

THE  
**GOD**  
ABDUCTION



*How Scientific Discovery  
Strengthens the Case for a Creator*

R O N L O N D E N

*The God Abduction*

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*For my wife, Christine, and my daughters,  
Carissa, Kate, and Bethany.  
They own my heart.*

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*By Dr. Hugh Ross*

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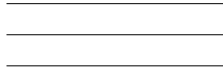
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# FOREWORD

*By Dr. Hugh Ross*



**R**on Londen has written a beautiful, engaging book that shows how someone, with or without degrees in science, can draw reasonable and trustworthy conclusions about the most foundational questions of life from what researchers have discovered about the natural realm. Ron’s story illustrates how “abductive reasoning”—a weight-of-evidence approach to available information—can lead us to a rich understanding of our place within the vastness of time and space.

Reasoning to the best explanation (another way to define abduction) is actually a way of thinking we all rely on every day, whether we’re aware of it or not. It’s the work of all investigators, of all inquiring minds, from childhood onward. When applied to the biggest questions of all, this reasoning process leads to a wondrous conclusion. Of course, that’s possible only because we live in a universe governed by constant and consistent physical laws, a universe in which the diverse disciplines of research—as well as emo-

tional and relational experiences—integrates more and more seamlessly as knowledge increases. Because the record of nature is trustworthy, reliable, and free of contradiction, *truth* is accessible to human inquiry. Not *all* truth, of course, but sufficient truth.

A sufficiency of truth is what Ron came to discover as he leaned into his cosmic questions and pored over relevant research findings. Without being a scientist himself, he used the investigative approach that continues to propel the advance of knowledge. Let's just say the sustained success of the scientific enterprise illustrates the validity and robustness of Ron's abductive approach. So does his personal experience.

Sometimes I wonder if people other than the most passionate scientists have the motivation to search for truth as deeply as current knowledge and the abductive method allow. One thing I most appreciate about *The God Abduction* is that Ron answers my question with an exuberant "yes." Not only does he show the reader a way to discover and confirm what's true, but he also demonstrates how enjoyable that process can be. The fact he experienced great pleasure as he explored the record of nature, including his inner landscape, seems to strengthen the conclusions Ron has drawn.

In *The God Abduction*, Ron relates the story of how he gained reasons to believe and how those reasons have transformed—and are still transforming—his life. Ron's passion, and mine, is that you will explore, discover, and thoughtfully piece together your own reasons to believe your life has meaning and value. May this book start you on a never-ending adventure of continual transformation.

*Hugh Ross*

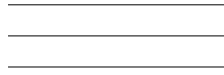
*Astronomer*

*Founder, Reasons to Believe*



SECTION ONE

# OUR SEARCH FOR TRUTH



*A man should look for what is,  
and not for what he thinks should be.*

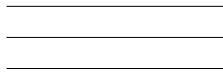
ALBERT EINSTEIN

THE GOD ABDUCTION

INTRODUCTION

# THE SMOKE ABOVE OUR HEADS

*A Personal Journey*



I tell this part of the story reluctantly.

At about eight thirty on a Monday night one January, Dodie Londen took her last breath. My mother was surrounded by Jack, her husband of fifty-four years, as well as a sister, a brother-in-law, a caretaker, and her three surviving sons. I am Ron, the youngest.

It was the fifth day of our watch. Several times that day my mother's breathing became so labored I was convinced we were moments from the end. But the hospice nurse said her death would be more peaceful than that. And it was. At the end my mother drew a few rapid breaths, grew quiet for what seemed an eternal minute, then filled her lungs—a last fight that surprised no one who knew her. Silence. The moment lingered.

Later we busied ourselves in the kitchen. I was doing a few dishes leftover from dinner, which lent my mind to wandering. Her struggle had taken years. A series of strokes had robbed her of so much. But her passing went beyond the mere relief of a struggle at life's end. It held something I'd seen only rarely in my life. *Peaceful* doesn't quite capture what I witnessed. That moment seemed, for me at least, to hold a kind of holiness.

As we quietly discussed what had happened, it became clear not everyone had the same impression. We all pass our experiences through a filter of our own philosophies and expectations. Certainly I had done so. I have been a Christian for more than three decades. Yet I was taken aback when my mother's passing was described—from someone offering comfort—as “just biology.” Clearly her death *was* biology. Everyone dies. But was it *just* biology?

At the end of the night, we went out to the back porch for a cigar, because that's what London men do late at night on those rare occasions we are together. My dad looked relieved. My mother had been sick for so long. We were all relieved. Because I am a photographer, I was framing pictures in my head of my dad that night, almost out of habit. I was intrigued by the way the smoke danced in the light above his head.

For me, other questions hung over the night like cigar smoke. Either death is “just biology,” or it is something much more. Is there meaning embedded in a life—how we live it, even how we leave it? Maybe meaning is something we must define for ourselves along the way. Or maybe what we take for meaning is just a way to distract ourselves until we die.

### ***The rise of Big Atheism***

Major life events tend to sharpen the eyesight on big questions. Yet my mother's death was hardly the only factor in what would become a major turn in my own life. As isolated as our lives can seem, we are still all passengers in a common culture, which occasionally clears its throat and must be heard.

A spate of recent books has almost become an industry and, in the process, drawn a line in the sand. Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell*, Sam Har-

ris's *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Christopher Hitchens's *god is not Great*, and perhaps most notably, Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* set the new "no more Mr. Nice Guy" tone for today's atheism. As a whole, these books may be taken more as a source of heat than of light. Here's an executive summary: "Boy, religious people sure are stupid."

The drumbeat from these "Big Atheists" is clear. Hitchens suggests religion, to borrow from his subtitle, "poisons everything." Dennett imagines the day when religious believers will be quarantined, their traditions preserved and studied in zoos for the entertainment of more enlightened people.<sup>1</sup> For sheer bravado no one can quite match Richard Dawkins in his description of religious people who question evolution:

They feel uneducated, which they are, often rather stupid, which they are, inferior, which they are, and paranoid about pointy headed intellectuals from the east coast looking down on them, which, with some justification, they do.<sup>2</sup>

On behalf of Christians everywhere—or at least on behalf of *this* Christian—let me just say the feeling is not mutual. If you are an atheist, I do not think you are stupid. I do not want your perspective to be silenced or even limited in any way. I would fight to my last breath against such an effort. In fact, we need *more* ideas. We need *better* discussions. We need a conversation that rises above simplistic name calling into a dialogue that presumes good intent. That kind of worthy exchange is hardly encouraged by calling each other stupid poo-poo heads.

The purpose of this book is not to respond directly to Dawkins, Dennett, and the other captains of Big Atheism; a task others have already capably addressed.<sup>3</sup> Most of the people who are deeply engaged in this discussion are dug in; their minds will not change.

For those not already deeply invested, two aspects of the recent public discussions have tended to scare them away. First, it can be quite technical. Second, it can be downright *mean*. Sharp elbows are common, especially

from the Big Atheists, whose rhetoric runs along a triad of bad arguments, bad attitude, and bad alignment of fact.

Although we will explore the subject elsewhere and quite a bit in this introduction, this book is not about evolution, and certainly not about evolution vs. creationism. Those terms are so rhetorically laden they are almost useless. The real issue is purpose vs. purposelessness as an underlying explanation—or teleology vs. naturalism, to use terms of art. Philosophical naturalism is a profound assumption that has wide-ranging impact. The assumption is simple: *This is all there is*. The natural world—all that we can see, hear, taste and touch, and whatever we can deduce from those observations—is all that exists. Therefore, there is no God.

After many years as an avid student on the subject, I have slowly come to realize that, despite a wealth of material available on the topic, most people still are completely disengaged with the questions of our origins and with the vital issues that lie above them. Many good books have been written by world-class experts on a given subject only to languish on the shelves at the bookstore or in the catalog of the online bookseller.

In the months and now years following my mother's death, I decided to dig deeper. I committed as a personal precept I would never criticize any perspective without first understanding it enough to defend it. As the concepts that led to this book slowly developed, I read and read and read to something currently north of 50,000 pages of material. (By the way, that was *not* in the brochure!) The result is not true expertise, in the sense that I could discuss astrophysics to the last detail with a Ph.D. astrophysicist. Not even close. But I probably understand biology better than the average physicist, cosmology better than a typical historian, and theology better than most zoologists. I'm a writer, so I try to be a good storyteller. Perhaps the topic doesn't need depth as much as breadth—weaving together threads from the worlds of cosmology, biology, history, and theology into a single, accessible narrative.

That is my goal for this book. As such, it will probably have a pace and flavor different from many similar titles. The subject matter of each chap-

ter in this book has been covered in other venues as entire books. I know; I read many of them. Thus, people who are widely read on the subject will probably wish for more detail; newly engaged readers might have the opposite reaction. But this book attempts to chart a course between those poles, seeking to explore enough detail to honor the issues they represent without submerging the reader in esoterica. One could attempt to reduce the issues in this book to bullet points, but it's a fool's errand and would miss a grand journey. The subjects we will explore are fascinating, filled with plot twists, heroic insights and missteps, and even a few occasions to crack a smile.

The journey is worth the effort. *Where did we come from?* is the most interesting question in the world, and one of the most important. Yet we have done the issue a terrible disservice. We have left it entirely in the hands of experts. Some issues in life simply ought to be beyond delegation or distraction. Everyone lives with our culture's answer to this question, which touches on how we treat one another, how we regard the world around us and how we approach the questions of life that are bigger still. No one should get away with leaving this issue entirely to others.

How, then, to proceed? We'll start with a brief visit to the discipline of logic.

Over the years philosophers have developed techniques for rigorous argument. One of the giants of this effort is American philosopher and logician Charles Sanders Peirce, a contemporary of Charles Darwin who identified three kinds of logical arguments: deduction, induction, and abduction.

To summarize the distinctions as quickly as possible, philosophers use deduction, scientists use induction, and *everyone* uses abduction. Deduction trades in logical argument. Induction seeks out examples and then builds principles from them. Abduction tries to find an underlying cause from an incomplete set of facts.

The process of abduction is also called "inference to the best explanation." Where is it used? Detectives use abduction, following the evidence backward to build a case against a criminal suspect. Physicians routinely ap-

ply such reasoning to trace back from symptoms to find underlying cause. And since “underlying cause” is fundamental to our questions of origin and purpose, abduction is a great way to proceed. The result of abduction is never absolute certainty, but it can be trustworthy enough to make life-changing decisions—conviction of a crime, a course of medical treatment, or a worldview-altering change in perspective.

Because of the nature of abduction, there will never be a single grand “Aha!” moment, but there might be dozens of little ones. Expect no dramatic accusation and confession in the courtroom or any philosophical equation with God as the necessary final line of deduction. The process of inference isn’t that clean, nor is naturalism itself. Rather than precise deductions to end a discussion, naturalism is foundational, from which conceptual structures are built. We will see how the mortar of naturalistic presumption has broken down between the bricks in so many places, weakening the walls, weakening the buildings, weakening the cities we have built from it.

## **SKIN IN THE GAME**

This book is not remotely autobiographical, not told as one of those and-then-I-discovered-*this* detective stories. The universe is vastly more interesting than that. References to myself will be few and far between, mostly limited to anecdotes of self-mockery to lighten all the science stuff. But for context, a bit of biography will help.

My mother and father raised me to believe in God. As far back as I can remember, I have. Naturally at first, then culturally, then deeply by heart and by habit until that belief became the most genuinely real thing about me.

I also have always been fascinated by space and astronomy. I vividly remember watching Gemini and Apollo space launches when I was a young child. I grew up in Phoenix, so the launches were quite early. In predawn hours I sat alone on the floor of our TV room watching the preparations for launch, imagining my one-piece pajamas were a spacesuit and swearing one day I would be an astronaut.

In fact, astronaut wasn't enough. In first grade, I declared to my family I actually came from the planet Mercury. (I knew Mercury was hot, but I was from Phoenix, and heat is OK as long as it's dry.) At the time, an unfortunate speech impediment left me unable to properly say *r* and *l*—bad luck for someone named Ron Londen—so I insisted I was “Wonnie Wonden from the Pwanet Mewcuwy.” It was kind of sad, and all it got me was a year in speech therapy. But since nobody else in my special class could say *s* very well, I breezed through “Sally the satellite sailed through space,” feeling superior about my mastery of the *s* and thrilled we were talking about satellites.

Back then, and in the many years that followed, I found no conflict between my passion for science and my growing faith in God. To the extent those streams crossed at all, they seemed to strengthen one another. I had little difficulty, for instance, with the age of the universe. I eventually adopted a perspective known as “old-Earth creationism,” the conviction that scientific observations about the age of the universe are largely valid, and that the words of Genesis 1 describe long periods of time. (This is touched upon, from a perspective of Scripture, in Chapter 17.) An alternative view would be called, no surprise, “young-Earth creationism”—the belief that the “days” in Genesis are 24-hour periods occurring less than 10,000 years ago. The age of Earth is not a central theme of this book and is taken to be more than four billion years.

Despite the intellectual tranquility of my youth, there certainly are *perceived* points of conflict between science and faith stoked by the recent invective from the Big Atheists. I have no doubt this book will be described as anti-science at the far end of the Internet's intestinal tract. That accusation is false and better supported by not actually reading the book. For those who do read it, my admiration of scientists will be more than obvious.

Still, as I began my research that led to this book, I knew many people disagreed with my sanguine view of the compatibility of science and faith and I committed to find out why. A few weeks into the process, a single thought stopped me in my tracks.



*What if I'm wrong?*

I'm wrong all the time. Ask my wife. But what if I'm *wrong* wrong? What if it is “just biology”? What if the assumptions I've built my life around aren't as well-founded as I thought? After all, many of the critics are smart people. Much of what they say makes sense.

I knew that question deserved more than a cheap answer. At that moment, I faced no particular intellectual crisis. Nothing yet had really thrown me. (Many things *were* challenging; if none of this material is challenging, you're not paying attention.) I had been, for more than four decades, a devout, *thinking* Christian. And I have been unusually happy. Yet I was intentionally bringing in the influences of many smart people with many strong opinions, often the opposite of my own.

In the end, I knew I could do nothing more than agree with philosopher Antony Flew, who committed in his fifty years of atheism to “follow the argument wherever it leads”—a path that eventually led him to acknowledge God's existence. Was I willing to risk the opposite?

I simply had no other choice. For this process to have real value, I had to be willing to put up my faith as collateral. It meant I would try to face every issue with eyes open. It meant I would do everything I could to maintain intellectual honesty. It meant, in the end, if it fundamentally changed the way I looked at the universe and our place in it, then so be it. And even if I were to lose my faith along the way, that would just be something I would have to accept. A painful truth is far more valuable than a comfortable lie.

In the world of poker, this is when the guy pushes all his chips to the middle of the table and says, “All in.”

## **THE GOD ABDUCTION**

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