### THE SOLUTION TO MAN'S INABILITY TO UNDERSTAND

I understand Christians' approval of Davies' bringing the possibility of God's existence to the public eye. To his credit, Davies, after more than 200 pages of writing, quite perceptibly and rightly concludes:

*'But in the end a rational explanation for the world in the sense of a closed and complete system of logical truths is almost certainly impossible. We are barred from ultimate knowledge, from ultimate explanation, by the very rules of reasoning that prompt us to seek such an explanation in the first place. If we wish to*

*progress beyond, we have to embrace a different concept of "understanding" from that of rational explanation.*<sup>21</sup>

Although Davies uses 'rational' to imply 'logical', he means 'rationalistic'. That is, beginning and ending with himself, man will be unable to understand ultimate things and cannot possess complete knowledge of reality. To this, all Christians say, 'Amen'.

The solution? *'In the beginning was the Logos, and this Concept/Reason was with God, and this Word/Idea was God . . . and the Logos became a human being* McCaughan points out that

*'The laws of nature are first known in God's intellect and then translated into reality by a free exercise of His will.'*

More importantly, because the cosmos's sustaining factor, that which is Concept and Wisdom for us (and our science), became man, all of Davies', Plato's and the many other pagan thinkers' problems are surmounted in this sublime passage. Paul's Colossian letter instructs us not to be *' . . . cheated through philosophy and empty deceit, according to traditions of men and the basic principles of the world, but (instructed) according to Christ.'*

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27. Davies, Ref. 1, p. 231.

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#### QUOTABLE QUOTE:

#### The 'Big Bang' and the Origin of the Universe

*' . . . if the entire package of physical Universe plus laws just popped into being from nothing — then we cannot appeal to the laws to explain the origin of the Universe. So to have any chance of understanding scientifically how the Universe came into existence, we have to assume that the laws have an abstract, eternal character. The alternative is to shroud the origin in mystery and give up.'*

Davies, Paul, 1996. The day time began. **New Scientist**, 150(2027):34.